MIND BODY ZEN

Waking Up to Your Life

HOKAKU JEFFREY MAITLAND

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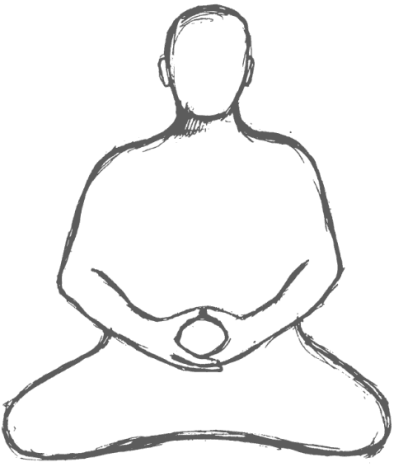

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PREFACE

Kendo Hal Roth
Professor of philosophy, Brown University

There are a great many books written about Zen. I once attended a meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in which a scholar who writes on Zen gave an entire twenty-minute presentation listing all the books he could find that contained the word "Zen" in the title. These days the word's ubiquity has expanded well beyond books. If you have a product to sell—perfume, seaweed, MP3 players, bassinets, diaper stackers, teapots, dog food, shower curtains, or even toilet-paper holders (all listed on Amazon.com)—calling it "Zen" gives the item a certain cache, a certain minimalist aesthetic that Western popular culture has come to associate with the term.

There have been numberless books written that attempt to apply "Zen" to the problems we face in daily life, everything from motorcycle maintenance to golf to screaming (yes, Amazon lists a DVD entitled *Zen Screaming*.) But how many of these books have been written by someone who actually practiced Zen, much less had many years of practice with an authentic Zen master? How many are pop-psychology self-help books written by people who have read one of the many tomes of Alan Watts or D. T. Suzuki and then become self-styled experts?

Zen sells in the academic world as well. A Zen scholar once remarked to me, with tongue firmly planted in cheek, that he had put Zen into the title of his book not once but twice, and that he'd more than doubled its sales as a result! Indeed, scholarly works on Zen abound these days. Many follow the intellectual pretense of "seeing through" the "rhetoric" of Zen from the presumably superior postmodern position of detailing how the various political intrigues and superstitious folk beliefs that have found their way into Zen monasteries over the centuries undermine any claims Zen makes to having genuine epistemological insights. Indeed, "debunking" Zen has become somewhat of a cottage industry among North American scholars who are hell-bent on proving that Zen is just as superstitious and political as the religions they were raised in and subsequently rejected (or accepted, as a few did).

In the latter group are scholars whose hidden religious commitments to one of the Abrahamic traditions and the assertion of an ultimate separation between God and creation has led them to reject the challenge of the Zen assertion that the Absolute is intricately involved in the relative, and its concomitant contention that the Absolute can be directly experienced through Zen practice. In the former group are the scholars who have rejected the religions they were raised in for their failure to answer the serious existential questions of their lives and who now want to assert that Zen is no different than any of them: to them, it's the kind of anti-scientific superstition that Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins rail against. This latter "rejectionist" group also contain scholars who have dabbled in Zen or one of the other Buddhist contemplative traditions and whose lack of progress therein had led them to the "inevitable" conclusion that

Zen practice leads nowhere and that Zen is no different than the Christianity or Judaism that they previously found wanting.

On the other side of the world of Zen authors are Zen practitioners. While many scholars of Zen have little or no experience with Zen practice, many practitioners of Zen are devoid of academic training, in an ironically parallel fashion. Although there are numerous books written by Zen practitioners, few of them have the kind of academic training that would enable them to bring a critical distance to their writing. Moreover, it has long been the position of many Western Zen practitioners that Zen completely rejects the study of the classical Buddhist sutras and, indeed, any intellectual activity at all. Zen is all about meditation and practice, they say; words are useless to convey the profundities of Zen experience and so why bother studying them? Besides, all these ideas do is get in the way of one's Zen practice.

The life and teaching of Roshi Joshu Sasaki demonstrates that these practitioners' notions are naive. Born into a farming family in the Tohoku region of Northern Japan in 1907 and a monk since 1921, he brought to America upon his arrival in 1962 an authentic form of Rinzai practice that in many ways was as vigorous (AND as intellectual) as that of his lineage great-grandfather Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768). Not content to reproduce to the letter this centuries-old form of Zen practice, Sasaki Roshi became a great innovator, developing new koans for his Western students and presenting a deeply intellectual and unique Zen philosophy through his numerous dharma talks *(teishos)* during intensive practice weeks *(sesshin)* and also through his many years of scholarly lectures in the context of the annual Summer Seminars on Buddhism, hosted first through UCLA, then through Cornell, and finally, for the past quarter century,

through the University of New Mexico. Since the early 1970s, Sasaki Roshi has traveled widely through the Americas, Europe, and even New Zealand, bringing his unique Zen teaching to students in many far-flung places at the rate of one sesshin every other week until three years ago when he turned one hundred, at which time he "reduced" his teaching to roughly fifteen sesshins a year. This is twice the number that most Zen masters half his age in Japan—or anywhere in the world, for that matter—give today. At 103, while understandably declining in his overall energy, Sasaki Roshi remains vigorous in his teaching. Because this incredibly insightful teacher who has developed a sophisticated Zen philosophy about the nature of human experience has spent so much of his energies in teaching, he has very little published writing of his own. With the exception of the occasional teisho printed in the newsletters of his many centers and the unapproved and poorly translated collection of his teishos from a 1972 sesshin at the Lama Foundation in New Mexico, *Buddha Is the Center of Gravity,* Sasaki Roshi's teaching has been transmitted in the life experience of his many disciples and students rather than in books.

I have known Hokaku Jeff Maitland for probably thirty years. I remember talking to him in the early 1980s after sesshins at Bodhi Manda Zen Center in New Mexico when he was then professor of philosophy at Purdue University. We instantly related about the intellectual conformity and the lack of creativity and integrity in our respective fields of scholarship and often talked about the need for a different kind of academic endeavor that combined a rigorous critical spirit and training with a deep engagement in subjective experience. Following the lead of Sasaki Roshi in establishing the Summer Seminars on Buddhism to com-

bine academic study with Zen practice, I took this model and expanded upon it in my work with others to develop the new academic field of Contemplative Studies, which combines traditional third-person study with critical first-person experience (see Contemplativestudies.org for details).

Jeff pursued this vision in different endeavors, eventually leaving the academy to became an innovative teacher in the area of body-mind work within the tradition of Ida Rolf that works to release pent-up emotions held deeply within the body through myofascial manipulation. While developing new and important methods within Rolfing, Jeff never forgot his love of philosophy and his rigorous training therein, writing his first book, *Spacious Body: Explorations in Somatic Ontology,* in an attempt to bring together his interests in philosophy, Zen, and bodywork.

Mind Body Zen is a new and original attempt to bring together these interests and also to fill the need for a critically reflective study of the Zen teachings of Joshu Sasaki Roshi by a disciple who has not lost his critical eye. Indeed, one thing this book shows is that practicing Zen does not require that one become some kind of simple-minded devotee, as many Western scholars would lead us to believe. The purview of *Mind Body Zen* is the complete range of human experience, from the mundane to the sublime. Fully integrating his work in Western philosophy, Rolfing, and the practice of Sasaki Roshi's "Tathagatha Zen," Jeff Maitland gives us a work that is profound, insightful, and informative, and gives a wider audience access to his understanding of one of the great unknown traditions of Zen practice and philosophy. There are virtually no other books that give us this unique and important combination of the perspectives of Western philosophy and of Japanese Zen practice (Katsuki

Sekida's *Zen Training* is the only other example I can think of). What we have here is a book by a long-time Zen practitioner who is also an academic and an intellectual. He has neither the antipathy to the intellectual study of Zen found in many American practitioners nor the slavish devotion to the ethnocentrically biased trope of "debunking" that characterizes so much of current Western Zen scholarship. I therefore commend this work to all serious scholars and philosophers and to all committed practitioners of Zen.

April 25, 2010
Barrington, Rhode Island

INTRODUCTION

This book came to be because of my Zen teacher, Kyozan Joshu Sasaki Roshi. As I was once leaving the sanzen room after receiving his private instruction, Roshi surprised me in the middle of my last bow by declaring, "You should write about Zen for Americans." Since Roshi never told me what kind of writing he had in mind, it was up to me to figure out the best approach. I sat on the idea for a while and then wrote what is now the sixth essay of this book. I shared it with both my Zen friends and people who had a passing interest in Buddhism and was encouraged by the positive responses. I also gave a copy to Roshi just before the beginning of a sesshin. A few days later, during sanzen, he humorously turned my essay into a koan he seriously wanted an answer to by asking me a series of questions: "Where is Buddha?... Where is Plato?... Where is Aristotle?... Where is Kant?" Otherwise he voiced no objections to what I had written.

