DISCOVER YOUR BUDDHA NATURE
ZEN INSIGHTS THAT GO BEYOND WORDS

IN CONTEXT
KEY EVENT
The development of Zen Buddhism
WHEN AND WHERE
12th–13th century CE, Japan
BEFORE
8th century CE: The Buddha teaches meditation leading to insight and enlightenment.
6th century CE: The Buddhist monk Bodhidharma brings meditation Buddhism (Ch'an) to China, and is said to have instigated martial arts training at the Shaolin monastery.
AFTER
1960s–1960s: Zen ideas become popular in Western counterculture, as seen in the work of the Beat poets and Robert Pirsig's Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. Many Zen meditation groups and California's first Zen monastery are founded.

Using words – in prayer, or discussion – creates clutter in our mind.

Thinking and reading silently just create more "words" in our heads.

When we strive to find answers and insight, our desire clouds the mind.

If we are to discover our Buddha nature, we must empty our minds of all these things.

With an empty mind insight and understanding will come to us without words.

Zen and its Chinese counterpart, Ch'an, simply mean "meditation." As a tradition of Buddhist practice, it is generally regarded as having been founded by an Indian monk, Bodhidharma, who brought it to China in 520 CE, and is credited with the definition of Zazen as "a direct transmission of awakened consciousness, outside tradition and outside scriptures."

This definition highlights the key features of Zen: it seeks to allow enlightenment to happen naturally, as a result of a clearing of the mind, and does so without the need for rational argument, texts, or rituals. In other words, it creates the conditions in which a person's mental clutter, which detracts from clarity of the mind, can be replaced by direct insight.

Zen claims to continue a tradition that goes back to the earliest days of Buddhist teachings. There is a story that one day, surrounded by his disciples, the Buddha simply held up a flower, turning it in his hand without speaking. One of the disciples, Kasyapa, smiled. He had seen the point. That wordless insight, it is claimed, was passed down from teacher to disciple for 28 generations to Bodhidharma, who took it to China, from where it spread throughout. So, rather than being a product of the development of the two main Buddhist branches, Theravada and Mahayana (p. 330), Zen sees itself as having developed independently via a separate line of transmission.

Buddha mind
Central to Buddhism is the idea that existential unhappiness is caused by the illusion that each person has a fixed ego, which is separate from the rest of the world, yet which clings to it, trying to hold on to what changes.
Zen sees this as the small, superficial mind, one that people acquire at birth, then develop, influenced by those around them. However, it holds that people also w

See also:
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- Buddhism and the mystic tradition 282–83
- Life-energy cultivation in Falun Gong 323

Nishida Kitaro
The Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitaro (1870–1945) studied both Zen Buddhism and the history of Western philosophy, and tried to express Buddhist insights using Western philosophical terms. He taught at the University of Kyoto from 1910 to 1928, and founded what is known as the Kyoto School of Philosophy.
Nishida argued that pure experience took place before the split between subject and object, self and world – exactly the distinction made by Zen between the ego-based mind and the undifferentiated unity of the Buddha mind (see left). This he compared to the ideas of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who distinguished between a person's experience of things (phenomena) and the things themselves (noumena), the latter being unknown. Nishida even introduced the idea of God as the basis of reality and our "true self," and compared Zen with Heidegger, Aristotle, Bergson, and Hegel.

Key work
1911 A Study of Good
Sitting and meditating is all that is required to achieve enlightenment in Soto Zen. This state of the mind dispels the illusion of self.

But the illusion is not easily dispelled by meditation, even by a Zen master. This is because the mind is not a fixed state but is in a constant state of flux. Meditation is a technique for taming the mind, not for eradicating it.

Zen in Japan

There are two main schools of Zen: Rinzai and Soto. Rinzai Zen was established in Japan in the 12th century by Rinzai and later became the dominant school until the 18th century. Rinzai Zen emphasizes the sudden awakening of the mind through the sudden insight meditation known as "satori." Soto Zen, on the other hand, was founded by Hakuin in the 18th century. Soto Zen emphasizes the gradual enlightenment process through gradual training through meditation and the study of Zen texts.

If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him!

Zen koan

"If you understand the first word of Zen you will know the last word. The last word and the first word: they are not one word.

Mumon

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