

Z

ZEN BUDDHISM. The word *zen* is the Japanese form of the Chinese word *ch'an* which itself is a Chinese rendition of the Sanskrit word *dhyāna*, or meditation. It is one of the several schools of MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM, differing from the others in its emphasis on silent meditation rather than on devotional repetition of the name of Buddha, as in the Pure Land sect, or an intellectual study of the scriptures, as in the Three Treatise School. Historically, it began in China in the sixth century with a monk named BODHIDHARMA, who had traveled to China from India by sea. There is an apocryphal story (found only in Zen literature) that the Buddha himself was the real originator of Zen Buddhism when he gave a “sermon” to a group of disciples by silently twirling a lotus in his fingers. It is said that only Mahākāśyapa understood the meaning of this, attained enlightenment, and smiled. The Buddha, recognizing his enlightenment, gave him a “special transmission outside the scriptures,” as it is put in Zen literature. Thus it is said in Zen Buddhism that enlightenment is received not by scriptures or oral teachings (though both are important), but by direct experience. As such, this is not fundamentally different from the message of Buddha’s sermons (*suttas* or *sūtras*) as recorded in the Theravāda scriptures, the *Tripitaka*.

Although the story about the origin of Zen is of questionable historical accuracy, Helena P. BLAVATSKY states that the Buddha did have an esoteric teaching, largely (or completely) unknown to Western scholars, most of whom explicitly deny her claim. In her introduction to *The Secret Doctrine* (I:19-20) she identifies this esoteric teaching as *dan* or *ch'an*, going on to say that *ch'an* is only “a very small portion” of that esoteric doctrine, which “time and human imagination” as well as its transfer to “a soil less prepared for metaphysical conceptions than India” — she explicitly includes China and Japan — caused considerable alteration in the esotericism (p. 21).

Ch'an (or Zen) Buddhism identifies its succession of teachers as “patriarchs” and claims that Bodhidharma (fl. 460-534) was the 28th after the Buddha. He, in turn, had a number of successors in China, one of the most important being the 5th, Hung-jen (601-674). Whereas Bodhidharma had based his teachings on the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (Scripture about [Buddhism’s] Descent into Sri Lanka), Hung-jen emphasized the *Vajracchedikā Sūtra* (Diamond-cutter Scripture). The emphasis in the former is on the elements of existence (in Buddhism called *dharmas*) as ultimate reality, whereas the emphasis in the latter is on consciousness as the only reality (sometimes called the “Mind-Only Doctrine” or *viññāpimātratā*). Hung-jen had two main disciples, Shen-hsiu (605?-706)

and Hui-neng (638-713), who stressed, respectively, gradual enlightenment and sudden enlightenment (Japanese *satori*; Sanskrit *sambodhi*). The story, as told in *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* (*Liu-tsu t'an-ching*), is that Hui-neng entered the monastery as an illiterate boy of humble background after hearing a monk chant a Buddhist scripture in the marketplace. When Hung-jen was considering a successor, he requested all his monks to write a single stanza summarizing Ch'an teachings. Shen-hsiu, it is said, in the middle of the night wrote the following verse on the monastery wall:

The body is the Bodhi tree;
The mind is a bright mirror's stand.
One must constantly wipe it
So that no dust collects.

This elicited great admiration from the other monks. When one of them read it to Hui-neng, the boy said that it was all wrong and dictated the following counter-verse to be written:

Really, *bodhi* has no tree
Nor has the bright mirror any stand.
Buddha nature is forever clear and pure.
So where is there room for dust?

Hung-jen, recognizing that Hui-neng was truly enlightened, called him in and, according to the story, transferred his robe to Hui-neng, then directed him to flee the monastery before the other monks harmed him (since he was inappropriately illiterate and too young). He went south and established a monastery near Canton. Thus, at that point, according to tradition, Ch'an split into two main sects: the Northern or Gradual Enlightenment School and the Southern or Sudden Enlightenment School. Actually, the main doctrinal difference between them is in their concept of mind as composite or as essentially an indivisible unity. But they also differ in certain practices.

