

## An Ethical Critique of Wartime Zen

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This article explores the ethical implications of those numerous Japanese Zen masters who so strongly and unconditionally supported Japanese aggression during the Asia-Pacific War (1937-45) and before. It asks the question whether such masters may rightly be considered to have been enlightened/awakened in a Buddhist sense. If not, what are the implications for such foundational Zen doctrines as “a separate transmission outside the sūtras” and “no dependence on words and letters”?

This article further raises the possibility that the Zen school, at least during wartime, may have forfeited its right to be considered a legitimate part of Buddhism. Is this because the Zen school in Japan, during the war if not earlier, lost its connection to Buddhist ethics? If so, is this loss in any way connected to Zen’s heritage as one expression of Mahāyāna Buddhism? While providing no definite answers to these questions, the article suggests that it is long past time for these questions to be seriously considered.

### Introduction

Many years ago, when I first began my research on the relationship of Zen Buddhism to Japanese aggression during WW II, I had no idea that it would one day lead me to open a veritable Pandora’s box of ethical questions related to Zen and the larger Mahāyāna tradition of which it is a part. For starters, it led me to examine two of the foundational teachings, distinguishing characteristics of the

Chan/Zen school, from an ethical viewpoint. It also raised the question whether the Chan/Zen school is, ethically speaking, a legitimate part of Buddhism. Still further, it even raised the question of whether the Mahāyāna school as a whole should be considered legitimate.

Scholars have already examined many of the questions raised in this article. However, for the most part, their examination has taken place from a historical, doctrinal or cultural viewpoint. This study raises the same questions but within an ethical or moral context. First and foremost, the question will be asked how Zen leaders could have so enthusiastically embraced and supported the massive killing machine that was the Japanese Imperial military during the Asia-Pacific War (1937-45). Could they have been “Buddhists”, let alone genuinely “enlightened”?

### Foundational Questions

The first foundational teaching to be examined is Zen’s claim to be “a separate transmission outside the sūtras.”<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as this transmission can allegedly occur only within the confines of a close relationship between Zen master and disciple, the master-disciple connection is of paramount importance to all schools of Zen.

On the surface there would appear to be little or no connection between this claim and the teachings of the Zen school, both Rinzai and Sōtō, in wartime Japan, i.e., during the Asia-Pacific War of 1937-45 and even before. The latter topic lies in the realm of the historian of religion while the former belongs to the realm of the “faithful”, in this case the faith of the Zen practitioner.

However, when examined within its Chinese cultural context, it is clear that the claim to be a separate transmission outside the sūtras inevitably leads to a disciple’s dependence on the Zen master’s approval, aka “patriarchal Zen.” As Piya Tan notes, “Unlike the other major schools of East Asian Buddhism that legitimized their existence and teachings by centering themselves around a

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<sup>1</sup>This forms one part of the central teachings of Zen Buddhism. Specifically, it is the second set of four Chinese characters in the four-line saying: 1) 不立文字 2) 教外別傳 3) 直指人心, and 4) 見性成佛 (J. 1) *furyū-monji*, 2) *kyōge-betsuden*. 3) *jikishi-jinshin*, and 4) *kenshō-jōbutsu*): “1) no dependence on words and letters, 2) a separate transmission outside the sūtras, 3) pointing directly to the human mind, and 4) seeing the nature of the self and becoming a Buddha. Note that all English translations in this article, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.

particular Mahāyāna text, the Chan [Zen] tradition, in rejecting the scriptures as final authority, had to resort to other means of legitimization of its authenticity, that is, the lineage of patriarchs.”<sup>2</sup>

The focus of this article, however, is not on the historical origins of the Zen disciple’s dependence on a master, but on the *ethical results* this dependence has created even to the present. This dependence is nowhere more clearly evident than in the closely related question of what constitutes “Dharma transmission”. This in turn inevitably leads to the question of *what* it is that is being transmitted, i.e., the very nature of enlightenment itself. An examination of this question constitutes the second foundational teaching to be considered in this article, for wartime Zen history has brought the nature of enlightenment as understood within the Zen school into question as never before.

Enlightenment, of course, is not the sole possession of Zen or any other school of Buddhism; rather it constitutes the shared heritage, or ultimate goal, of all Buddhists. Thus, if only to more fully understand the distinguishing features of the Zen school’s understanding of enlightenment, it is necessary to examine enlightenment, or at least elements of it, within the broader context of the Mahāyāna and even Theravāda schools. This is a daunting task, and let me apologize to the reader for the length and complexity of this paper.

### **The Challenge Posed by Wartime Zen “Enlightenment”**

If we assume that enlightened Buddhist practitioners were once present in Japan (as in other Asian countries), the first question to be asked is whether any *wartime* Zen masters were enlightened. To answer this question in the negative further raises the question of whether Zen-based enlightenment exists in Japan at present.

To assert there were no enlightened Zen masters in the wartime era is a prospect fraught with momentous if not frightening implications for the Zen

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<sup>2</sup>Piya Tan, *Transmission Outside the Scriptures?*, p. 158. Tan also points out that a second reason Chan maintained that it was a teaching outside the scriptures was to prove its superiority over other competing schools in China, e.g., the Tien-t’ai and Pure Land schools, that had their own distinctive canon (p. 159). Additionally, Tan quotes John McRea, who asserts “the proliferation of Chan lineages mimics that of conventional family genealogies, creating a parallel realm of filiation between living and dead.” (p. 172). Available on the Web at: <http://terebess.hu/zen/mesterek/40b.5-Transmission-outside-the-scriptures.pdf> (accessed 9 July 2015)

school, at least in Japan. Why? Because, as noted above, unlike other Buddhist traditions based on teachings contained in one or more Buddhist sūtras, the Zen school validates itself on the basis of being “a transmission *outside* the sutras” (*kyōge betsuden*). That is to say, a transmission of the *Buddha-dharma* from the enlightened mind of a Zen master to his/her disciple(s). This, however, raises the question of what happens in those cases when the “enlightened master” isn’t truly enlightened? Can an authentic transmission of the *Buddha-dharma* between master and disciple then take place? Is it possible for the disciple’s enlightenment to be genuine in the absence of a master who was enlightened?

### In Sōtō Zen

**Harada and Yasutani** To understand just how serious this question is, let us briefly examine just two of many wartime Zen masters, i.e., Sōtō Zen Master Harada Daiun Sōgaku and his better-known Dharma heir, Yasutani Haku’un. I have selected these two masters because in the postwar period both men were introduced to the English-speaking world as the very embodiment of Zen enlightenment.

American Zen priest Philip Kapleau, author of the best-selling *The Three Pillars of Zen*, described Harada as follows: “Nominally of the Sōtō Zen sect, he [Harada] welded together the best of Sōtō and Rinzai and the resulting amalgam was a vibrant Buddhism which has become one of the great teaching lines of Japan today. Probably more than anyone else in his time he revitalized, through his profound spiritual insight, the teachings of Dōgen-zenji, which had been steadily drained of their vigor through the shallow understanding of priests and scholars of the Sōtō sect in whose hands their exposition had hitherto rested. . . .”<sup>3</sup> As for Yasutani, Robert Aitken, founder of the Hawaii-based Diamond Sangha, praised Yasutani, saying: ““He devoted himself fully to us. We felt from him the importance of intensive study, of dedication and also something of lightness.”<sup>4</sup>

It was not until the publication of my two books, *Zen at War* and *Zen War Stories* in 1997 and 2003 respectively, that what can only be described as the wartime fanaticism of these two Zen masters, and many others like them, became known in the West. Their rhetoric was not simply patriotic, but they

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, pp. 135-36.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in “Yasutani Hakuun Roshi – a biographical note” by Paul David Jaffe

twisted and reconstituted the *Buddha-dharma* into a “selfless” (*J. muga*) and “mindless” (*J. mushin*) creed that demanded absolute subservience to the state and its military. This contributed to the deaths of millions of Japanese and many more millions of Chinese and others. Yasutani even went so far as to invoke the *Buddha-dharma* to justify his virulent anti-Semitism. Readers unfamiliar with the wartime writings of these two masters will find selected quotes included in the Appendix to this article.