Since I didn't want to be constrained by the format of a book with chapters, it seemed that a book of essays might be the best way to fulfill Roshi's directive. Following the principles of what the Chinese philosophers call *round thinking*, I wrote each essay to illuminate and be illuminated by all the others. At the same time, each of the essays in this book is meant to stand alone and can be read independently of the others. You also can read them in any order you desire.

Strewn throughout the text are a number of text boxes like the one below. Mostly, they contain stories that help illustrate the practice of Zen as only true stories can. Since the narrative is capable of promoting an easy way of understanding that transcends analysis or explication, it is often experienced as a welcome respite for the weary discourse-burdened reader. There are a generous number of such rest stops stationed along the way. When I shared some of these stories with Nancy Logan, a client of mine, she suggested naming them Zennits, humorously making an irreverent allusion to sonnets. The name was too good not to use. In the Table of Contents I included a separate section for the Zennits, listing the page numbers of each Zennit for those readers who don't want to wait for them to appear in the course of reading.

▶ Roshi was once asked why he came to America. He replied, "Let others teach Zen. I came to teach Americans how to laugh."

The tradition of Zen that is represented in this book of essays is called Tathagata Zen. It is part of the Rinzai tradition and the name of the practice Sasaki Roshi brought to America forty-five years ago. At the time this book was completed in May 2007, he turned one hundred years old and is still teaching. Whatever wisdom I have been able to glean from Zen practice, I owe to the great generosity and tireless efforts of Roshi. Any mistakes I may have made in articulating the dharma activity are entirely my own doing and have nothing to do with the overflowing details of his profound teachings. Unfortunately, Roshi's teachings have not often found their way into the published word. As a result, much of what appears in this book comes from listening to a great many of Roshi's teishos and my face-to-face

interactions with him. An interesting exception is an excerpt from one of his teishos entitled "Ordinary Mind is the Way," published in the September 1998 issue of *Shambhala Sun*. This excerpt provides a wonderful peek at how a great Zen teacher articulates the dharma activity. My discussion of the dharma activity at the end of Chapter Seven and the section entitled "Following the Dharma" in Chapter One are based upon this aspect of Roshi's teachings. Also of interest is a transcription of Roshi's teishos from a seven-day sesshin published under the title, *Buddha Is the Center of Gravity*.*

In an earlier book, *Spacious Body: Explorations in Somatic Ontology*,** I tried to articulate an understanding of how the self is born. Unfortunately, my understanding was both premature and much too psychological. At the time, I didn't grasp how self and world, subject and object, space and time, mother, father, and child all arise together and at once. Thanks to the efforts of Roshi and more years of Zen training, I have remedied my deficient and incomplete understanding to some degree. As a result, *Mind Body Zen* represents a significant advance over some of the material covered in *Spacious Body*.

As you read these essays, certain Japanese words will keep showing up. These words are part of the everyday vocabulary of Zen students. But for a reader who is not a Zen practitioner, they need to be defined. To that end, I have provided a glossary at the end of this book.

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*Joshu Sasaki Roshi, *Buddha Is the Center of Gravity* (San Cristobal, NM: Lama Foundation, 1974).

**Jeffrey Maitland, *Spacious Body: Explorations in Somatic Ontology* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995).

My first Zen teacher used to say that Zen discourse was a compass that pointed the way and Zen meditation was a machete for cutting our way through our entanglements. Even if this book somehow were the best compass ever created, it would still be only a pointing device. Using discursive pointing devices requires employing our intellect to interpret and understand our world. But, even though the intellect is not irrelevant to our search, it is not fully adequate for the job. Consequently, we should not lose sight of the fact that the wisdom and freedom Zen offers is not to be found in words alone. In the end, what is required is the complete deconstruction of the self along with its metaphysical illusions. This dismantling of the roots of our suffering is accomplished not by faith, belief, or theory building, but through Zen practice—which is, as it turns out, the way of understanding itself.

I

Is There Karma in Heaven?

Even the person who sits in zazen just one time
will destroy a limitless accumulation of karmic crimes.
So in reality just where are these resultant evil states?
The Pure Land itself is not at all far away.

— Hakuin Ekaku, "In Praise of Zazen"

When people learn that my shaved head signifies that I am an ordained Zen monk, they typically ask me about what Buddhists believe. The two most common questions are: "What do Buddhists believe happens when you die?" and "Do Buddhists believe in karma and reincarnation?" At the risk of appearing somewhat evasive I reply that even though there are many beliefs associated with Buddhism, Zen is really not about belief. Zen is not a faith-based religion. In fact, it is not a religion at all. It is, rather, a practice-based, experientially driven discipline that aims at the direct and immediate experience of the activity of the source. True, Zen takes great determination and belief in the practice. But this kind of belief is more like believing that you can do an activity such as learning to ride a bicycle than it is like

having a belief in God. The Japanese word for the practice of Zen is *shukyo*. Although it is often mistranslated as "religion," it actually means "teaching of the essence." Unlike followers of faith-based religions, Zen students are not encouraged to believe in doctrine, but rather to engage in the practice of *zazen* (Zen meditation) in order to discover for themselves the essence that the Buddha experienced and taught.

The root meaning of the word *radical* is "to return to the root." Using *radical* in this sense, we could say that the Buddha transformed and radicalized the religious quest into the meditative practice of contemplating the activity of the source. This radicalization of practice is behind Rinzai's (Lin Chi) famous exhortation, "If you meet a Buddha, kill the Buddha." Rinzai is not saying that you should murder the Buddha if you run into him at your local grocery store. Rather, he is trying to shock us to the point where we drop our I-am-self, cease clinging to all of our objectifications and concepts of God, Buddha, or the source, and directly contemplate the activity by which we and the world appear and disappear into love over and over again, day in and day out. Rinzai's outrageous exhortation expresses the fact that Zen is not a path founded on belief, concept, or idolatry.

Since Zen is not founded on belief and does not postulate the existence of a faith-based God, it follows that Zen is not a form of theism, deism, or pantheism. Yet it is not a form of atheism either. Joshu Sasaki Roshi once said, "There is no God and he is always with you!" If you say that God exists, you are attached to a concept or objectification and you are worshiping your own imaginary creation. If you say there is no God, you are attached to the denial of a concept and are missing the truth that is always

staring you in the face. In neither case have you penetrated to the heart of the matter.

Death and Resurrection

By now you may be wondering whether Zen has anything positive or encouraging to offer when it comes to answering the age-old questions about death and the meaning of human life. After all, if Zen is a radical practice-based discipline, if it is not about having or adopting beliefs to live by, if it is not about worshiping a faith-based concept of God, then how can it have anything helpful to say about karma, dying, the possibility of an afterlife, or any of the other questions that plague human life? Consider the problem of death. If Zen is based on experience, then it seems that the only way one could grasp the meaning of death would be to actually die. But how is anyone helped by that? At least with a faith-based religion there are plenty of beliefs, explanations, concepts, and theological pronouncements that comfort believers in their suffering and fear of death. Religious beliefs help us get through the difficult times and face the inevitability of death. What does Zen have to offer?

The short answer is, as long as you are looking for comforting beliefs and explanations in which to place your faith, then, of course, Zen has very little to offer. But let's not give up just yet. Let's look more carefully at how the practice-based orientation of Zen deals with these questions. Ask yourself this: "Am I the same person today as I was when I was five or fifteen years old?" It must be obvious that you are not the same. In so many ways, you are astonishingly different: in your body, your mind, and the values you hold dear. Maybe you have experienced profound,

▶ During a particularly hot summer sesshin, a Zen student was besieged with memories of innumerable past lives. For two or three days, her zazen was flooded with memory after compelling memory. In vain, she tried to stop them. At the same time, she also found herself so completely fascinated that she would dwell on the memories for hours. She told no one about her experience. On the third day of sesshin, right in the middle of his teisho Roshi made a surprising remark that was completely unrelated to the topic he was discussing. He said, "If you have only come here to dwell on your past lives, you should leave and become a Hindu!" She was stunned. But as she continued meditating, her heart-mind became bright and clear and the memories faded away in the expanse she had become.

life-transforming changes and now no longer recognize yourself as the person you once were. But you have not metamorphosed into some wholly different person. After all, when you look at your baby pictures you still say, "Yep, that's me!"

Even in the face of our own ever-shifting and changing self and body, most of us experience and believe our self to be our foundation or essence and some sort of continuous entity. To account for the apparent continuity of our personhood amidst the obvious and sometimes life-altering changes we continually undergo, many religions claim that we have an eternal soul that survives both moment-to-moment change and our inevitable biological death.