Ch'an survived the great persecution of Buddhism in 845 mainly because of the remote location of its monasteries, because of its similarity to Taoism, and because of a series of remarkable masters. It flourished during the T'ang and Sung Dynasties (618-907 and 960-1279 respectively) during which it further split into five different schools, the two most important being the Lin-chi (Japanese Rinzai) founded by I-hsuan (died 867) which taught sudden (or “lightning”, *lin-chi*) enlightenment, and Ts'ao-tung (Japanese Soto) founded by Chao-chou (known as Joshu in Japan) emphasizing gradual enlightenment. Rinzai was taken to Japan by Eisai (1141-1215), who had originally been a monk in the Tendai sect. Sōtō

was brought to Japan by Dōgen (1200-1253), who had once studied under Eisai. The former stresses meditating on a saying or brief conversation known as a *koan* (Chinese *k'ung-an* or “public case”); the latter stresses *zazen* or “just sitting” in meditation. Zen had considerable influence upon Japanese culture (literature, painting, calligraphy, flower arrangement, landscape gardening, and the tea ceremony) and in the 13th-15th centuries Zen masters were also prominent in politics and education. Zen’s influence declined during the 16th-17th centuries, but was revived by Hakuin (1686-1769) from whom present-day Rinzai masters trace their spiritual lineage. Both Rinzai and Sōtō continue in Japan to this day as the principal sects of Zen.

In *zazen*, one sits erect with legs crossed (in a lotus or half lotus position) on a small cushion called a *zafu*. The eyes are kept slightly opened and looking at the floor, unfocused, about two feet in front of one. The right hand is laid palm up in the lap with the left hand cradled inside it, also palm up, the tips of the thumbs touching lightly. It is a common practice for beginners to still the chattering of the mind by counting their breaths; later one just sits quietly without being distracted by thought. Some theosophists, who practice meditation, utilize this method, which is much more difficult than it sounds. Followers of Zen usually gather at a center and chant scriptures as well as practicing *zazen*. It is common for practitioners to listen to a *dharma* talk by a Zen master after their meditation. Retreats are also held, either for one day (*zazenkai*) or more intensively for a week (*sesshin*). At these retreats, silence is maintained and simple dark clothing is worn, both to free the mind from worrying about what to wear and to eliminate any sense of difference from or superiority over other practitioners. Often, between periods of sitting, there will be *kinhin*, walking meditation. Evening meetings usually begin with *sūtra* chanting. Such retreats are usually called *sanghas* (“assemblies” or “gatherings”).

Koans are used to break the habit of the mind, which wants to analyze and categorize everything. From a theological point of view, the use of *koans* assumes that there is a state of consciousness (usually called *buddhi* in theological literature) which transcends the rational mind (or *kāma-manas*) and that in order to reach it, one has to abandon logic and reasoning. There are several varieties of *koan*: anecdote, illogical paradox, *double entendre*, blasphemy, and shock (often involving painful action or indecent language). A very famous example of illogic is “What is the sound of one hand?”, sometimes given as “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” Another famous example (in its Japanese version), using both illogic and a pun or *double entendre*, is the following exchange between a pupil and the monk Joshu (i.e., Chao-chou):

A monk asked Joshu, “Does a dog have the Buddha nature?”

Joshu answered, “Mu!”

Here the monk’s underlying assumption is that everything has the same essence, which is called the Bud-

dha-nature, though it would seem to him socially unusual to think that even a dog might have it. The answer “*mu*” (in Japanese, “not so” or “nothing”) could mean “No,” which would be contrary to the theology, or “Woof” (since the Japanese imitate a dog’s bark with the sound “*mu*”), or “Empty,” which would be intended to remind the monk of the *sūnyatā* (emptiness) doctrine, but would require profound insight to understand completely. Or, more likely, it could mean all three simultaneously — in which case the first and third meanings are contradictory. But *koans* are not meant to be analyzed in this way, for that frustrates the very purpose of them!

Ch’an also spread from China to Korea and Vietnam where it is still practiced. In the late 19th century its Japanese form, Zen, arrived in the United States during the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. The Zen teacher, Soyen Shaku attended and spoke. He returned to Japan afterwards, but his student, D. T. SUZUKI, remained, married an American Theosophist, Beatrice Erskine Lane, and popularized Zen through their journal, *The Eastern Buddhist*, as well as through his numerous books, which are still in print today. He also appeared on television and was featured in popular magazine articles. Among his students were well-known artists and members of the intelligentsia. During the 1950s, Zen attracted members of the so-called “Beat Generation” such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. About the same time some Westerners, such as Robert Aitken and Philip Kapleau, traveled to Japan to practice Zen seriously. In the sixties, monasteries and Zen centers began to develop in the West. They are now to be found throughout the US, Canada, Europe, and Australia, as well as some other countries.