**Bernie Glassman** In the postwar years, Yasutani became one of the most influential Zen masters to teach in the U.S. Thus, once his war-affirming and anti-Semitic remarks were discovered, they posed a major problem for his American disciples, not least for those who came from a Jewish background. One of the latter, Bernie Glassman, addressed the problem as follows:

So if your definition is that there’s no anti-Semitism in the state of enlightenment [sic]. If your definition of enlightenment is that there’s no nationalism, or militarism, or bigotry in the state of enlightenment, you better change your definition of enlightenment. For the state of enlightenment is *maha*, the circle with no inside and no outside, not even a circle, just the pulsating of life everywhere.<sup>5</sup>

**David Brazier** In rebutting Glassman’s position, the American Pure Land Buddhist priest, David Brazier, wrote in *The New Buddhism*:

Glassman is willing to say that if your definition of enlightenment does not allow for anti-Semitism within enlightenment then your definition is not big enough. For Glassman, who is Jewish, to say such a thing is, in one sense, big-hearted. I acknowledge Glassman’s big heart. Nonetheless, I assert that he is wrong. My definition of enlightenment does not have room for anti-Semitism. I do not think that the Buddha’s definition of enlightenment had room for anything similar either. The Buddha had compassion for bigots, but he did not think they were enlightened.<sup>6</sup>

**Bodhin Kjolhede** Philip Kapleau’s Dharma heir, Bodhin Kjolhede, current abbot of the Rochester Zen Center, provided yet another view of this question.

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<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. xi

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. xi

While admitting that Yasutani's political views raise questions about the meaning of enlightenment, Kjolhede stated:

Now that we've had the book on Yasutani Roshi opened for us, we are presented with a new *kōan*. Like so many *kōans*, it is painfully baffling: How could an enlightened Zen master have spouted such hatred and prejudice? The nub of this *kōan*, I would suggest, is the word enlightened. If we see enlightenment as an all-or-nothing place of arrival that confers a permanent saintliness on us, then we'll remain stymied by this *kōan*. But in fact there are myriad levels of enlightenment, and all evidence suggests that, short of full enlightenment (and perhaps even with it—who knows?), deeper defilements and habit tendencies remain rooted in the mind.<sup>7</sup>

**Kubota Ji'un** Meanwhile, back in Japan, Kubota Ji'un, third abbot of the lay-oriented Sanbō Kyōdan (Three Treasures Religious Foundation) originally founded by Yasutani in 1954, took a significantly different stance from Glassman, Brazier or Kjolhede. In February 2000 Kubota wrote:

I personally became Yasutani Haku'un Roshi's disciple at the age of 17 and kept receiving his instructions until his death. So I know very well that Yasutani Roshi did foster strongly right-winged and anti-Semitic ideology during as well as after World War II, just as Mr. Victoria points out in his book. If Yasutani Roshi's words and deeds, now disclosed in the book, have deeply shocked anyone who practices in the Zen line of the Sanbō Kyōdan and, consequently, caused him or her to abhor or abandon the practice of Zen, it is a great pity indeed. For the offense caused by these errant words and actions of the past master, I, the present abbot of the Sanbō Kyōdan, cannot but express my heartfelt regret.

If I may speak as an insider, however, during the 25 years of my practice under him I never saw Yasutani Roshi ever force his students to accept his political ideology. After all, it was his Dharma that we wished him to transmit to us; never have I aspired, therefore,

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<sup>7</sup>Quoted in the fall 1999 issue of *Tricycle*, "Yasutani Roshi: The Hardest Koan, Part 4". This article is available on the Web at: [Tricycle.com](http://Tricycle.com) (accessed 14 March 2013)

to learn his ideological standpoint.<sup>8</sup>

Kubota's attempt to divorce Dharma transmission, with its attendant enlightenment, from strongly pro-war and anti-Semitic "political ideology" is noteworthy in that the Sanbō Kyōdan believes that it, and it alone, now embodies the authentic teachings of Zen. The essence of these teachings is that enlightenment, as expressed by the term *kenshō* (seeing one's true nature), is equally attainable by both lay practitioners and priests, the sole criteria being sufficient motivation and diligence. Needless to say, both Harada and Yasutani are viewed as exemplars of this possibility. Recognition of a *religiously* flawed founder is not an option.

### **In Rinzai Zen**

While the above commentators are, for the most part, associated with the Sōtō Zen sect, numerous examples in *Zen at War* demonstrate that wartime Rinzai Zen sect leaders were equally fervent in their endorsement of Japanese aggression on the basis of their Buddhist faith. Here, however, what is of interest is how contemporary Rinzai leaders attempt to explain their sect's support for WW II (aka the Asia-Pacific War of 1937-45) with regard to their allegedly enlightened wartime predecessors.

**Harada Shōdō** In the 2009 video documentary, "Zen and War", Harada Shōdō, abbot of Sōgenji in Okayama Prefecture, provides this explanation for the conduct of wartime Zen masters:

The state of enlightenment means to achieve the same kind of enlightenment as the Buddha. It brings a noble and spacious heart. It brings us back to a compassionate, open heart. This is only right and proper, and I believe it should be so. But I don't think that ordinary people have the omnipotence (*zennō*/全能) that Buddha had. There is, however, a general tendency for [Zen masters] to be seen as an absolute presence, as a dignified presence.

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<sup>8</sup>*Kyosho* #281 [March/April 2000], translated by Satō M. Available on the Web at: <http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/Apology.html> (accessed 23 December 2014). Note that while the website of the Sanbō Kyōdan's website originally posted Kubota's apology, it was posted only in English, not Japanese. It appears the apology was only for foreign consumption. Moreover, the apology is no longer publicly accessible on their website

I think that everybody believes that Zen enlightenment gives us access to the golden rule. That means that we feel absolute love towards the universe and all the human beings in it. But the things people do can't be done all at once, done solely on a conceptual basis. If we don't surrender our whole life to the existing world and don't jump into the mud even when that means we have to suffer, or if we don't fulfill our faith without experiencing fear, then we can't claim that we have awoken to the true state.<sup>9</sup>

**Kono Taitsū** In the same documentary, Kono Taitsū, former chief administrator of Myōshinji, the largest branch of the Rinzai sect, provides the following explanation:

Some people's enlightenment (*satori*) can be dubious. But I have no doubts with respect to enlightenment itself. However, it is very difficult to maintain this state of enlightenment twenty-four hours a day. This is called "*shonen shozoku*" [preserving total awakening] and is very difficult to maintain. They [wartime Zen masters] were not able to keep up this continuous state of enlightenment and were incorporated into the social framework of their time. Some people weren't incorporated, but even if they felt something was wrong, they still turned themselves over to the stream of the big river [of society at large]. I believe that many of them felt deeply ashamed, but they lacked courage [to speak out].<sup>10</sup>

**D.T. Suzuki** Readers may be surprised to learn that D.T. Suzuki also commented on the enlightenment of Zen's wartime leaders. In fact, dating to October 1945, his comments were the first to be made in postwar Japan. Unlike Kono Taitsū, Suzuki didn't find the problem to be Zen masters' inability to maintain their enlightened state, but it was rather a lack of "intellectuality"

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Video documentary, "Zen and War," directed by Alexander Oey, produced by the Buddhist Broadcasting Foundation of the Netherlands, 2009. This video, with English subtitles added by the producers,, is available for purchase through the amazon.com website at: [http://www.amazon.com/Zen-War-Alexander-Oey/dp/B00BF36WU8/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=movies-tv&ie=UTF8&qid=1419436014&sr=1-2&keywords=zen+and+war](http://www.amazon.com/Zen-War-Alexander-Oey/dp/B00BF36WU8/ref=sr_1_2?s=movies-tv&ie=UTF8&qid=1419436014&sr=1-2&keywords=zen+and+war) (accessed 25 December 2014)