But does this continuous, foundational self or eternal soul really exist? Have you ever really experienced it? As an experiment, can you remember similar experiences and answer the fol-

lowing questions? Where is your self when you first kiss your lover? Where is your self when you hear the opening "da da da dum!" of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony? Where is your self when you bang your head on the garage door? At the moment these events occur, there is no self to be found. If you try to discover a self or soul in those moments, a self that somehow survives our never-ending, unstoppable moment-to-moment disappearance, you can't. But just as quickly as it disappeared, in the next moment your self reappears already commenting on what just happened: "Oh baby, I love you!" or "Beethoven is the greatest!" or "Geez, that's the second time today I've bumped my head on that crummy door!" But in the very first instant of every perception, as you expand out to what is being perceived and it contracts to meet you, you disappear in oneness and love. In that meeting, there is, in fact, no you at all. There is only a one-feeling-unity that manifests the embracing and being embraced of a wondrous lip-to-lip-one-body-one-universe, or the one-hand-clapping-totality-of-this-da-da-da-dum, or the head-bashing-bang-bong-one-garage-door-opening-with-everything oneness and unencumbered love!

What Zen meditation and these examples reveal is that our deeply held and all but instinctive belief in the continuity of our self and the objects of our world is a fiction. We and our world are dying and resurrecting in love over and over and over again. Since it is occurring at the very moment you are reading this sentence, the question about what happens when we die can be answered in this very moment. In the end, the question about whether we survive our biological death is the same question as to whether we survive our moment-to-moment death. It too can be answered in the present moment. There is no self-subsisting,

continuous self that constitutes our foundation, and yet a new self is continuously reappearing in each moment. Like everything else in the endless universe, it is dying in love and resurrecting in love moment by moment.

Zen says if you want to solve the problem of life and death, do zazen and contemplate this ever-ongoing activity of dying and resurrecting that sits at the heart of everything. If you put everything you are into it, if you die the great death, you will no longer fear death, and you will come to understand. You will not understand the way you understand a theory. You will not understand because you have adopted or grasped a new concept. Instead, you will rejoice in way of knowing that is more like how you experience true love while holding your sweet precious baby. And as strange as it may sound at first, you will also come to understand the true nature of karma.

Karma

There are many interpretations of karma, both erudite and mundane. The most common view is that when you perform good actions, you experience good future consequences, and when you perform bad actions, you create bad consequences. Some interpretations narrow the concept of karma to what might be called a tit-for-tat system of retribution. For example, if you are a racist in this life you will be abused and persecuted by racists in your next life. Still others go further and claim that there is a Karma Board comprised of disembodied spirits who dole out punishment and rewards for the naughty and the nice.

As the concept of karma evolved in ancient India, it came to mean the law of causation. It called attention to the apparently

obvious fact that everything, including our actions, is the result of an endless chain of cause and effect. The ancient Indians believed that because of our ignorant accumulation of good and bad karma, we suffer through transmigration and rebirth. For them, liberation consisted of being free of the chain of causation, of good and bad karma, with its endless rounds of death and rebirth.

The concept of karma made its first appearance in the early stages of the developing Vedic tradition of ancient India (1200–200 BCE). During this time the primary religious practice was one of performing rituals. These rituals were taken very seriously and could take a day, a week, or as much as a year to complete. Most people who have a nodding acquaintance with the subject know that *karma* means "action," but originally in the Vedic tradition it specifically signified any action performed in a religious ritual.

Understanding karma as ritual action provides us with a suggestive hint for grasping its nature. Since ritual actions are embedded in the context of a ritual, whatever significance they have depends on the actions that preceded and anticipated them and on the future actions that they prepare for and anticipate. When embedded in its meaning-rich context, a ritual action can acquire Olympian, almost magical power and significance. But when taken by itself, by virtue of being stripped of its meaning-rich context, it loses its significance and verges on becoming an empty gesture. The same is true for music. On its own a single musical note or chord has very little musical significance. But in the context of a great symphony, where it both relates to what preceded and anticipated it and prepares for what follows, a singe note or chord becomes saturated with fertile, full-bodied musical meaning.

What is true of a ritual action or a note in a symphony is also true of any meaningful human action: it is context-bound and knowing what the action means and how to respond to it is dependent upon knowing its context. Actions are also purposeful. They are the way we achieve our desires and goals. Any meaningful action is what it is because of the choices we made in the past that brought us to our present situation, and the goal or goals we are trying to achieve presently or in the immediate or distant future. Actions are also necessarily temporal. We are always ongoing in the present aiming toward our future based on our past decisions. We are where we are in the present because of how we chose our future in the past. Just as our present is thick with the decisions of the past and anticipations of our future, so too are our present actions replete with meaning because of their historical context and orientation to the future.

To say the same thing differently: because of their temporality and purposeful interaction with the world, actions have consequences. What you choose and how you act have both intended and unintended ramifications for you and others. Sometimes we judge the resulting consequences as good, sometimes as bad, and sometimes as simply neutral. Sometimes they are predictable and sometimes they are utterly unpredictable. We and everything in the vast universe are the result of an endless chain of cause and effect that created our world and us. Our actions and their consequences are part of this endless chain of cause and effect. But unlike all the other causes and effects that constitute the universe, our actions become our karma because we are responsible for them.

How you live makes a difference. Kind acts beget kindness and unkind acts increase your suffering and the suffering of

others. If you are married with children and you decide to spend all of your time drinking and carousing at your local bar, your life will surely take a series of downturns and you will cause great suffering for your family. If you instead choose a life of service and kindness to others, the consequences of your actions will, on the whole, produce a happier life than one devoted to alcohol and satisfying your own selfish desires. There is no tribunal in the astral plane deciding our fate by applying tit-for-tat logic to our transgressions or charitable acts. There are only the ever-blossoming consequences of ever-unfolding acts. Karma is nothing more than the consequences of our and others' desire in action.

You have probably noticed that some people seem to be able to live a life devoted to crime and hurting others and never suffer any consequences. Perhaps you have wondered about whether these people will ever get their due. An old saying that bears on this question claims that evil brings its own punishment. This saying makes a point we can all understand; namely, that the consequences of evil acts will more than likely eventually catch up with wrongdoers. Some people believe that if it doesn't happen in this life, it will on judgment day when the wrongdoers finally reap the consequences of their behavior after death. In a small-minded way these people hope to exact a kind of vicarious revenge through witnessing evil people getting punished. But there is no day of judgment at the end of your life. Every day is the day of judgment. Judgment day is always right now. Therefore, the old saying referred to above could be better stated as follows: evil is its own punishment.

To get a sense of what "judgment day is now" means, imagine how it would feel if you could inhabit the body of a person

▶ A Zen student was just getting over a bad case of the flu when he and his family received an invitation to spend the day with friends at a horse farm. He had never ridden a horse and had no interest in learning. He wasn't even sure if he had the energy for a whole day's activity. But not wanting to disappoint his children and wife, he somewhat reluctantly agreed to go. When they arrived at the farm, the mother of one of his children's best friends urged him to ride. "I don't feel at all well today," he said. "Besides, I've never ridden a horse in my life." "Oh no!" she protested. "You must ride. It is so exhilarating; you'll feel much, much better afterwards. You will be amazed at how easy it is, especially if you ride bareback." Appearing as if she wanted only the very best for him, she added, "I'll tell you what, we will set you up with Henry. He's the perfect horse for you!" Only later did he learn that Henry was not only the biggest horse in the barn, but also the most difficult. He was especially fond of bucking riders off as soon as they got on.

Unaware of the danger, he mounted Henry bareback and started trotting down the road. Within seconds, he began to fall off the

who has devoted his or her life to crime and violence. As is usually the case with such people, being able to go against what you know is right and maintain your life of hurting others depends on your being self-deceived and numb at heart. Otherwise you couldn't bear what you do. As a result, these people don't fully feel or comprehend their deplorable state. Provided your feeling state is not overly encumbered, were you actually able get inside the skin of a wrongdoer, you would feel what it would be like to be him or her and be sickened and appalled. You would have a direct experience of judgment day. As we die and resur-

horse. Fearing for his life, he remembered reading a book about how expert horsemen meditated on their hara while riding. He immediately began doing zazen by breathing into his belly. Instantly he and Henry connected and each wordlessly knew what the other was experiencing. With great compassion Henry adjusted his body this way and that in order to prevent him from falling. Henry's heartfelt concern for his safety was palpable and overwhelming.

He and Henry turned around and galloped back at full speed. They stopped on a dime just in front of the scheming mother. She was beside herself. "You lied!" she exclaimed. "You said you'd never ridden a horse. You lied to me!" Of course, he denied her accusation. But she would have none of it. As he walked Henry back to the barn, he pondered why this person he considered a friend wanted to put him at such great risk. But his musings were overshadowed by his profound sense of gratitude to Henry and his complete wonderment over communing with this amazing and compassionate horse.

rect moment to moment, judgment day is now. It is experienced in the quality of our felt-experience. It manifests as freedom when we spontaneously live the love and kindness that is our nature and the nature of everything. Or it manifests as fixation, conflict, or unfreedom when we do something less.