R.W.B./M.R.

ZEND-AVESTA (Par.). The collective name for the scripture of Zoroastrianism. The word “Avesta” means “law,” although it originally referred to the dialect in which the scriptures were written. The word “Zend” is taken by scholars to mean “commentary,” but, according to Annie BESANT (*Zoroastrinism*, p. 7; first published in *Four Great Religions*, 1897), this commentary is named for the language, called Zend-zar or Zendzar, in which it was written, a language obviously linguistically related to “Senzar,” the language of the “Stanzas of Dzyan,” upon which *The Secret Doctrine* of Helena P. BLAVATSKY is based. Since this Zend, or commentary, has become regarded as part of the original text, the two words are now taken together to refer to the scripture.

The Zend-Avesta is divided into four parts: *Yasna* (the book of hymns or *gāthās*), *Visparad* or *Vispared* (a collection of prayers and ceremonies), *Yashts* (a collection of preparatory prayers and invocations, including the *Khordah* or “Little” *Avesta*), and *Nasks* (a collection of treatises on a variety of subjects, of which only the *Videvdad* or *Vendīdād* has survived). Later, the *Dinkard* was added. Much of the material in the original scripture

was lost when the Zoroastrian library at Persepolis was destroyed in 334 BCE by Alexander the Great (or “Accursed” as he is known to Zoroastrians). The scripture has also been translated into various languages including Modern Persian and Gujerati. See also ZOROASTRIANISM.

R.W.B

ZERUANA-AKARANA. Also Zervan-Akarana. Literally, “boundless time.” In ZOROASTRIANISM, the father of the good and evil principles of the universe, namely, Ahura Mazda (or Ormazd) and Ahriman (or Angra Mainyu). It is equivalent to the PARABRAHMAN of the Hindus and AIN SOPH of the Kabalists.

ZEUS (Gk.). A Greek deity of sky and weather, also ruler of men, usually referred to as *Zeus-patēr* (“Father Zeus”); his consort is Hera. (Their Roman equivalents are Jupiter, i.e., Ju-pater, and Juno.) But his origin may be found in the Vedic sky god Dyaus who is also identified as Father (Sk. *pitr*). There is obviously a linguistic relation between these names, suggestive of the spread of religions ideas westward as a result of the migration of the Aryans into India, Greece, and Italy. Helena P. BLAVATSKY quotes Hermes Trismegistus (trans. by Kingsford & Maitland, *The Virgin of the World*, 1885, pp. 64-65) as saying, “The supreme Being of Heaven, or of all that is comprehended under this name, is Zeus, for it is by heaven that Zeus gives life to all things” (SD I:672). Many of her references to Zeus seem to suggest that he is symbolic of Nature’s finer forces, such as FOHAT. In Homer, Zeus is represented as the ruler or “Father” of all the gods and of humanity.

ZHELIOVSKY, VERA PETROVNA DE (nee Hahn) (1835-1896). Younger sister of Helena P. BLAVATSKY. She was born at Odessa, southern Russia on April 29, 1835. Her first marriage was to Nikkolay Nikolayevich de Yahontov (1827-58) who died when he was only about 31 years old and later she married Vladimir Ivanovich de



Vera Petrovna De Zheliovsky

Zheliovsky. She had two sons by her first marriage and one son and three daughters by the second.

Zheliovsky became well-known as a writer of children’s stories and contributor to various Russian journals. She published a series of articles about the life of Blavatsky which appeared in 1883 in the periodical *Rebus* under the title, “*Pravda ö Yelena Petrovne Blavatskoy*” (“The Truth about Helena Petrovna Blavatsky”). It appears that editorial liberties were taken with these articles and Zheliovsky subsequently corrected them. Blavatsky translated these articles into English and the manuscript in her handwriting is preserved in the Archives of the TS at Adyar. Another article dealing with Blavatsky’s life and character was written by her sister for the *Russian Review* (*Russkoye Obozreniye*) under the title of *H. P. Blavatsky: a Biographical Sketch* (November and December 1891).