(*chisei*) on the part of all Zen priests. Suzuki wrote:

In any event, today's Zen priests lack "intellectuality." . . . I wish to foster in Zen priests the power to increasingly think about things independently. An enlightenment that lacks this element should be taken to the middle of the Pacific Ocean and sent straight to the bottom! If there are those who say this can't be done, those persons should confess and repent all of the ignorant and uncritical words they and others spoke during the war in their temples and other public places.<sup>11</sup>

Were Suzuki the "man of peace" that his many admirers have portrayed him to be, and given that Japan literally lay in ruins at the time, Suzuki's words may be understood as well justified "righteous anger." The problem is that Suzuki takes no ownership for his own wartime words and actions. To give but one example, in June 1941 Suzuki published an article in the *Kaikōsha-kiji*, the Imperial Army's premier journal for its officer corps. Entitled "Rush Forward Without Hesitation" (*Makujiki Kōzen*), Suzuki exhorted Japan's officer corps as follows:

In one sense it can be said that "rush forward without hesitation" and "cease discriminating thought" are characteristics of the Japanese people. Their implication is that, disregarding birth and death, one should abandon life and rush ahead. It is here, I think, that Zen and the Japanese people's, especially the warriors', basic outlook are in agreement.<sup>12</sup>

One can only speculate how many of Japan's officers took Suzuki's words to heart, that is to say, disregarding birth and death, abandoning life and rushing ahead – to their own deaths, not to mention the deaths of their victims. Needless to say, Suzuki never attempted to answer, or reflect on, his own involvement in this question.

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 149.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Victoria, "Zen as a Cult of Death in the Wartime Writings of D.T. Suzuki." This article is available on the Web at: <http://japanfocus.org/-Brian-Victoria/3973/article.html>

## Irreconcilable Differences

In reviewing the preceding statements made by two American Zen priests, one American Pure Land priest, three Japanese Zen masters in both the Sōtō and Rinzai sects, and D.T. Suzuki, the question is which, if any, of their explanations is correct? Their explanations/interpretations/rationalizations are clearly mutually exclusive and therefore cannot all be right. In fact, it is possible they all are wrong.

One American Zen priest justified Yasutani's near fanatical support for mass killing and anti-Semitism on the basis of what he claimed to be a false understanding of enlightenment. According to Bernie Glassman, a correct understanding of enlightenment means that it is *all*-inclusive, including Buddhist affirmations of killing and anti-Semitism.

On the other hand, Bodhin Kjolhede informed us that there are "myriad levels of enlightenment, and all evidence suggests that, short of full enlightenment (and perhaps even with it—who knows?), deeper defilements and habit tendencies remain rooted in the mind." Thus, for Kjolhede the problem is that while a fervent Zen supporter of Japanese aggression like Yasutani was enlightened, he just wasn't sufficiently or completely enlightened.

Kubota Ji'un expressed what might be deemed the most 'clever' solution of all. He didn't have to worry, like Glassman, that nationalism, militarism and bigotry are contained within enlightenment or, like Kjolhede, that Yasutani just wasn't enlightened enough. Instead, Kubota solved the dilemma by strictly divorcing what he designated as Yasutani's "political ideology" from his *Buddha-dharma*. This made it possible for Yasutani's enlightenment, i.e., his *Buddha-dharma*, to remain authentic even as his warmongering and bigotry were rejected. Kubota claimed that both he and Yasutani's other disciples were only interested in the former, not the latter. In this way, Kubota and other members of the Sanbō Kyōdan were able to claim they remained untainted by Yasutani's "errant words and actions" even as Kubota apologized for them.

The only problem with Kubota's clever solution is that, as we have seen, Yasutani identified killing as the very essence of Mahāyāna Buddhism:

"Those who understand the spirit of the Mahāyāna precepts should be able to answer this question immediately. That is to say, of course one should kill, killing as many as possible."

Are the disciples of an enlightened master allowed to select what aspects of their master's *Buddha-dharma* they will, and will not, adhere to as if they were

ordering from the menu in an ‘enlightenment restaurant’?

In contrast, Harada Shōdō tells us that the enlightenment of ordinary human beings can’t measure up to that of the historical Buddha due to the latter’s “omnipotence”. Thus, ordinary human beings, Zen masters included, can’t always act in an enlightened state of mind. They have to jump into the “mud” (of war and other defilements) even if they and millions of others have to suffer for it. In the face of an omnipotent Buddha, the lot of the ordinary human being, Zen master or not, enlightened or not, is a sad one indeed.

Rinzai Zen Master Kono Taitsū began by suggesting that at least some wartime Zen masters may not have been enlightened, i.e., “Some people’s enlightenment can be dubious.” But then he retreated, as it were, to the position that they were indeed enlightened but just weren’t able to maintain or continue their enlightened state. He also suggested that some of them were actually opposed to the war but simply too cowardly to express their opposition.

Finally, Suzuki identified the problem as the lack, on the part of all wartime Zen priests, of “intellectuality”, something he explained as the inability to “think about things independently”. While few, especially in the West, would quarrel with these words as an admirable goal, they nevertheless contrast sharply with his earlier admonition of many years standing to “cease discriminating thought.” Did Suzuki himself have ‘second thoughts’ about this?

## Other Voices

D.T. Suzuki also famously wrote: “Besides its direct method of reaching final faith, Zen is a religion of will-power, and will-power is what is urgently needed by the warriors, though it ought to be enlightened by intuition.”<sup>13</sup>

If Suzuki is correct, does this mean that Zen-derived “will-power” can be acquired only by warriors but not by Zen masters who dare oppose wars initiated by their government? Further, Suzuki’s linkage of Zen to the warrior class indicates that the problem of Zen’s connection to warfare has roots reaching back beyond Japan’s modern wars. In fact, roots reaching back to Zen’s introduction to Japan in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century just at the time the warrior class had taken over political power from the emperor and aristocracy.

In Japan’s modern history, Zen support for war began even prior to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5. For example, in October 1887 General Nogi Maresuke

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<sup>13</sup>Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and its Influence on Japanese Culture*, p. 37.

(1849-1912), hero of both the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, began his Zen training under the Rinzai Zen Master Nakahara Nantembō (1839-1925). Nantembō was so confident in his own enlightenment that he said: “I am the only one in Japan who possesses the true transmission of the Buddhas and Patriarchs. Zen that only looks like Zen must be smashed.”<sup>14</sup> For their part, the leadership of the Myōshinji branch of Rinzai Zen requested Nantembō to investigate and rule on the authenticity of all that branch’s Zen masters.