The Karma of Having No Karma

Buddhism has many ways of expressing how we can become free. With respect to karma, Buddhism teaches that it is possible

to attain freedom and eternal peace by becoming free of the chain of causation. Being free of causation or karma means being completely at peace with whatever kind of karmic consequences appear, good or bad—no matter what. A good illustration of this kind of freedom is a story about a dirt-poor Zen monk who was burglarized. As the burglars were fleeing his humble abode with his few precious valuables in hand, the monk noticed that they overlooked stealing his expensive watch. He quickly grabbed the watch and went in pursuit of the burglars yelling, "Wait, wait, you forgot to take this valuable watch!"

If this story sounds like another one of those Zen stories that seems just too fanciful to be true, consider what a contemporary American woman, Byron Katie, has to say about being at peace with whatever is happening: "My eyes are seeing less, for longer periods of time, and the pain has increased. The cells in my cornea seem to be dying at a very fast rate. I'm excited to find out what blind people know: the kindness of a world without vision, how the other senses become more acute, how the hands feel their way, how ready friends and strangers are to help.... I am looking forward to being blind if the surgery doesn't work. I've already been there, almost.... I know that the way is clear. And when I trip over an obstacle, I enjoy myself all the way to the ground. Falling is equal to not falling. Getting up again and not being able to are equal. The only way you can know the way of it is to join it without separation. It's constant lovemaking, with no other lover than what is."*

For another example, permit me to describe an experience

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*Byron Katie, *A Thousand Names For Joy: Living in Harmony with the Way Things Are* (New York: Harmony Books, 2007), 181–84.

from the early days of my Zen training. During a particularly difficult Zen retreat, I found myself suddenly transported to what Hakuin called the "lotus land of purity," utterly free of all causation, perfectly content, and in love with whatever was occurring. There was no opposition or conflict to be found anywhere. The spacious clarity of the lotus land of purity was beyond good and evil, beyond beautiful and ugly, beyond like and dislike, beyond all dualities of this versus that. For the duration of those few hours had I tripped and fallen I could have easily agreed with Katie: "I enjoy myself all the way to the ground. Falling is equal to not falling." In this place of no conflict, when I took a breath the stench of the New York city air and the beauty of a flower were equally wondrous.*

Since we now have a way of understanding the nature of karma and what it means to be free of it, it looks as though our investigation into these concepts and the way of life they portend is finished. But in reality we are only halfway there. Were it not for a famous *koan* known as "Hyakujo's Fox" we could rest easy with what we have discovered. Koans are profound teaching devices that are designed to allow the Zen student to penetrate his or her physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual blocks in order to open more fully to the source. The koan is usually given to the student in the form of an enigmatic question that arises from an equally enigmatic story. "Hyakujo's Fox" is of particular interest here, because it seems to throw considerable doubt on our interpretation. But more importantly, it also points to a much deeper and richer experience of karma and

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*Jeffrey Maitland, *Spacious Body: Explorations in Somatic Ontology* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995), 8–10.

causation and its relation to the ceaseless self-begetting activity of the source than many would suspect. Let's look at a statement of the koan first:

> Whenever Master Hyakujo gave teisho on Zen, an old man sat with the monks to listen and always withdrew when they did. One day, however, he remained behind, and the Master asked, "Who are you standing here before me?" The old man replied, "I am not a human being. In the past, in the time of the Kasho Buddha, I was the head of this monastery. Once a monk asked me, 'Does an enlightened man also fall into causation or not?' I replied, 'He does not.' Because of this answer, I was made to live as a fox for five hundred lives. Now I beg you, please say the turning words on my behalf and release me from the fox body." The old man then asked Hyakujo, "Does an enlightened man also fall into causation or not?" The Master said, "He does not ignore causation." Hearing this the old man was at once enlightened. Making a bow to Hyakujo he said, "I have now been released from the fox body, which will be found behind the mountain. I dare to make a request of the Master. Please bury it as you would a deceased monk."
>
> The Master had the Ino strike the gavel and announce to the monks that there would be a funeral for a deceased monk after the midday meal. The monks wondered, saying, "We are all in good health. There is no sick monk in the Nirvana Hall. What is it all about?" After the meal, the Master led the monks to a rock behind the mountain, poked out a dead fox with his staff, and cremated it.
>
> In the evening, the Master ascended the rostrum in the

> hall and told the monks the whole story. Obaku thereupon asked, "The old man failed to give the correct turning words and was made to live as a fox for five hundred lives, you say; if, however, his answer had not been incorrect each time, what would he have become?" The Master said, "Come closer to me, I'll tell you." Obaku then stepped forward to Hyakujo and slapped him. The Master laughed aloud, clapping his hands, and said, "I thought a foreigner's beard is red, but I see that it is a foreigner with a red beard."*

This koan is very complex and the story it tells is bursting with the kind of Zen insight that is difficult to fathom without a well-developed Zen eye. I have had the good fortune of having been guided to some small understanding of this koan by my teacher, Sasaki Roshi. Even so, I don't presume to be able to unpack and illuminate all of its wisdom. For the purposes of our discussion of karma, we will focus on the paradox the koan seems to generate around the question of whether the enlightened person doesn't fall into or can't ignore causation or karma.

As we have seen, Buddhism teaches that we are all subject to causation and it is possible to be free of it. On the surface, it appears that the old man's answer was wrong, even though it was a correct statement of what the Buddha taught—and, worse, the koan seems to say that the correct answer is actually the opposite of what the Buddha taught. Upon first reading this story, most people naturally assume that it is about giving the wrong answer to a question, being reborn as a fox as punishment, finally

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*Zenkei Shibayama, *Zen Comments on the Mumonkan* (New York: New American Library, 1974), 33–34.

getting the right answer, and then being enlightened. But this story has very little to do with the issue of right and wrong answers. Rather, it demonstrates the Zen way of using language and imagery to coax out a profound insight into the true nature of karma as the self-begetting activity of the source (Dharmakaya). Instead of replacing wrong answers with right ones, the story dramatizes the evolution and deepening of understanding and insight.

Contrary to what you might think, the old man's response that the enlightened man does not fall into causation is actually a good answer. But when we compare the two answers, Hyakujo's is the deeper and more complete of the two. If causation or karma is understood as "everything is the result of cause and effect and doing good brings good consequences and doing bad brings bad consequences," then the old man's answer is correct. In part, his being reborn as a fox for five hundred lives represents his inability to know how to embrace the human world after he experienced unification with the Dharmakaya.

The old man represents Hyakujo as a young Zen student who gets a big taste of Zen. Since he knows how to drop his self and unify with the source, the old man says that he is not a human being. But he has trouble going back to the responsibilities of his everyday life. He throws himself into the practice, hoping to experience more while feeling that his everyday life is somewhat drab and repetitious. In reality, heaven and everyday life are the same place and each moment is the resurrection of a new self. But he is living the fox life. For him, heaven and everyday life are separate experiences and the self that is resurrected anew is experienced as the same old self with all the responsibilities that come with living in the human world. The old man wants to

escape the human world. But where could he escape to that would solve his problem?

The old man implores Hyakujo to release him from his repetitious fox life. Hyakujo's answer seems to contradict the old man's answer. But in reality it actually deepens the old man's understanding by deepening his experience of causation or karma. Causation, as the old man understands it, is the view that everything within the world is the result of cause and effect and that our actions have consequences. The deeper understanding manifested in Hyakujo's response is not about the kind of causation that occurs within the world, but about where the human world comes from in the first place. Causation in the deeper sense refers to the activity of the source, to that loving activity that continually brings the human world into and out of appearance. This dharma activity is the true nature of karma.

Hyakujo's answer that the enlightened man does not ignore causation manifests the activity of the source. The old man was correct when he said that you can be free of causation in the first sense. But Hyakujo takes the questioner and question to their origin, demonstrating that when you understand causation or karma as the activity of the source then no one can be free of it. How, after all, can you be free of that loving, self-begetting activity that is your very essence and origin and at the same time the essence and origin of everything? It would be as impossible as trying to breathe without lungs in the absence of air.

The old man solved his problem. Instead of experiencing his everyday life and unification with the Dharmakaya as two different ways of being, he now experienced them as the same. To say it another way: now able to follow the workings of the dharma, he realized that nirvana and samsara (heaven and hell)

are the same. Prior to Hyakujo's turning words, when the old man's I-am-self was reborn into the human world of duality and separation with the ability to reflectively discriminate between this and that, he was unable to stay awake to the unity he experienced without his self. After Hyakujo's words, the birth of the old man's reflective self no longer occluded from whence it and the human world came. He was able to experience the unity and love of the Dharmakaya while his I-am-self was simultaneously immersed in duality and separation. As a result, he was able to feel-perceive everything as himself and a manifestation of the Dharmakaya. With the resurrection of his reflective I-am-self, he was both together with and separate from everything, simultaneously discerning the difference between this and that while feeling-perceiving the unity and love of the source. In the Zen vernacular, he discovered how to follow the dharma. In more familiar terms, you might say that he saw God in everything.