Blavatsky and her sister were very close in their affections and the latter defended Blavatsky most vehemently whenever she was attacked. She died May 18, 1896.

P.S.H.

ZIRKOFF, BORIS DE (1902-1981). Grandnephew of Helena P. BLAVATSKY who edited her *Collected Writings*. He was born on March 7, 1902, in St. Petersburg, Russia, to Lydia Dmitriyevna von Hahn, the niece of H. P. Blavatsky. A frail child, tutored at home and mastering



Boris De Zirkoff

several languages, de Zirkoff knew little of his great aunt until he was about 16. Escaping across Finland in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, he settled in Stockholm (1917) with his mother and stepfather. At the home of the Russian Consul he saw *The Secret Doctrine* for the first time. Its study became the first step of a lifetime dedication to Theosophy.

Zirkoff met Katherine TINGLEY during her European tour as head of the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society. She invited him to come to headquarters at POINT LOMA, California, where, in 1924, he resolved to compile Blavatsky’s writings. This project led to a worldwide correspondence and over 50 years of research. Dove-tailing with Gottfried de PURUCKER’s Fraternization Movement, in 1930 a uniform edition of Blavatsky’s writ-

ings became an inter-organizational venture. The first four volumes were published by Rider & Co. as *The Complete Works of H. P. Blavatsky* between 1933 and 1936, however, the Rider edition plates were destroyed in the German bombing of London during World War II.

In 1942 Boris moved to Los Angeles; working independently, he expanded the lost volumes and with the support of Manly P. Hall, as well as the HPB Writings Fund, volumes 5 and 6 were published in 1950 and 1954. In 1956 the Theosophical Society (Adyar) became the sole publisher and distributor of the *Blavatsky Collected Writings*.

With the help of a small volunteer staff, de Zirkoff edited the journal *Theosophia* from 1940 to 1981. He also lectured and contributed to theosophical journals around the world. He was awarded the SUBBA ROW MEDAL in 1980.

Boris de Zirkoff died March 4, 1981, after seeing Blavatsky's first 12 volumes as well as new editions of *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* into print. From his manuscripts for Vols. XIII and XIV the remaining numbered series were completed in 1982 and 1985. A *Cumulative Index* Vol. XV was published in 1991, leaving only *The Key to Theosophy*, *The Voice of the Silence*, *Letters*, and her Russian writings, to be completed.

D.E.

ZOROASTRIANISM. The religion of the followers of Zoroaster (Greek form of the Avestan name Zarathushtra). Other names for the religion are Zarathustraism, Mazdism (which is mentioned in the *Avesta*), Magism, Fire Worship, and later *Bah Dīn* ("Good Religion") and Parsiism. The common assumption that it is a form of Dualism is a misunderstanding (although some Parsis do accept this interpretation).

History. There is considerable divergence between the scholarly, theological, and theosophical views about the historical background of the religion. Scholars claim that a pre-Zoroastrian religion was animistic and superstitious and that Zoroaster introduced a new religion in the 7th cent. BCE. The theosophical or occult view is that there were two Zoroasters, the first of whom lived "more than 20,000 years ago" according to Annie BESANT (*Zoroastrianism*, p. 7; first published in *Four Great Religions*, 1897), and who was a Chaldean sage and "high initiate" (*idem*). It was he, Besant claims, who led the Parshu tribe of Aryans into what is now Iran (formerly Persia); this started the civilization in the so-called "fertile crescent" between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The dating of this event obviously is considerably at odds with orthodox scholarship! After him there were a succession of enlightened teachers called *Saoshyants* (benefactors, reformers), according to the Zoroastrian scripture, the *Avesta*: Gayomard, Hoshang, Tehmuras, Jamshid, Faridun, and finally Zarathushtra Spitāma. While there are remnants of the original teachings in what remains of the *Avesta*, it is the ideas of the last Zoroaster which form what

we now call Zoroastrianism. The *Avesta* also speaks of *Saoshyants* yet to come. The language of the early Parshus was related to Vedic Sanskrit and the hymns (*gāthās*) of the *Avesta* are in a meter related to the meters of the Sāma Veda, indicative of the common heritage of Vedic Hinduism and ancient Zoroastrianism. It is the third oldest extant religion, according to theosophical sources, only Jainism and Hinduism being older.