Nantembō had nothing but the highest praise for his disciple, General Nogi,:

I have no doubt that Nogi’s great accomplishments during the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars were the result of the hard training that he underwent. The ancient [Zen] patriarchs taught that extreme hardship brings forth the brilliance [of enlightenment]. In the case of General [Nogi] this was certainly the case. . . . All Zen practitioners should be like him. . . . A truly serious and fine military man.”<sup>15</sup>

Nantembō later added, there is “no bodhisattva practice superior to the compassionate taking of life.”<sup>16</sup>

During the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, one allegedly enlightened Zen master, Shaku Sōen (1860-1919), went directly to the battlefield as a military chaplain. Sōen’s enlightenment had been attested to by his master, Imakita Kōsen (1816-1892), who in 1883 granted him his seal of approval (*inka shōmei*) certifying that an authoritative transmission of enlightenment had taken place. Sōen described his decision to become a military chaplain as follows:

I wanted to have my faith tested by going through the greatest horrors of life, but I also wished to inspire, if I could, our valiant soldiers with the ennobling thoughts of the Buddha, so as to enable them to die on the battlefield with the confidence that the task in which they are engaged is great and noble. I wished to convince them of the truth that this war is not a mere slaughter of their fellow human-beings, but that they are combating an evil, and that, at the same time, corporeal annihilation really means a rebirth of [the

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<sup>14</sup>Quoted in Victoria, *Zen War Stories*, p. 36.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 37

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 37

soul], not in heaven, indeed, but here among ourselves. I did my best to impress these ideas upon the soldiers' hearts.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, how was Sōen able to justify his war support with his Buddhist faith, the first precept of which is “not to take life”? In 1904 Sōen wrote a letter in response to a peace appeal from the great Russian writer, Leo Tolstoi. Sōen's letter contained the following passage: “Even though the Buddha forbade the taking of life, he also taught that until all sentient beings are united together through the exercise of infinite compassion, there will never be peace. Therefore, as a means of bringing into harmony those things that are incompatible, killing and war are necessary.”<sup>18</sup>

When these early pro-war expressions of allegedly enlightened Japanese Zen masters are taken into account, the inaccuracy of Kono Taitsū's proposition that it is difficult to maintain the state of enlightenment “twenty-four hours a day” is readily apparent. To be accurate, Taitsū should have admitted the difficulty Japanese Zen masters had in maintaining their state of enlightenment not for twenty-four hours but *for more than fifty years!*

Further, are we to suppose that Suzuki, as Shaku Sōen's disciple, was also critical of his own master's “ignorant and uncritical words [he] and others spoke during the [Russo-Japanese] war”? Or was the massive bloodletting, on both sides of the conflict, that accompanied the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 of no concern to Suzuki? Nothing in Suzuki's writings suggests he was critical of Sōen's words.<sup>19</sup> In fact, quite the opposite, for in 1904 Suzuki had concluded his English language article on the Buddhist view of war as follows: “Let us then shuffle off this mortal coil whenever it becomes necessary, and not raise a grunting voice against the fates . . . Resting in this conviction, Buddhists carry the banner of Dharma over the dead and dying until they gain final victory.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 26

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 29

<sup>19</sup>D.T Suzuki was, in fact, an ardent supporter of the Russo-Japanese War which opened the way for Japan's subsequent colonization of Korea. For details, see “The ‘Negative Side’ of D. T. Suzuki's Relationship to War,” p. 104. This article is available on the Web at: <http://web.otani.ac.jp/EBS/The%20NegSide%20of%20DT%20Suzuki%20Relationship%20to%20War.pdf>

<sup>20</sup>Suzuki, “A Buddhist View of War.” *Light of Dharma* 4, 1904, pp. 181–82

## Searching for Solutions – Alternative Possibilities

Is there no convincing rationale for why so many allegedly enlightened Zen masters could have supported Japanese military aggression for more than half a century? Of course, the obvious answer would be to simply admit these masters “weren’t enlightened.” But this would be a difficult, if not impossible, position for current day Dharma successors of these masters to accept, for it would call into question their own enlightenment or at least their qualification to teach. Is there no other possibility?

There is, of course, the “bad apple” theory, i.e., these war-supporting Zen leaders were merely “bad apples” in an otherwise pure tradition. In recent years, for example, the “bad apple” theory has been widely used in the Roman Catholic Church, among other religious bodies, to explain the sexual abuse perpetrated by members of its clergy. Additionally, many Western Zen practitioners have adopted a similar rationale to explain the multiple incidents of sexual misconduct on the part of Zen masters, both Japanese and non-Japanese, that have occurred at Zen centers in the West.

Yet, as previously noted, Zen practitioners are faced with a unique problem regarding the alleged transmission of the *Buddha-dharma* from the enlightened minds of Zen masters to the enlightened minds of their disciples. To admit that one’s master was a “bad apple” is tantamount to admitting that he or she was “unenlightened,” or, at best, “not yet fully enlightened.” This, in turn, makes the disciple’s attainment questionable. Among other things, this means that the disciple’s claim to be a bona fide “Zen master” may no longer be tenable since no authentic *Buddha-dharma* existed to be transmitted.

Are there no other possibilities?

**Satō Kemmyō Taira** Although the Jōdo Shinshū sect rejects the practice of meditation as an expression of “self-power” (*J. jiriki*), a priest in that sect and postwar disciple of D.T. Suzuki, named Satō Kemmyō Taira, claimed that meditation is itself “value-neutral.” Therefore it is quite possible that an enlightened person might decide to support a particular war without the least contradiction to his or her state of enlightenment. Satō wrote:

Meditation. . . is the infinite openness in which there is no self and other; it is the mind prior to thought, and thus prior to the distinction between good and evil. Being prior to the arising of good and evil

means also, of course, that it is value-neutral, with all the dangers that accompany this. It can be employed equally for either good or evil; when misused it can enable killing unrestrained by pangs of guilt or conscience, but when used in conjunction with an ethical system that stresses benevolence, magnanimity, and compassion, it can provide an important spiritual foundation to that system and help minimize the ego concerns that form “the root of all quarrels and fightings (sic).”<sup>21</sup>

As my research, as well as that of others, reveals, there can be no debate about the dangers that accompany a value-neutral understanding of meditation. Nor is there any doubt about the fact that value-neutral meditation “can be employed equally for either good or evil; when misused it can enable killing unrestrained by pangs of guilt or conscience.” This leaves us with the question of whether for at least fifty years, if not before, Japanese Zen masters simply forgot or ignored “a [Buddhist] ethical system that stresses benevolence, magnanimity, and compassion.”

The fundamental question that needs to be addressed here is whether *Buddhist* meditation can be accurately categorized as “value-neutral”.

Borrowing an insight from the Theravāda school of Buddhism, we find that in the *Gopaka Moggallāna-sutta* (Moggallāna, the watchman), Ānanda, one of Śākyamuni Buddha’s chief disciples, points out to Vassakāra (the chief minister of the country of Magadha) that Śākyamuni did not praise every form of meditation:

What kind of meditation, Brahman, did the Lord [Śākyamuni] not praise? . . . He [who] dwells with his thought obsessed by ill will, and does not comprehend as it really is the escape from the ill will that has arisen; he, having made ill will the main thing, meditates on it, meditates absorbed, meditates more absorbed, meditates quite absorbed. . . . The Lord does not praise this kind of meditation, Brahman.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Satō Kemmyō Taira, “D.T. Suzuki and the Question of War,” p. 99. This article is available on the Web at: <http://web.otani.ac.jp/EBS/DT%20Suzuki%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20War.pdf>

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in Walshe 1987, pp. 63–64 (italics mine).

Meditating “obsessed by ill will” is not, of course, the only misuse to which meditation can be put. Śākyamuni also criticized meditation obsessed with “sensual passion,” “sloth and drowsiness,” “restlessness and anxiety,” and “skeptical doubt,” collectively known as the “five hindrances” (Pāli, *pañca nīvaraṇāni*). Further, it should be noted that the word translated as “meditation” above is *samādhi* (in both Pāli and Sanskrit). *Samādhi*, of course, refers to the state of mental one-pointedness or concentration most readily, though not exclusively, achieved through the practice of meditation in the seated, cross-legged position, i.e., *zazen*.

Significantly, the Pāli word for these five mistaken types of *samādhi*, i.e., *micchā-samādhi*, appears to have no Mahāyāna equivalent. It further appears that the Zen school, and perhaps even Mahāyāna Buddhism as a whole, have refused, purposely or not, to recognize that *samādhi* can be misused. Note, too, that the promise of employing the mental power arising out of *samādhi*, i.e., *J. zenjōriki* (禅定力), on the battlefield first made Zen attractive to the warrior class in pre-modern Japan and later to the modern Japanese military, especially its officer corps.