Following the Dharma

As long as we keep in mind that we are not referring to an objective or subjective God of a faith-based religion and that "God" in this context means the Dharmakaya, we can say that enlightenment is seeing God in everything. Roshi also defines enlightenment as the ability to manifest the wisdom that knows the activity of the Dharmakaya. This activity is not an activity or event in any ordinary or metaphysical sense. The source is not some kind of energy or being that does something. There is no creative will or consciousness at the bottom of existence that creates or produces the universe. It is a self-begetting activity in which there is not any kind of thing or energy that does the

activity. Buddhism characterizes this activity as will-less and calls it emptiness.

Karma in the deepest sense is the activity of the Dharmakaya ceaselessly unifying and dividing itself. This ceaseless activity is the result of two simultaneous mutually opposing but also mutually complementary activities that go by various names: "thus going and thus coming," "tatha-gata and tatha-agata," "expansion and contraction," "being and non-being," "guest and host," "life activity and death activity," and "plus and minus." The activity of the Dharmakaya is a continual cycle of separation and unification, which will be further explained below. In this cycle, the human world and the self appear, develop, and disappear.

Describing the details of karma or the dharma activity, and how the human world and the self appear, develop, and disappear, is no small task. Following and articulating the activity of the source is a complicated and lengthy undertaking to which my teacher has devoted innumerable teishos over the years. In order to bring an experience of the ineffable into some kind of manageable and comprehensible form, Roshi developed a language that personifies various stages and aspects of the source. I will try to do justice to the depth of Roshi's teachings with a summary of the workings of the dharma using the language he developed. We begin at the point of unification.

As a way of partly overcoming the limitations of linear, sequential thinking, imagine this activity taking place as a round sphere. We will use the opposing but complementary forms of plus and minus to illuminate this process. In the state of unification plus is on the inside of the sphere and minus is on the outside. As they begin the process of separating from each other, plus takes

▶ A Zen monk was doing zazen when it occurred to him that he was working way too hard. He realized that he was working hard at his Zen practice in the same way that he worked hard at everything else in his life. He decided to stop right then and there. Suddenly, his zazen became very easy. During the next sanzen Roshi said, "Ahh, you learn zazen very easy. Dharmakaya very simple. Few moving parts."

the lead by expanding and minus assists plus by contracting. When plus and minus separate, they break through each other and reach to the completion of their respective activities of expanding and contracting. Then, once plus is fully expanded and minus is fully contracted, they each have reached or incarnated into the starting place of the other. Minus then takes the lead and expands as plus assists by contracting. As each performs the activity of the other, they eventually meet again and unify. When plus and minus separate self and the world, and past, present, and future appear. But when plus and minus unify, the human world, the human self, past, present, and future disappear once again in unencumbered true love.

From this new origin, the activity of separation, resurrection, and appearing begins anew. Once again it expands to the ultimately large, turns around and contracts to the ultimately small, unifies, becomes a new origin, and then begins yet again a new resurrection and a new dying. This will-less activity is also called emptiness and it never fixates on one condition. Ceaselessly, the dharma activity separates and unifies, gives forth the world and takes it away. In separation, beings come into being and evolve, and in unification they disappear.

Let's look more closely at how the birth and death of the self and the world occur in this activity. When plus and minus separate, a space or distance appears between them. As a condition of their separation, they each give the tiniest part of themselves into the distance as a way to create and give birth to the first appearance of the emerging self. With the birth of the self, plus and minus become a father and mother. Mother, father, and child are all born simultaneously.

Mother and father are said to be incomplete, because they have lost part of themselves to create a child. The child is also incomplete, because he consists of very small portions of plus and minus. Seen in another way, the father is the past and embraces the child on the inside, the mother is the future and embraces the child on the outside, and the child is the present existing between mother and father. Or, we can think of the mother and father as subject and object. Due to René Descartes' revolutionary influence on Western thought, this characterization sounds odd, because, for Westerners, the word *subject* has come to mean self. But in Roshi's teachings the self exists *between* subject and object, *between* incomplete minus and incomplete plus.

As the self continues to grow and develop, mother, father, and child unify and separate over and over again. With each separation, in continuing acts of love, mother and father give more and more of themselves to the child in order that he or she can grow and develop. Finally, the self takes all of plus and minus as its content, becomes ultimately large, and mother, father, and self disappear into oneness.

When the life activity (plus) reaches its limit, the process turns around and the death activity (minus) takes the lead. Minus seeks her origin by expanding and plus follows her lead and

seeks his origin by contracting. Mother, father, and child continue to unify and separate again and again. During this process, which also occurs through continuing acts of love, the self returns what he or she was given from mother and father. When minus reaches her origin and plus reaches his, the self gives back his or her entire content, and he or she becomes the ultimately small. Mother, father, and child all disappear into oneness and true love. And, then once again the process begins anew.

The Cause of No Cause

About 100 years after the Buddha's death (circa 350 BCE), a schism occurred within the teachings and a new approach to Buddhism was born. In order to distinguish itself from the traditional Nikaya schools, the newly formed school called itself the Mahayana (the Great Vehicle) and labeled the Nikaya a Hinayana (the Lesser Vehicle) approach, thus implying that the early teachings were incomplete and the lesser of the two.

You can look at the Mahayana/Hinayana distinction in two ways. You can see it as a doctrinal issue and approach the distinction as a dispute over how to understand and interpret doctrine correctly. Or you can see it as a practice-based issue and approach the distinction as a description of how wisdom matures and deepens over years of dedicated practice. Since Buddhist doctrine is generally an expression of what is revealed by practice, the more illuminating way to understand the distinction is from the practice perspective. From the perspective of how wisdom matures, every beginning student is a Hinayana Buddhist, whether he or she is practicing a form of Hinayana Buddhism or a form of Mahayana Buddhism, such as Zen. The beginner is most

concerned with solving his or her own difficulties first and foremost. The student may express concern for others, for example, but his or her practice is really about finding personal freedom. In the beginning, this kind of Hinayana practice is only natural. Years later, when the student's practice matures, without giving it much thought he or she quite naturally finds him or herself working for the benefit others. The student can be said to now be practicing with the big heart-mind of Mahayana Buddhism.

With this distinction in hand, we can see that "Hyakujo's Fox" demonstrates, in part, the transformation, maturation, and flowering of Hinayana wisdom into Mahayana wisdom. In order to appreciate this blossoming of wisdom, we need to fill out in more detail what we only sketched about causation earlier. Recall the old man's and Hyakujo's answers. The old man's answer rested on understanding karma and causation in two related senses: in the broad sense as the kind of ubiquitous cause and effect that manifests everything in the universe, and in a more narrow sense, as a system in which good actions bring good consequences and bad actions beget bad consequences. The old man thinks of causation as occurring only within the universe, whereas Hyakujo's understands causation and karma as the activity of the Dharmakaya, as the self-begetting origin and nature of the universe.

In order to explain how neither our self nor the things that populate the universe have independent self-natures or self-subsisting essences that constitute identity, it is common to appeal to the Buddhist concept of dependent co-arising *(Pratityasamutpada)*. Typically, the explanation turns on the understanding of causation represented in the old man's answer. Each thing is what it is not because it has an independent self-nature, but because it owes its existence to a myriad of causes extending

back in limitless time. The existence of each and every thing, including the human self, is completely dependent on this endless chain of cause and effect and is nothing more than the sum total of all the causes that brought it into existence. Thus, any given thing or self is said to be empty of its own being.

Since it comes from a practice-based perspective, Hyakujo's answer represents a profoundly different understanding of dependent co-arising. Contemplating the activity of the dharma is not a matter of having a theory or concept about how cause and effect operate in the existing world, but about coming to feel-perceive the activity of the dharma itself. This experience includes how plus and minus always work together and at the same time. Their activity is not an objective, linear, one-after-the-other process in which first one expands, then the other contracts, followed by another expansion, and then another contraction, and so on. Rather, when one of these activities expands, the other assists by simultaneously contracting.

The activity of unification and separation occurs in one and the same space. When plus and minus separate and the self is born, at the very same time and place, mother, father, time, space, subject and object, and the human world are all also born. The nature of this arising is the origin and nature of everything, including cause and effect. Since it is the origin of causation in the old man's sense, Hyakujo's causation cannot be captured by the common interpretation of dependent co-arising, which sees causation as a conditional one-after-another cause and effect that operates within an already constituted universe. For Hyakujo's experience of causation the "co" in *dependent co-arising* is all-important. It signals the deeper understanding of karma in which everything arises together and at the same time due

to the ceaseless co-causality of plus and minus. The deeper understanding of karma also includes simultaneity and co-causality to describe the disappearing of self and world. Everything simultaneously dies together only to be simultaneously born together in love, grow and develop in love, and then die in love again—unceasingly.