The first Zarathushtra, according to Besant, emphasized the sacred nature of fire and could invoke it directly "from the fiery *ākasha*," as could other early priests (*ibid.*, p. 36). Nowadays priests have to wait for lightning to ignite fire if the sacred fire on the altar is allowed to go out (*ibid.*, p. 37).

The last prophet Zarathustra Spitāma (ca. 660- ca. 583 BCE) was born the third son of a wealthy, noble family in Bactria (an area in western Iran/northern Afghanistan today) on the banks of the River Darega according to Besant, or in southern Azerbaijan according to some scholars. His father's name was Pourushaspa, his mother's name was Dughdhova (or Dugdāv). According to the *Dinkard*, marvelous phenomena accompanied his birth and sorcerers tried unsuccessfully to kill him. He grew strong, intelligent, studious, handsome, patient, and with a high moral character. Sometime between the age of 15 and 20 he withdrew from the world to meditate and search for truth; he spent several years in the wilderness, often praying with upraised hands. He is depicted in the scriptures invoking the Amesha Spentas (hierarchy of gods in Zoroastrianism), especially Vohu Manah ("Good Thought"). At about the age of 30, he is said to have received a divine revelation from Vohu Manah who led him to the throne of God (i.e., Ahura Mazda). This was the first of seven such visions he had over the ensuing 10 years. In several verses of the *Avesta* he is depicted as asking questions of Ahura Mazda and receiving answers. The 19th chapter of the *Videvdat* (also called *Vendīdad*) tells how Angra Mainyu (the Zoroastrian Satan) attempted to dissuade him from his devotion to Ahura Mazda by revealing to him the allures of the world. Zoroaster rebuffed him, returned home, and began his ministry.

For the first two years his message met with rejection. His first convert was his cousin Maidhyomah (considered the "St. John" of Zoroastrianism). At the age of 42, he went to Chorasmia (now Khorasan in Iran) and to the court of King Vishtāspa (or Hystaspes, father of Darius the Great) and there is said of have healed the king's favorite black horse by apparently miraculous means. The king and his court became converts and the faith then spread throughout Bactria. There is a strong suggestion in the scriptures (cf. Yasna 31.2) that he only intended to purify the existing religion of its animism, superstition, sorcery, and immorality, not begin a new religion. This accords well with the theosophical view that Zoroastrianism underwent several cycles of decline and revitalization over the thousands of years of its existence. Subsequently, he mar-

ried Hvōvi, daughter of another wealthy nobleman, and had three sons and three daughters. He traveled widely throughout Bactria (and adjoining areas) spreading his teaching and even was once imprisoned for sorcery by adherents of the popular superstitious religion, although he preached against wonders and psychic phenomena. At the age of 77, while in prayer, he was killed during a war against the invader Arejad-aspas of Turan, a war which may have been provoked by that king's reaction to his proselytizing the Turanians.

The subsequent history of Zoroastrianism is often divided into the Persian-Achaemenid Period (559-330 BCE), Seleucid Period (330-250 BCE), Parthian-Arsacid Period or Dark Ages of Zoroastrianism (250-226 BCE), Sassanid or Sassanian Period (226 BCE - 651 CE), and Modern Period (651-present). During the first of these, commentaries were written on the *Avesta* in Pahlavi, the priestly language of Persia and a great library was built at Persepolis. The second period is characterized by the destruction of that library and burning of its sacred books (many of which have never been recovered) by the invasion of Alexander the Great (known to Zoroastrians as "Alexander the Accursed") in 334 BCE. Under the Seleucid rule of Persia, the religion underwent a gradual recovery. A decline set in again in the following period and there was another revival after that under the Sassanids whose founder monarch, Ardeshir Babegan, belonged to a family of Zoroastrian high priests. The Modern Period is dated from the Muslim conquest of Persia in 651, as a result of which most Zoroastrians (the Parsis) fled to India, settling mainly in the Gujerat and Bombay. About 10,000 (the Gabars) remained in Persia where many of them became gardeners for their Muslim conquerors.