The argument can be made, of course, that neither during Japan’s pre-modern period nor its subsequent militarist epoch did Zen masters urge their warrior/military followers to practice *zazen* “obsessed with ill-will.” Yet, one of the distinguishing features of traditional Buddhist ethics is its stress on “intentionality.” In determining whether an action is wholesome/skillful (Pāli *kusala*, Skt. *kuśala*) one must look at its impelling cause or motive. An act is considered unwholesome if it is rooted in one or more of the three poisons, i.e., greed, hatred and delusion, while it is wholesome if rooted in non-greed (i.e., generosity), non-hatred (loving kindness or compassion), and non-delusion (wisdom).

Apart from members of Japan’s right wing, there are today few knowledgeable observers who would claim that the Japanese imperial military’s forceful takeover of Taiwan, Korea and Manchuria, etc., so strongly supported by allegedly enlightened Zen masters, was *not* based on one or more of Buddhism’s traditional three poisons, most especially greed. Nor are they likely to assert that Japan’s unprovoked invasion of China, resulting in the deaths of many millions, was accompanied by loving kindness and compassion, not hatred. Or that Imperial Japan’s belief in its ability to conquer all of Asia, let alone defeat the Allied forces, wasn’t delusional.

Thus, if Satō’s claim that meditation is completely value-neutral cannot be sustained within at least a Theravāda Buddhist framework, have all of the alternatives been exhausted?



**Robert Gimello** Buddhist scholar Robert Gimello has provided one additional possibility, although it is a possibility that will not be attractive to many, this author included. This is because Gimello's position would, in effect, see all Buddhists who value an ethical life either abandon their faith or, at the very least, not become Buddhists in the first place. Gimello asserts: "The Buddhist doctrine of the emptiness of all things (which implies also the *nairatmya* and *anitya* character of all things) denies any stable foundation for the moral life and that is one reason why I am not a Buddhist."<sup>23</sup>

Gimello's position, it must be said, at least has the advantage of brevity. However, for those readers who might wish to remain Buddhists, or at least maintain a certain degree of sympathy for this faith, Gimello's position offers little. Is there truly no hope?

**Damien Keown** When this author interviewed Damien Keown, Emeritus Professor of Buddhist Ethics at the University of London, on this topic, he shared perhaps the most helpful, and certainly the most logical, response so far. Furthermore, a response that also has a high moral threshold. In doing this, however, Keown also challenges us to expand our search to consider enlightenment within the context of the Theravāda school as well.

Keown began by saying:

Ethics is a subversive subject, because once you start exploring ethical issues it can lead you to question other teachings. From a Theravāda point of view, it is believed to be psychologically impossible to have an *arhat* or Buddha break the precepts. They are said to be incapable of doing it, and in my view this is because they know it's morally wrong. That's a part of their enlightenment: you could even say it's what constitutes their enlightenment to a large extent. This is because enlightenment (or awakening) is not just a kind of knowledge. It is not simply a mystical intuition like *satori*, or an intellectual grasp of metaphysical truth. Enlightenment is also a personal moral transformation, an emotional as much as intellectual experience.

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<sup>23</sup>Spoken to the author in a conversation with Robert Gimello during the Guanyin Seminar held in Singapore in April 2015

So being enlightened means you have understood that a certain way of *living* is morally better. If you went against the precepts you would be going backwards in terms of the process of self-development, and it would mean that you couldn't be regarded as having achieved the goal. This is why you never see the Buddha doing anything immoral, not telling a lie, and certainly not killing anybody. As mentioned, it's said in the Pāli canon that it's simply impossible for those things to happen.

This view of things shifted in the Mahāyāna, where according to some sources it is permissible to break the precepts for two main reasons. First of all, out of compassion. Compassion as an emotional response to suffering becomes extremely important and tends to eclipse the earlier view that compassion must be balanced by wisdom. According to some Mahāyāna sources, compassion becomes the paramount virtue, and as a consequence anything justified on grounds of compassion is seen as morally acceptable. This is the rationale of the *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra* and a whole line of related thought derived from the principle that so long as you are a *bodhisattva* and act from a compassionate motive you can do no wrong.

The other strand that comes into play is a metaphysical one based on the notion of emptiness. On this view, nothing has any real essence so concepts like good and evil are simply relative. They don't have any real ontological status, and to imagine that good and evil exist in any real sense is seen as the product of a deluded mindset.

So you have these two notions of compassion and emptiness independently justifying antinomianism, which makes a powerful combination. From a moral point of view it means anything can be justified, and this is what we see from the beginnings of Mahāyāna Buddhism down to the present day. There are plenty of examples of this in recent historiography. For example, during the Korean War, Chinese monks justified violence on the basis of the dubious proposition that it was legitimate to kill the American "demons" out

of compassion. This is a significant departure from early Buddhist teachings.

By contrast, my own view, based on Theravāda Buddhist teachings, is that ethics, including respect for the precepts in a conventional sense, is integral to the enlightenment experience. As you develop your wisdom you develop your ethics, and the two can't be disentangled. An early source compares wisdom and compassion to two hands washing one another, and the Mahāyāna has a similar image comparing wisdom and compassion to the two wings of a bird. One wing represents an intellectual understanding of the truth, and the other denotes an emotional understanding of what the truth requires in terms of our relationship to other people. Those two things need to be developed in conjunction.

Those Zen teachers who have historically justified killing seem to have based their justification on the antinomian idea mentioned above that in the last analysis the moral concepts of good and evil are not found in reality. This is linked to the idea that there are no individual selves, so in taking life we cannot say that anyone is killed or anything wrong is done. To me this seems to be little more than sophistry, and gives strong reasons for doubting the validity of the claim of any teacher who expresses such a view to have achieved awakening.

So, the Zen enlightenment experience which masters claim to have had is an imbalanced state of being which isn't, I would say, a true kind of enlightenment. Complete enlightenment must include the perfection of ethics. You can't disentangle ethics from wisdom, and if you try to do that, you achieve something that is not really an authentically Buddhist state of awakening. It is only a partial awakening and not the complete transformation of being that enlightenment requires.

Keown's words, at least to this point, appear to leave little room for a teaching role on the part of the "unenlightened" in Buddhism, Zen included. In

fact, Keown's understanding of enlightenment, based on Theravāda, basically excludes Zen enlightenment from being authentically Buddhist, or, at best, recognizes it as only a "partial awakening." Needless to say, this is a highly controversial position, certainly within Zen circles. As important as this question is, an in-depth exploration lies beyond the confines of this article and must await another opportunity.

Keown, however, goes on to specifically address the nature of "Dharma transmission":

If the idea of Dharma transmission is that the master transmitted some enlightenment to the student, then someone expressing antinomian views of the kind described above couldn't transmit anything of value to anyone else.

I must confess I don't really understand what is meant by the transmission of enlightenment from master to student. According to Theravāda teachings, anyone can become enlightened whether they have a master or not. The master doesn't transmit his own enlightenment to his student, although he may recognize that the student has achieved enlightenment. There is nothing mysterious about this. I think we can all recognize if a person is spiritually enlightened. It's not hard to recognize people who are saints, good role models, inspiring individuals, and so forth. I think even the Buddha's disciples could recognize that he was enlightened even though they weren't. So in that sense it doesn't take one to know one.<sup>24</sup>

According to Keown, if "Dharma transmission" consists not in the "transmission" of a mysterious something called enlightenment but only a Zen master's *recognition* of the disciple's spiritual attainment, then such recognition is possible even if the master is not enlightened. This is definitely an attractive proposition for those disciples who find value in the traditional Zen master-disciple relationship, for they can thereby utilize the master's recognition as proof of their own spiritual attainment or credentials.