Conclusion

When the fundamental questions about life and death and the ultimate nature of reality are asked in the context of a practice-based discipline like Zen, they have an entirely different function than when they are asked in a faith-based religion. Zen transforms the fundamental questions of human life into questions and statements that are designed to ignite transformation, wisdom, and insight. To the I-am-self who hears the language of Zen without the benefit of a teacher or a practice, however, it seems to be either enigmatic nonsense masquerading as some sort of great truth or riddles designed to short-circuit the intellect. These misconceptions arise because the I-am-self completely misses how it is being addressed and also is not capable of hearing what is being said. As a result, it tries to interpret the language in the only way it knows how—in categories of understanding completely unsuited to the task.

Unlike the pronouncements of faith-based religion, which offer explanations to comfort the reflective I-am-self, the language of Zen speaks to that part of us which already and always feels-perceives the activity of karma. Zen language is designed to provoke a permanent awakening to this activity, not merely provide an explanation of it. Since our natural tendency in these matters is

▶ When a Zen monk heard a plane fly over the Zen Center, he completely fell into the sound, and experienced satori (enlightenment). For months afterwards, a number of monks at the center listened every day in intense anticipation for the plane. It flew over again and again, but never produced another satori.

to substitute explanation for felt-participatory experience, more often than not, the freedom we seek is occluded by the very explanations we cherish the most. In contrast, when embedded in Zen practice, a statement such as "The world is not as it seems, nor is it otherwise," or questions such as "What is your original face before your parents were born?" or "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" turn out to be probing, provocative carriers of great insight and wisdom that cannot be understood easily or entirely by the I-am-self.

Verbal explanations appeal to the I-am-self. But since the fixated I-am-self only knows its world dualistically, by thinking-about and separating from what is thought about, it has no ability to experience its origin. Thinking about its origin is not the wisdom of knowing and experiencing its origin. The more fixated our I-am-self is, the more it stands in the way of our being able to experience the unification and unencumbered love that results when subject and object, self and world, become one, and the more it occludes our being able to feel-perceive from whence we have dependently co-arisen. Explanations that satisfy the I-am-self cannot provide true peace or solve the problem of life and death. True peace and love are found in contemplating and awakening to the true nature of karma. Awakening means being able to manifest the wisdom that knows and follows the activity of the source.

2

Who's Attached to What?

> Thus, Subhuti, fearless bodhisattvas should give a gift without being attached to the perception of an object.
>
> — *The Diamond Sutra*

Spiritual literature is replete with admonitions on how to live the good life.* Perhaps the most common recommendations center on the concept of attachment. It is often said that being attached is the root of our suffering and that liberation is dependent on getting rid of attachment. Oddly, with the exception of Buddhist literature, the all too common admonishment to get rid of attachment is rarely accompanied by any understanding of what is meant by "attachment." As a result, we are often left with a diagnosis that at first appears to be simple and straightforward, but on closer inspection turns out to be somewhat

*In this chapter and the next, my way of understanding attachment and how we misapprehend ourselves and reality was greatly enhanced by my reading Jay L. Garfield's excellent translation and commentary on Nagarjuna in his book *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

obscure and offers little in the way of an effective prescription for finding relief.

In order to gain some perspective on what attachment is, let's look at some everyday examples. Most of us have certain favorite possessions. Perhaps you have a favorite chair and coffee cup that you use fondly every day. Can you imagine how you might feel if an unsuspecting guest sat in your chair and used your cup just as you were about to engage in your morning ritual? More than likely you would be slightly miffed, especially if it happened on a number of occasions. Realizing that your feelings were somewhat petty, you would probably smile politely as you went in search of another cup and chair. This reaction to your

▶ A Zen monk was sitting in zazen with forty other students, listening to Roshi's teisho. Five minutes into the talk he thought to himself, "Oh God, not this topic again. This is all Roshi ever talks about . . . I wish he would talk about time." From the translator's hesitation, it became immediately obvious that Roshi had interrupted his train of thought. Then came the translation, "You think this old Roshi is just repeating himself over and over again. You have no respect!" The monk was completely horrified. When he got over his embarrassment and shock, he realized that the Roshi's words somehow freed him to sense Roshi's teisho in a new, more profound way. He also came to understand that a teisho is not an ordinary talk. From that moment on, he never again tired of hearing Roshi repeat himself.

Twenty-five years later during sanzen as he was finishing instructing the monk, Roshi added, "Not many people understand time. Ahh, but you interested in time!"

guest's unknowing transgressions shows that you are attached to your cup and chair. Or perhaps a beloved, deceased relative gave you a piece of furniture that has great sentimental value to you, but is just too ugly for words. Your spouse hates it and thinks its best use would be as landfill. You know your spouse is right, but because you are emotionally attached, you simply cannot endure parting with it. As a third example, imagine the person who wants to be acknowledged for his charitable efforts. He gives not from selfless compassion, but from the need to be perceived as a good, upstanding person in his community. He is egocentrically attached to the outcome of his gifts.

We could easily come up with more examples of attachment, but these three are sufficient for our purposes. They illustrate how everyday attachment is a way of being bound to something through emotions, feelings, aesthetics, comfort, ego, neurosis, or habit, and how parting with the objects of our attachment can produce varying degrees of discomfort.

If freedom is a matter of not being attached in these and similar ways, then it seems that the reasonable course of action would be to make an inventory of all your attachments and then systematically try to extinguish them one by one. Since new attachments are likely to replace the old, to be completely successful you would have to go deeper into their source. You would have to train yourself to become indifferent to all your likes and dislikes, as well as to all your feelings of attraction or repulsion. You would have to learn to be completely untouched by the joys and sorrows of life and utterly insensible to what others find moving or exciting. If you were to persist in this complete debridement of all feeling, eventually you could attain a state of detachment the ancient Greek stoics called *apatheia.* This state is one in which

you are steadfastly indifferent to all suffering and joy. In this state your detachment would be so assiduously complete that, as one stoic put it, you would be as indifferent to the death of a loved one as to the loss of a cup.

If you are like most people, when you hear about this kind of detachment you probably think that a life devoted to it would be a pretty dismal affair. The idea of getting rid of attachment seems utterly unappealing once you realize that you must completely eviscerate your ability to feel in order to attain a state of detachment in which you are altogether cheerless, passionless, and unresponsive. Our brief investigation into the nature of attachment and the logic of its uprooting has led us down a path of renunciation wherein the cure seems far worse than the disease. Perhaps being attached is not so bad after all. When you think about it, as long as they are not too excessive or addictive, what's wrong with having a few attachments anyway?

Reflective Thought and the I-am-self

Although getting rid of attachment in the everyday sense led us to a dreary dead end, there is another meaning of attachment found in Buddhism that profoundly addresses the problematic nature of being human. Attachment in the Buddhist sense is a kind of mistake that we are all constantly and continuously engaged in moment by moment. Due to the structure of the human mind, it is a natural perceptual error that we all make. Interestingly, it is a mistake we do not easily recognize, even when it is pointed out to us. It bears little resemblance to the everyday sense in which we are attached to specific objects or events at different times during the course of our lives. When

you are relaxed and staring off into space not thinking of anything in particular, you are not attached in the everyday sense. But in the Buddhist sense, even in this relaxed situation when you are not driven by any particular desire or intention, you are still attached—profoundly so.

Our minds continuously predispose us to make a basic perceptual error that sits at the root of this form of attachment. In order to understand this, we need to look more closely at the way our mind functions. One of our mind's more astonishing features is the ability to step out of the flow of lived-experience and think about our situation. As an illustration, consider the following somewhat dramatic example. Imagine you are taking a leisurely walk through your neighborhood when a car drives by and suddenly and loudly backfires: KABOOM! Instantaneously you and the KABOOM meet and at that moment your self dissolves so thoroughly into the explosive eruption of sound that you and the sound become one. In the next instant, your self resurrects from its momentary death and you think, "What the . . . ! Oh, whew, it was just a car backfiring." Since your death and resurrection occur so rapidly, you usually take no notice of it. But notice that when you dissolve into the sound there is no thinking about your situation and there is no you. There is just KABOOM. It is only after your self reappears that you begin to think about what just happened.

Less dramatically, but no less significantly, I learned from my teacher that this birth and death of the self, this becoming one with something and then thinking about your situation, occurs thousands of times a day. It occurs in the very first moment when you meet and perceive the things and people that populate your world. Let's look at some more examples. You turn

and see a flower. In that instant your self dissolves and you and the flower become one. Just as quickly, your self reappears and you begin to think again. Perhaps you say to yourself, "What a beautiful flower!" Or perhaps you are so preoccupied that the beauty of the moment slips by you. Instead you think, "I gotta get some coffee before this meeting." Can you remember what happens when you embrace your lover? As you fall into each other's arms you dissolve your selves and become one. When you say, "I love you," your self is reborn and thinking about your world begins again.