Scriptures. Zoroastrian scriptures are collectively called the *Avesta* or *Zend-Avesta*. The term "Avesta" originally designated the ancient language in which they were written, but later came to mean "law." Scholars translate "Zend" to mean "commentary," but according to Besant this commentary was originally written "in a language derived from that ancient sacerdotal language . . . of signs, of symbols, of colors, of sounds . . . called the Zenzar or Zend-zar" (*ibid.*, pp. 15-16), in other words the Zenzar language of the "Stanzas of Dzyan" upon which Helena P. BLAVATSKY's *The Secret Doctrine* was based. This commentary eventually became regarded as part of the original text. These scriptures are divided into four classifications: *Yasna*, *Visparad* (or *Vispered*), *Yashts*, and *Nasks*. The *Yasna* is the book of hymns (*gāthās*), all composed by the first Zoroaster. The hymns are further divided into chapters (*Hās*) of varying length (10-23 verses, each verse containing 3-5 lines). The chapters are organized according to their meter. Of the original 21 books of the *Yasna*, only five hymns have survived Alexander's destruction: the Ahunavaiti, Ustavaiti, Spentamainyu, Vohukhshathra, and Vaihistōisti. The *Visparad* is a collection of prayers and ceremonies appended to the *Yasna*. The *Yashts* comprise a

collection of preparatory prayers and invocations for use by priests and also the *Khordah* (or "Little") *Avesta* containing prayers for use by the laity. The *Nasks* were a collection of 21 treatises on agriculture, astronomy, medicine, botany, philosophy, law, etc., but only the *Videvdad* (or *Vendīdād*) survives today. To these was later added the *Dinkard*, written in Pahlavi. During the Sassanid Period all the *Avesta* was translated into Pahlavi (early Persian), then later into Pāzend (later Persian), then into modern Persian, Gujerati, etc. Theological expositions of these texts were influenced by contact with Babylon, Lydia, Greece, Rome, India, China, Christianity, Islam, and most recently theosophy.

Esotericism. According to one Parsi priest-scholar, Dr. Meher Master-Moos (President of Zoroastrian College, Sanjan, India and member of The Theosophical Society) there is an esoteric tradition that all 21 books of the original *Yasna* were recovered from remote mountain villages which survived the Alexandrian invasion. Towards the end of the Sassanid Dynasty, the Zoroastrian Magi and Abeds, having foreknowledge of the turmoil that was to come during the 7th century CE when Islamic Arabs overran and conquered Iran, withdrew into remote mountains to preserve this ancient wisdom. According to this tradition, there existed many such esoteric groups of Zoroastrian holy Maghavs and Abeds, in the mountain regions of the Caucasus, Elburz mountains, Hindu Kush, Pamirs, and Central Asiatic Highlands. Two such spiritually developed communities are known by the names of the Abeds of Chaechast Vaar and the Abeds of Demaand Kuh. These communities preserved the ancient esoteric wisdom of Zoroastrianism, which they call the Mazdayasnie Zarathustrian Daena, or knowledge of the Divine Universal Natural Laws of Ahura Mazda. Gradually, through adoption of Indian languages (especially Gujerati), customs, and dress, most Zoroastrians in India, including the priests, lost this esoteric knowledge.

The three most striking doctrines of Zoroastrianism are its emphasis on strict morality in thought, word, and deed, its veneration of fire as sacred, and its method of disposing of the deceased (called "sky burial"). There is no separation between Ahura Mazda and his creation, including man; the universe is an immense ladder of creative intelligences. Absolutely central to Zoroastrianism is that human life is a battleground between forces of good and forces of evil. The freedom of the human will is a cardinal tenet of the faith. While there is no teaching of reincarnation in exoteric Zoroastrianism, it is a doctrine accepted in esoteric teachings.

Cosmology. According to Besant (but not mentioned in scholarly literature), Zoroastrian cosmology says that there is at the base of all existence One Unknowable Reality (Zeruan Akerna or "Boundless Time"). This gives rise to One Transcendent Being called Mazda ("All-Wise" or "Omniscient"); to this ancient name Zoroaster Spitāma added Ahura ("Governor"), i.e., the wise and beneficent