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<sup>24</sup>This personal interview took place in Bangkok, Thailand on May 30, 2015. Prof. Keown subsequently edited his words on September 2, 2015

**William Bodiford** As attractive as Keown's proposition appears, it nevertheless has a clear defect. This defect becomes clear when we look at William Bodiford's explanation of the nature of Dharma transmission in Zen:

The Zen school places great importance on the master-disciple relationship. According to modern descriptions of this discipleship, the master's goal is to cause his disciple to recreate through his own training the same intuitive cognition of reality that the master himself experiences. When the master successfully leads him to a level of understanding that has the same content as his own experience, the minds of the teacher and student are said to be one. Traditionally referred to as the "transmission" of the teacher's mind to the disciple, this method has been termed the crucial 'pivot of the Zen teaching method'. In this method both the enlightenment and the transmission are essential.<sup>25</sup>

Even if somewhat idealized, it is clear from Bodiford's description of Dharma transmission that unless the master has her/himself already experienced an authentic "intuitive cognition of reality" then there would be no possibility for the disciple to have the same experience. Of course, it is always possible that even an unenlightened master might "successfully lead [his or her disciple] to a level of understanding that has the same content as his own experience." In that case, however, it would be an example of "the blind leading the blind." In fact, in addition to warmongering Zen priests, the numerous illicit sexual scandals that have rocked Western Zen centers in recent years suggest this to be the case.

Thus, once again we are left to ask, have all of the options been exhausted?

### **Enlightenment without a Master**

While all of the 'reasonable' alternatives may have now been exhausted, two alternatives still remain. These two, however, must be identified as the most 'radical' alternatives. The first of these, hinted at by Damien Keown, may not appear so radical in that, albeit minor, it does have historical precedent both in Korea and Japan if not other Asian countries.

In Japanese Zen the first alternative is known as either "*mushi-dokugo*" (無師独悟/enlightened alone, without a master), or "*jigo-jishō*" (自悟自証/ self-

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<sup>25</sup> William Bodiford, "Dharma Transmission in Sōtō Zen," p. 423.

enlightened and self-certified), Its origins in Japan can be traced back at least as far as Nōnin (fl. 1190s). Originally a Tendai monk, Nōnin later established his own school of Zen called Daruma-shū (Bodhidharma sect) all without the benefit of formal “Dharma transmission” from an acknowledged master. Although the Daruma-shū eventually disappeared, many of the prominent disciples of Zen Master Dōgen, founder of the Sōtō Zen sect, were originally Nōnin’s students or those of his successors.

As for Dōgen himself, Hee-Jin Kim notes:

Consider enlightenment-by-oneself, without a teacher" (*mushi-dokugo*), the ultimate Zen principle that every practitioner had to actualize, even while studying under competent teachers and reading the *sūtras* for a number of years. Dōgen provided this well-known dictum with a specific methodological/hermeneutic key that allowed one to unlock the mystery of existence—that is, to open the self and the universe. That key amounted, in essence, to critical, reflective thinking as an integral part of meditation. Without this key, it was impossible to attain one's own salvific independence [...] Meditation and wisdom alike had to be subjected to critical scrutiny and reassessed in the changing situation.<sup>26</sup>

The denial of the need for formal Dharma transmission from a qualified master is, at first glance, an attractive proposition, for the enlightenment of the disciple is possible irrespective of whether one’s master was, for example, a warmonger or even a sexual predator. Indeed, without the need for either an enlightened master or Dharma transmission, the entire discussion up to this point is irrelevant. Yet, *in practice*, history demonstrates just how dangerous this possibility is, for as William Bodiford notes: “An enlightenment experience in and of itself (*mushi dokugo* 無師独悟, that is, one attained without a master’s guidance) is usually considered suspect since the risk of self-delusion or 'fake Zen' is always high.”<sup>27</sup>

Historically, we need go further than Zen monk Suzuki Shōsan (1579-1655), nominally affiliated with the Sōtō Zen sect, to see an example of Bodiford’s concern. Claiming to be self-enlightened, Shōsan, a former samurai, did not hesitate to teach:

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<sup>26</sup>Hee-jin Kim, *Dogen on Meditation and Thinking: A Reflection on His View of Zen*, p. 122

<sup>27</sup>William Bodiford, “Dharma Transmission in Sōtō Zen,” p. 423

It's best to practice *zazen* from the start amid hustle and bustle. A warrior in particular absolutely must practice a *zazen* that works amid war cries. Gunfire, crackles, spears, dash down the line, a roar goes up and the fray is on; and that's where, firmly disposed, he puts meditation into action. At a time like that, what use could he have for a *zazen* that prefers quiet? However fond of Buddhism a warrior may be, he'd better throw it out if it doesn't work amid war cries.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, Shōsan's self-generated enlightenment taught him that "if [Buddhism] doesn't work amid war cries," it should be discarded. Suzuki is indeed one example of what can happen when a Zen monk conflates his former profession, that of a samurai, with his status as a monk. Shōsan clearly had no use for "peace", with the exception, perhaps, of the "peace of the dead."

### **Zen is not Buddhism?**

**Piya Tan** Now for a second and even more radical alternative. Just how radical this alternative is can be seen if we postulate that yes, warmongering Zen masters et al. were truly enlightened within the Zen tradition, but the problem is that the Zen tradition isn't *Buddhist*! Piya Tan, previously introduced, explains this alternative as follows:

I have always taken care to use the expression Chan enlightenment (and avoided the term —awakening) so that we do not confuse the Chan or Zen idea with the early Indian notion of awakening (*bodhi*). Indeed, it is germane to speak of Chan *enlightenment*—a fitting imagery reflecting the transmitting of the Chan lamp—as against early Indian Buddhist *awakening*, which is a matter of self-effort. Whatever our terminology, the two should not be misunderstood as referring to the same idea. . . .

Mahāyāna *enlightenment* and Hīnayāna *awakening* are literally and spiritually *worlds* apart. The two should not be confounded or conflated with each other. Any Chan [Zen] priest who claims to be suddenly enlightened and places himself on the same level

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<sup>28</sup>Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*; p. 219

as the Buddha (indirectly claiming supreme awakening), could be said to be guilty of an offence entailing defeat (*pārājika*), that is, automatically falling from the state of monkhood or nunhood. However, no such offence is entailed if we do not equate any terms of Chan enlightenment (Ch. *wúwéi*, J. *satori*, etc.) with the early Buddhist conception of *bodhi*, etc. Since Chan and other forms of Chinese Buddhism and East Asian Buddhisms are effectively different Buddhist religions in their own right, there is no problem of their transgressing the monastic rules of early Buddhism. . . .

Chan Buddhism is changing to stay relevant in our own times. Chan monastics are aware, after a century of open critique in the light of what might be called “**open**” **Buddhism**—a holistic and interdisciplinary study and practice of Buddhism—that Chan has become more *Chinese* (or Japanese, or Korean) than Buddhist. Such a bent may serve well in implementing a nationalist state ideology but it may fall back into a recidivist Chan of the 8th century China. Chan Buddhism adapted well to Chinese society, and it will surely adapt well to our contemporary world. For this, Chan will need to re-chart its course by re-orienting itself to the north star that is early Buddhism.

For this reason, for example, the serious Chan meditators of all traditions in our times at least never fail to make the early Buddhist texts a part of their compulsory reading. We need not throw out the baby along with the bathwater, especially when the baby has the potential of maturing into a wise adult, that is, carries the Buddha-seed in him.<sup>29</sup>

I have no doubt that many readers, particularly Zen practitioners, will disagree with Piya Tan’s assertions, not to mention those of Damien Keown. In this regard, however, it would be good to recall the words attributed to Śākyamuni Buddha in the *Kālāma Sutta*:

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<sup>29</sup>Piya Tan, *Transmission Outside the Scriptures?* pp. 172-73. The quote has been slightly modified to make it read more smoothly



Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor tradition; nor rumor; nor what is in a scripture; nor surmise; nor axiom; nor specious reasoning; nor bias towards one's beliefs; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, "The monk is our teacher." When you yourselves know: "These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness," enter on and abide in them.