The ability to distance ourselves from the things, people, and situations of our world by thinking about or reflecting on them constitutes what we recognize in ourselves as consciousness. It gives us our identity, which in turn allows us to say, "I am." Reflective thought also bestows upon us the illusionary sense that our self is the foundation and essence of what we are. Since it allows us to distinguish *me* from *not me*, it is at the root of why we feel ourselves to be separate and other from the things and people of our world.

Since becoming one with the things of our world happens so quickly and is not the kind of knowing/feeling that can even be held in reflective thought, and since reflective thought is what gives us our experience of a continuous self, it is difficult to see this process at work. We do not realize how we are continually surpassing the duality and alienation of reflective consciousness (of the *me* and the *not me*) and unifying with everything. Reflective consciousness is so compelling that it seduces us into thinking and feeling that we and the contents of our world are continuous self-identities. It also seduces us into believing that our I-am-self is the foundation and essence of what we are. The concept of

the I-am-self comes from my teacher, Sasaki Roshi, and is one that I often return to in these discussions. We are attached to the I-am-self, a version of ourselves that is separate and apart from the world, so much so that many of us believe the I-am-self to be an eternal undying soul that survives our death. We live this attachment to our I-am-self so completely that we never suspect that it is an illusion. Since we are so thoroughly attached to our I-am-self as our essence, we rarely see how we, the world, and all of its contents are a continuous discontinuity, forever unifying with the ground of being, only to be reborn into the world of separation again and again. For, as the Buddhist experience shows, the activity by which our selves appear and disappear is the very same activity by which the world, universe, and all of its contents appear and disappear.

Aspect-seeing and Essence-seeing

Along with reflective thought comes yet another equally astonishing ability of human consciousness. We humans do not perceive with our senses alone. To speak loosely, our mind is also an organ of perception. We perceive by means of an integration of mind and senses. As a result, our perception of the objects of our world is cognitive and interpretive. Because of our great conceptual abilities, we are capable of what Wittgenstein (1889–1951) called *aspect-seeing*—being able to see one thing in multiple ways. We not only see objects in the context of a foreground and background, we also see these objects *as something*. We see this thing as a chair, or that thing as a tree, and that as a mountain, etc.

Perhaps you remember reading the comic section of the newspaper as a child and enjoying the various word and visual

puzzles. Often there were drawings that, on first inspection, looked like a random bunch of squiggles and lines. But the caption directed you to find a figure, perhaps a cat, in the drawing. As you looked more carefully, suddenly the apparently meaningless squiggles congealed into the figure of a cat. Finding the cat in the squiggles is learning to see something *as something*—something that was not purely available to the senses alone.

When you saw the cat, you didn't add the cat to the drawing or see something that was hidden behind the drawing. No new lines were added to the drawing. By means of an integration of the sensory and the cognitive, you suddenly saw what was at first only prefigured and indeterminate. Your intentionality shifted and you saw the cat by means of the concept *cat.* You didn't see and then formulate the concept. Having the concept is what rendered the cat visible. It brought forth your perception. In a sense, you had to focus not only your eyes but also your understanding to perceive the cat. Yet it is important to understand that when you first saw the drawing as a bunch of squiggles you were also seeing it *as* something—as a bunch of squiggles.

This simple example of seeing the cat in the drawing contains an important insight: every act of perception, whether looking, listening, smelling, tasting, or touching, is also already an act of understanding. Our very act of looking or hearing or smelling makes the world appear. Similar to the way in which the cat appeared when we went looking for it, by actively seeking meaning, our perceptual-understanding brings forth aspects of reality. When our attention was first drawn to the visual puzzle we saw it as a bunch of squiggles, as an indeterminate form. Then when we looked more closely, the indeterminate squig-

gles became more determinate and we saw the cat. By taking what first appears as indeterminate and making it determinate, our perceptual-understanding makes it possible for these aspects to be perceived *as something*. By bringing forth particular aspects of reality, our perceptual-understanding renders the human world perceivable.

As a result of our investigation, we now realize that there is more to seeing than meets the eye, as a clever philosopher once said. But, aspect-seeing is not limited to the eyes alone. All of our senses are dominated by it. We hear that sound as a train whistle, feel that sensation as the edge of a knife, taste that morsel as a steamed carrot, smell that odor as gasoline fumes, and so forth. It is important to note that aspect-seeing is not some sort of an illusion contributed by our mind and arbitrarily imposed on reality. Aspect-seeing reveals aspects of reality that would go unperceived were we dependent on our senses alone. At the same time, we should not lose sight of the fact that our perception of aspects is largely conventional. What aspects we perceive depend on what our senses permit us to actually see, the contexts in which they appear, our needs, our linguistic habits, and what we and our culture deem important and significant at the time.

The point is not that these various ways of seeing something *as something* are illusions, but rather this: when seeing something as a chair, for example, there is no intrinsically identifiable, self-subsisting independent essence or entity to which the word *chair* refers. Beyond the basic properties of the chair, there is no essence or independent core identity that constitutes the fundamental nature of the chair. The innate perceptual error that we all make is to misapprehend the chair in precisely this way—we think of *chair* in terms of a self-subsisting independent

essence or identity that underlies its properties or bears its parts. In effect, when we misapprehend the chair in this way we perceive the chair as having more existence than it deserves.

In the 1600s, the philosopher Descartes gave theoretical voice to this misapprehension. He imagined melting a piece of wax near a fire and watching all the properties by which he recognized the wax change. As the wax changed its solidity, shape, smell, size, and so forth, Descartes noted that even though all of its properties had changed, he still knew it to be the same piece of wax. Since it was the same piece of wax, he concluded that there must be an underlying substance that remained the same throughout the change. Unfortunately, no matter how hard we try, no analysis or observation can ever reveal such an entity or essence.

If what we perceive as a chair is largely dependent on convention and context, and there is no underlying substance that constitutes the essential nature of the chair, just what is the chair anyway? What is true about the chair, as well as everything else in the universe, including our I-am-self, is that its existence does not come from itself alone, but is completely dependent on a host of other contingent conditions, which in turn depend for their existence on other contingent conditions. For example, imagine how many people it took to design and manufacture the chair, as well as the kind of infrastructure it required. Think of all the raw materials that were involved and how the chair was fashioned from a tree that depended for its existence on a seed, the generations of trees and plants that preceded it and from which it evolved, favorable growing conditions, and on and on and on. Apart from these conditions and the materials from which it was made, there is no chair to be found.

If you were a being from another galaxy whose body structure didn't require chairs, you might see a chair as a rather grotesque formation composed of plant material from our planet, stuck together in rather strange and incomprehensible ways. No independent chair essence would be revealed to you without the context of studying humans and learning what a chair was for.

The same point can be made about the materials from which the chair was created–wood, slats, and screws do not have self-subsisting independent natures. There simply is no such independent self-subsisting essence to be found at any level of analysis or observation. There is just a series of momentary existences, forever coming into and going out of existence, standing in a relationship in which all relationships are related. Yet when we bring our limited, conventional point of view to this relational, indeterminate complexity that we are all a part of, we are tempted to *reify* what we see—we regard a mere material or concrete thing as something more abstract and complex than it is.

Seeing something as something and turning it into an enduring object is the mistake that lies at the heart of attachment. We reify what we perceive as an aspect *into* an object and believe it to have an independent self-subsisting identity. With the kind of unchallenged certainty that comes from knowing that the earth is always under our feet, without realizing what we are doing, we simply and instinctively go from seeing something as a chair or tree to misapprehending it as a reified object with an independent self-subsisting nature or identity. When the Buddha says to Subhuti that fearless Bodhisattvas are not attached to the perception of an object, he is saying that they do not reify what they perceive as an aspect into an object with an

▶ Upon entering the sanzen room, a Zen monk performed his bows, sat before Roshi, and was about to state his koan when Roshi interrupted him, declaring, "Not clear!" Roshi immediately rang his bell signaling that the interview was over.

Next time, upon entering the sanzen room, the monk performed his bows, sat before Roshi, and was about to state his koan when Roshi interrupted him, declaring, "Very clear!" Roshi immediately assigned the monk a new koan and rang his bell.

independent self-subsisting nature or essence. They do not transform aspect-seeing into essence-seeing.

The mistake of transforming aspect-seeing into essence-seeing is further fueled and supported by our ability to step out of the flow of lived-experience and think about or reflect on our situation. As we have seen, reflective awareness gives birth to the I-am-self and our sense of identity is this—we become attached to our I-am-self as the foundation and essence of who and what we are. In actuality, this attachment to our I-am-self is rooted in the same attachment that transforms aspect-seeing into essence-seeing. In reflection, we become aware of an aspect of our nature. Due to the compelling nature of reflective awareness, we forget, or perhaps paper over, the moments when our self dissolves into unity with the source. As a result, we miss entirely these moments in which we die and resurrect and instead falsely believe that we live a continuous, unbroken existence. We reify our very limited perception of an aspect of ourselves into a self or soul that has an independent, self-subsisting continuous identity.