Additionally, the Zen school itself has a long tradition of "Dharma combat" (*hōssen*) in which a serious attempt is made on the part of the practitioner to better understand the Dharma through a series of challenging questions to the master. In the author's opinion, it is a matter of great regret that Dharma combat in Japan has today become, for the most part, a stylized ceremony in which both questions and answers are memorized prior to the ceremony and then simply regurgitated. For the Zen tradition to "adapt well" to contemporary society, as well as return to the best of its history, the practice of serious and "unrehearsed" questions and answers must be resurrected.

**David Loy** It should also be pointed out that Piya Tan and Damien Keown are not the first to challenge Zen's Buddhist credentials. For example, in 1995 Zen scholar/practitioner David Loy wrote an article entitled "Is Zen Buddhism?" Unfortunately, although Loy identified the problematical nature of the relationship between Zen and the samurai class from a Buddhist viewpoint, he failed to come to any conclusion other than his final paragraph, which reads:

The Meiji restoration remains an ambiguous legacy. Traumatized by its brutal forced opening to the rest of the world, acutely aware of the need to adopt Western technology as quickly as possible in order to defend itself from the imminent colonization that devastated the rest of Asia, not only Japan's self-confidence but its very self-identity were badly shaken. It is not surprising, then, that Zen and the samurai spirit became understood to exemplify the superior soul of the Japanese – which happened to fit nicely into a concern that arose in certain quarters of the West to find a superior "other" with which to flog itself. We may sympathize with Japan's need to establish its own identity on the world stage, and Japanese intellectuals' need to avoid the "hegemonic discourse" of

the West. Nonetheless, the resulting self-understanding of Japanese Zen Buddhists cannot be accepted uncritically.<sup>30</sup>

In the end, the only conclusion Loy arrived at was, “the resulting self-understanding of Japanese Zen Buddhists cannot be accepted uncritically.” This is clearly not an answer to the question Loy raised in the title of his article.

**Paul Swanson and “Critical Buddhism”** Even prior to Loy, Paul Swanson wrote an article in 1993 entitled, “Zen Is Not Buddhism.” Swanson took his title from the work of two Sōtō Zen-affiliated Buddhist scholars, Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shiro, founders of the “Critical Buddhism” movement. These two scholars both taught at Sōtō Zen-affiliated Komazawa University. Separately and jointly, they wrote a sophisticated critique of key doctrinal underpinnings of contemporary Japanese Zen, especially *hongaku* thought, i.e., the idea that all beings are “inherently” enlightened. They claimed this idea was antithetical to such basic Buddhist ideas as *anātman* (“no-self”) and called for its rejection in order to return to “true Buddhism.”

According to Hakamaya and Matsumoto, true Buddhist virtue is both anti-violent and requires a critical stance against discrimination and injustice.

In stressing the anti-violent nature of Buddhism, not to mention its opposition to discrimination and injustice, these two scholars made it clear, as I detailed in *Zen at War*, that the Zen school’s unconditional support of wartime Japan served as the catalyst for their attempt to identify and rectify what they considered to be Zen Buddhism’s past (and ongoing) doctrinal errors.<sup>31</sup> Thus, this author is not alone in having been deeply affected by the Zen school’s war collaboration.

Matsumoto further pointed out that such ideas as “no thought and no conceptualization” (*munen musō*), “direct intuition” (*chokkan*), and “non-reliance on words” (*furyū monji*) that have been introduced in the West as representative of “Zen,” are in fact ideas based on *tathāgata-garbha* and *hongaku* thought, and should not be considered positive Buddhist virtues.

The term *tathāgata-garbha* means that every sentient being has the inherent possibility to attain Buddhahood.

According to Matsumoto, while the idea of a universal inherent buddhahood of all appears optimistic, it actually serves to enhance the status quo and inhibit improvement of the human condition. This is because it leads to, or is based

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<sup>30</sup>David Loy, “Is Zen Buddhism?” *The Eastern Buddhist*, p. 286

<sup>31</sup>See Victoria, *Zen at War*, pp. 174-79

on, the non-Buddhist assumption that there is a single, underlying reality for all things. Thus, good and evil, strong and weak, rich and poor, right and wrong, are fundamentally "the same." Given this, there is no longer a need or incentive to correct any injustice or right any wrong.

Hakamaya insisted that the moral imperative of Buddhism is to act selflessly (*anātman*) for the benefit of others. The *hongaku* thought that "grasses, trees, mountains, and rivers have all attained buddhahood; that sentient and non-sentient beings are all endowed with the way of the Buddha" leaves no room, he claimed, for this moral imperative. Buddhism requires faith, words, and the use of the intellect (wisdom, *prajñā*) to choose the truth of *pratītya-samutpāda* (causality/dependent origination/interdependent co-arising). Zen's allergy to the use of words is more native Chinese than Buddhist, and the ineffability of "thusness" (*shinnyo*) claimed in *hongaku* thought leaves no room for words or faith.

For Hakamaya, true Buddhist faith requires one's intellect to respond critically to mistaken notions and activity with both words and actions. This critical response extends to the words and actions of a so-called Zen master or teacher. The disciple must completely reject the authoritarian idea so typical of Japanese Zen that the teacher is absolute and never mistaken, or must never be criticized.

Unsurprisingly, Matsumoto and Hakamaya's criticisms of Zen, and Japanese Buddhism in general, have themselves been the subject of numerous critiques, first and foremost by Zen scholars but also by scholars in the mainstream of Japanese Buddhist scholarship. In a section entitled "some personal observations," Swanson responds to these critiques as follows:

Apart from the technical arguments as to whether Buddha-nature ideas and *hongaku shisō* [thought] are "orthodox" or "not really Buddhism," it cannot be denied that this ethos has failed to provide a broad ethical dimension or stimulate a social ethic in Japanese society. Japanese Buddhists may – and in fact have – argued that this is not a problem, and that for Zen the priority is for the individual to realize one's own enlightenment, after which compassion and concern for others should "flow forth spontaneously." Nevertheless history has shown that this ethos tends to support the status quo; it provides neither a stimulus for necessary social change and altruistic activity, nor a basis to resist social structures that prey on the weak and oppressed.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Paul Swanson, "Zen is not Buddhism," *Recent Japanese Critiques of Buddha-Nature*, p. 142

This in itself is a severe ethical critique of Zen, as well as Japanese Buddhism overall, by a leading Western Buddhist scholar who has resided in Japan for many years. While there may, and ought to be, debate over the cause of Zen's malaise in Japan and beyond, the result is all too plain to see. Or, given the general indifference to such critiques displayed by Western Zen practitioners, perhaps it would be better said, "the result *ought to be* too plain to see."

**Erik Storlie** Finally, and returning once more to the nature of Dharma transmission, we have the words of Erik Storlie, a longtime Zen practitioner, author and meditation teacher in the Sōtō Zen tradition. Storlie's critique is perhaps the most telling of all:

[The belief] that an unbroken chain of "mind to mind" transmissions has descended, generation after generation, in a known lineage, down to today's living dharma heirs, is simply false on historical grounds. As Edward Conze, the great scholar of Indian Buddhism noted, "much of the traditions about the early history of Chan are the inventions of a later age" – inventions befitting a Chinese culture that deeply honored family lineages traced through renowned ancestors. . . .

Stated simply, the doctrine of dharma transmission is just one more among the many attractive delusions held by human beings. Unfortunately, adherence to it gives the dharma heir a very powerful – and potentially dangerous – authority within the community of Zen practitioners.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

Is Dharma transmission no more than an "attractive delusion" as Storlie claims? Can the same be said about the nature of "enlightenment" as understood in the Zen tradition? Or can the same be said about Zen (and Mahāyāna's) claim to

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<sup>33</sup>Erik Storlie, "Lineage Delusions: Eido Shimano Roshi, Dharma Transmission, and American Zen." Quotation edited slightly with the permission of the author. Available on the Web at: <http://sweepingzen.com/lineage-delusions-eido-shimano-roshi-dharma-transmission-and-american-zen/> (accessed on 9 August 2015)

be an authentic expression of the *Buddha-dharma*, and hence “Buddhist,” when viewed through an ethical prism?

This article does not pretend to have answers to the many questions that have been raised. At best it hopes to open the door to a wider and long overdue conversation in which what has frequently been camouflaged, or accepted uncritically, is addressed openly in hopes that a significantly more honest, ethical and less self-validating version of Zen Buddhism can evolve. The accomplishment of this, however, may require nothing less than a "Zen Reformation." While the nature of such a Zen Reformation lies far beyond the confines of this article, its purpose will be accomplished if the need for such a conversation is now clear. Clear not just from an academic point of view but, far more importantly, from an ethical one.

## Appendix

### Introduction

This appendix contains a series of war-related quotations, chronologically listed, by both Sōtō Zen Master Harada Sōgaku and his disciple, Yasutani Hakuun. Inasmuch as the meaning of these quotations is abundantly clear, there is no need for additional discussion or commentary. The original English quotations for Harada are found in *Zen at War*, pp. 135-38. Similar quotations for Yasutani are found in *Zen War Stories*, pp. 66-91.

#### *I. Select Wartime Quotations of Sōtō Zen Master Harada Sōgaku*

1. In the March 1934 issue of the magazine *Chūō Bukkyō* (Central Buddhism), Harada wrote:

The Spirit of Japan is the Great Way of the [Shintō] gods. It is the substance of the universe, the essence of the Truth. The Japanese people are a chosen people whose mission is to control the world. The sword that kills is also the sword that gives life. Comments opposing war are the foolish opinions of those who can only see one aspect of things and not the whole.

Politics conducted on the basis of a constitution are premature, and therefore fascist politics should be implemented for the next ten years. Similarly, education makes for shallow, cosmopolitan-minded persons. All of the people of this country should do Zen. That is to say, they should all awake to the Great Way of the Gods. This is Mahāyāna Zen.

2. In the November 1939 issue of the magazine *Daijō Zen* (Mahāyāna Zen), Harada wrote an article entitled, "The One Road of Zen and War." It read in part:

[If ordered to] march: tramp, tramp, or shoot: bang, bang. This is the manifestation of the highest Wisdom [of Enlightenment]. The unity of Zen and war of which I speak extends to the farthest reaches of the holy war [now under way]. Verse: I bow my head to the floor in reverence for those whose nobility is without equal.

3. In the February 1943 issue of the periodical *Zen no Seikatsu* (The Zen Life), Harada wrote:

It has never been as necessary as it is today for all one hundred million people of this country to be committed to the fact that as the state lives and dies, so do they. . . . We must devote ourselves to the practice of Zen and the discernment of the Way. We must push on in applying ourselves to "combat *zazen*," the king of meditation (*samādhi*).

4. Finally, Harada wrote the following article entitled, "Be Prepared, One Hundred Million [Subjects], for Death with Honor!" in the July 1944 issue of *Daijō Zen*:

It is necessary for all one hundred million subjects [of the emperor] to be prepared to die with honour. . . . If you see the enemy you must kill him; you must destroy the false and establish the true -- these are the cardinal points of Zen. It is said that if you kill someone it is fitting that you see their blood. It is further said that if you are riding a powerful horse nothing is beyond your reach. Isn't the purpose of the *zazen* we have done in the past to be of assistance in an emergency like this?

## *II. Select Wartime Quotations of Sōtō Zen Master Yasutani Hakuun.*

In February 1943 Yasutani published a book entitled, *Dōgen-zenji to Shūshōgi* (Zen Master Dōgen and the *Treatise on Practice and Enlightenment*). The following quotations are selected from that book.

1. Yasutani opened his book by explaining its purpose:

Asia is one. Annihilating the treachery of the United States and Britain and establishing the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere is the only way to save the one billion people of Asia so that they can, with peace of mind, proceed on their respective paths. Furthermore, it is only natural that this will contribute to the construction of a new world order, exorcising evil spirits from the world and leading to the realization of eternal peace and happiness for all humanity. I believe this is truly the critically important mission to be accomplished by our great Japanese Empire.

In order to fulfill this mission it is absolutely necessary to have a powerful military force as well as plentiful material resources. Furthermore, it is necessary to employ the power of culture, for it is most especially the power of spiritual culture that determines the final outcome. In fact, it must be said that in accomplishing this very important national mission the most important and fundamental factor is the power of spiritual culture. . . .

It is impossible to discuss Japanese culture while ignoring Buddhism. Those who would exclude Buddhism while seeking to exalt the spirit of Japan are recklessly ignoring the history of our imperial land and engaging in a mistaken movement that distorts the reality of our nation. In so doing, it must be said, such persons hinder the proper development of our nation's destiny.

For this reason we must promulgate and exalt the true *Buddha-dharma*, making certain that the people's thought is resolute and immovable. Beyond this, we must train and send forth a great number of capable men who will be able to develop and exalt the

culture of our imperial land, thereby reverently assisting in the holy enterprise of bringing the eight corners of the world under one roof.

2. Yasutani interpreted the precept forbidding killing as follows:

At this point the following question arises: What should the attitude of disciples of the Buddha, as Mahāyāna Bodhisattvas, be toward the first precept, that forbids the taking of life? For example, what should be done in the case in which, in order to remove various evil influences and benefit society, it becomes necessary to deprive birds, insects, fish, etc. of their lives, or, on a larger scale, to sentence extremely evil and brutal persons to death, or for the nation to engage in total war?

Those who understand the spirit of the Mahāyāna precepts should be able to answer this question immediately. That is to say, of course one should kill, killing as many as possible. One should, fighting hard, kill everyone in the enemy army. The reason for this is that in order to carry [Buddhist] compassion and filial obedience through to perfection it is necessary to assist good and punish evil. However, in killing [the enemy] one should swallow one's tears, bearing in mind the truth of killing yet not killing.

Failing to kill an evil man who ought to be killed, or destroying an enemy army that ought to be destroyed, would be to betray compassion and filial obedience, to break the precept forbidding the taking of life. This is a special characteristic of the Mahāyāna precepts.

3. Yasutani expressed his anti-Semitic views as follows:

We must be aware of the existence of the demonic teachings of the Jews who assert things like [the existence of] equality in the phenomenal world, thereby disturbing public order in our nation's society and destroying [governmental] control. Not only this, these demonic conspirators hold the deep-rooted delusion and blind belief that, as far as the essential nature of human beings is concerned, there is, by nature, differentiation between superior and inferior.



Jews are caught up in the delusion that they alone have been chosen by God and are [therefore] an exceptionally superior people. The result of all this is a treacherous design to usurp [control of] and dominate the entire world, thus provoking the great upheavals of today. It must be said that this is an extreme example of the evil resulting from superstitious belief and deep-rooted delusion.

4. Yasutani concluded his book:

At this point in time, nothing is more urgent than the clarification of the true Dharma of Zen Master Dōgen, thereby extolling the great duty of reverence for the emperor, and, at the same time, rectifying numerous unsound ideas, cultivating proper belief among the Japanese people as leaders of the Orient, one hundred million [people] of one mind, equipped with a resolute and immovable attitude.

In this connection I have provided a brief and simple outline of Zen Dōgen's *Buddha-dharma*. Nothing could bring me greater joy than, if through the dissemination of this book, the true Dharma becomes known once again, resulting in the total and complete exaltation of the Spirit of Japan and benefitting both the state and humanity.

Moreover, I am convinced this will become the spiritual foundation for the establishment of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, the standard for cultural activities, and the pillar for the construction of a new world order.

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