We misapprehend our own nature in exactly the same way that we misapprehend the things of our world. In fact, when we

resurrect from the unity with the source, we and the whole world resurrect together at the same time. Without the benefit of Zen practice to help us break through our ongoing misapprehension, the reified reflective self and the reified world continue to cover over the true nature of ourselves and our world. Attachment to the I-am-self and to the things of our world as continuous, reified objects is at the heart of our suffering, because the reified world occludes our connection to the source. It occludes our true home and the wondrous activity of what my teacher calls true love when the Dharmakaya is in a state of unification. As long as we only perceive a reified world, we miss how we and the universe are continuously being born in love, being sustained in love, and dissolving in love. We fail to grasp that everything is myself, that everything is Buddha-nature. Mahayana Buddhism targets this mistake with the expression, "All dharmas are marked by emptiness." It means that the reified self and world we cherish, experience, and believe in is a shared deception that is the cause of our suffering. If only we could give up our unrecognized but relentless dedication to this mistaken way of being and perceiving, we would find our true freedom and know the love from whence we come and where we go.

3

The Zen Way of Knowing Nothing

> Your not having perceived your own nature does not imply that you lack that nature. Why so? Because perception itself is that nature; without it we should never be able to perceive anything.
>
> — Hui Hai

Due partly to our philosophical heritage, we Westerners have an oddly ambivalent and confused attitude toward our states of feeling. Unfortunately, this attitude is usually coupled with our natural tendency to misapprehend the true nature of our selves and our world. Through the guidance of my teacher I learned that the resulting confused state makes it difficult to appreciate the essential contribution that our feeling-nature makes to all levels of consciousness. It also prevents us from experiencing how our feeling-nature, without the aid of thinking, can perceive in a participatory way the fundamental ground of being. One antidote for this confusion is the practice of Zen.

By transcending the fixations of ordinary thinking, Zen cultivates the ability to experience the true nature of what is by means of a profoundly awake, unencumbered activity of feeling. This activity of feeling is the same sentient activity by which the source knows itself and we know the source (Dharmakaya).

Feeling-nature

Our ambivalence toward feeling shows up in characteristic ways. On the one hand, we seem to appreciate and even extol those who are in touch with their feelings. Twentieth-century America even witnessed the birth of the sensitive male. Our airways are awash with the passion and emotionality of pop music and TV programs. Many of us ritualistically bathe in these waters every day. On the other hand, we are often deeply suspicious of our feelings. We consider them merely subjective states and fear the way they cloud judgment and undermine rationality. There are even those who, having been carried away by feelings just a little too often, wish we could be completely and utterly free of all feeling.

As if to add to our confusion, the word *feeling* hosts a great variety of experiences. Of our emotions, we say we feel sad or angry. We feel bodily sensations such as pains, tickles, and itches. When we are moody, we say we feel bored or blasé. When we have a premonition or intuition, we say we feel certain that the time is right or feel that the solution to a problem is to be found in this direction. We feel justified in making a demand. We feel tired or out of sorts. We feel hungry or full. We feel danger in a situation or have a good feeling about what is happening.

But perhaps the most interesting and overlooked aspect of

our feeling-nature is that it is a form of perception that is capable of revealing aspects of reality not otherwise available to us. It permeates every dimension of our being and every level of awareness and is a non-dualistic, participatory way of knowing that is not founded in thinking. This claim must sound strange when it is held next to our belief that feeling is not only subjective, but also capable of subverting reason and good sense. But it also appears especially peculiar for another reason. Our everyday way of perceiving is so dominated by a dualistic form of consciousness (recall the *me* and *not me* discussed in Chapter Two) that it simply passes right over how our sentient feeling-nature perceives non-dualistically. Our sentient feeling-nature is not only deeply intertwined with and embedded in all of our states of awareness, it is also what we share with all living creatures. It is how other forms of life, especially those without brains or nervous systems, perceive their world. What we recognize in ourselves as consciousness is a highly evolved elaboration of the same feeling-sentience that all life shares. When it is awake and free of conflict it is, at one and the same time, both the way we know the Dharmakaya and the way the Dharmakaya knows itself. My teacher understands the Dharmakaya as the state of unification and true love.

In order to understand the kind of perception that our feeling-nature is capable of, we need to better understand the nature of our everyday way of perceiving and why it is prone to skip right over the wisdom of our feeling-nature. Our everyday way of perceiving involves a remarkable ability that contributes to our ongoing misapprehension of the nature of reality. This ability allows us to step out of the flow of lived-experience and think about or reflect on what we perceive. As a result, we are capable

▶ A Zen student had been working with his koan for some time and felt he was getting close to answering it. When he gave his answer in the next sanzen, Roshi emphatically said, "ninety-five percent, but Roshi want one hundred percent!" The student thought, "What? Oh come on, I answered that koan. Roshi is screwing with me." The next three sanzens were all the same: the student performed the same answer and Roshi gave the same response, "Ninety-five percent, but Roshi want one hundred percent!" The student remained quietly skeptical about the accuracy and appropriateness of this supposed "ninety-five percent." He continued to wonder whether Roshi was playing games with him, until the next sanzen when Roshi passed him with the declaration, "Ahh, one hundred percent!" At that moment, he realized Roshi had been right all along—there was a difference between ninety-five and one hundred percent.

of standing apart from what we perceive and experiencing the objects and people of our world as separate and other than ourselves. This ability to think about what are experiencing is called reflective consciousness. It constitutes what we recognize in ourselves as consciousness and grants us the ability to say, "I am." It bestows upon us our sense of a continuous identity and an I-am-self that we experience as our essence and foundation.

But the Zen experience demonstrates that this self we experience as a continuous identity is not a continuous self-subsisting identity at all. To understand this point, let's look at an example. Can you remember what it is like to hold a baby? When you first take the baby in your arms, she melts into you so thoroughly that your self dissolves and you and she become one. In the first instant of the embrace, baby and self disappear into the won-

drous unencumbered love of the source. Then in the next moment your self reappears and you might say, "Oh, what a sweet baby."

Since the death and resurrection of the self happens so quickly, reflective consciousness passes right over it and most of us never recognize what happened. But it happens continuously, right under our noses. In the very first moment of perception, when we meet the things or people of our world, we lose our self to the object, and self and object disappear in unity with the source. In the very next moment, the world of separation and duality appears: self and object reappear, and our thinking about our situation begins again. Over and over again our self and world, subject and object, simultaneously are born in love and die in love—this happens thousands of times a day. As Zen practice reveals, the activity by which our self appears and disappears is the very same activity by which the universe and all of its content appear and disappear.

Reflective consciousness so dominates our experience of ourselves that, without the benefit of Zen practice, we remain oblivious to the self-begetting activity of death and resurrection that is the loving heart of everything. With unquestioned assurance, we unknowingly live the belief that we and the things we perceive are continuous entities, possessing own self-subsisting identities that persist over time. Descartes, the father of modern Western philosophy, famously gave theoretical voice to this unspoken assumption when he divided the world into mental and material substance, subject and object, and declared, "I think, therefore, I am."

In order to secure science on certain ground, Descartes offered his declaration as an example of something whose existence could not be doubted. As he demonstrated, the very act of doubting your

▶ A monk was on a roll. For three days nonstop he answered one koan after another. Every sanzen he would answer his koan, be given a new koan, and answer it in the next sanzen. He knew from experience that it couldn't last. At the same time, buried underneath his mounting excitement was the half-formed thought that the many koans he was passing were really bite-size aspects of one larger koan, and maybe his roll wasn't such a great accomplishment after all. Nevertheless, with some trepidation he let himself have the thought, "Wow, I am really getting the hang of this—at last!" He soon got a koan he wasn't able to answer and his roll came to an abrupt end. Sanzen after sanzen, the answer eluded him. As he became more confused, he surmised that he was having trouble answering his koan was because he was being too aggressive, especially in sanzen. The solution, he decided, was to tone things way down. So in preparation for the next sanzen, he tried to get as mellow and quiet as was humanly possible.

existence shows that you exist. The reach of Descartes' declaration extended far beyond his epistemological concerns. It helped forge the modern experience of selfhood and how we see the world. But from the Zen perspective, Descartes' declaration raises a profound question. If it is the case that Descartes exists to the extent that he is thinking, then where is he when he is not thinking? From a philosophical perspective, this question can be understood as an objection to Descartes' claim that he has proven his continued existence beyond all doubt. But Zen is not philosophy, and from its perspective the question, "Where are you when you are not thinking?" actually points to the origin of everything and asks us to manifest the wisdom that knows the activity of the source.