

FROM THERAVADA TO ZEN

—LAMA ANAGARIKA GOVINDA

In order to understand the sacred scriptures of Buddhism, we must to some extent be familiar with the living stream of tradition, as it has come down to us from the days of the Buddha, in an unbroken continuity. In spite of many differences in conception and formulation, even the comparatively later texts of the Mahâyâna are built upon the teachings of the earliest known tradition, which already was subdivided into eighteen different schools, of which each had its own canonical scriptures. However, only one of these canons has survived intact up to the present day, that of the Theravâdins, the teachings of the Elders. The reason for their survival was their insular seclusion in Ceylon, due to which they remained untouched by the spiritual and political revolutions on the mainland of India and the rest of Asia.

Until now the West has been mainly familiarized with the texts of this school, so that many people have formed the conviction that Theravâda is the only authentic form of Buddhism, as taught by the Buddha. We must remember, however, that not less than four centuries had passed before the Pâli Canon was put down in writing. Even if we want to trust the Indian capacity to pass on faithfully the words of great religious leaders orally from Guru to Chela for centuries on end, we must not forget that words are not lifeless objects, but that they, like all living things, are subject to the law of change and that they possess many meanings and associations of a spiritual and emotional nature, so that people of different temperaments, different background and different mentality—nothing to say of people belonging to different centuries—will associate different meanings or only a certain aspect of the original meaning with the same words.

This becomes evident by the fact that at the time when the Theravâda Canon was fixed, already eighteen different Buddhist schools had come into existence. No conscientious and unprejudiced scholar can overlook this fact, and therefore we must give to each of the different traditions as much credence as we are willing to give to the Theravâdins. Each of them has an equal claim of representing a true aspect of the teachings of the Buddha and a sincere effort to preserve as much as possible of the original words and thoughts of the Enlightened One. Only in this way can we obtain a complete and genuine picture of Buddhist thought and experience which reveals the whole wealth of Buddhist culture and its application in life. Such a complete picture does not only enrich our knowledge, but deepens the meaning and the importance of every single phase or school of Buddhism. Such a knowledge is equally essential for the understanding of the Pâli scriptures of the Theravâdins as for the other contemporary Hinayâna Schools and the Mahâyâna which finally took over the main stream of Buddhist tradition and carried it all over South East Asia, into the Far East and into Central Asia.

Only a detailed study of the Dharma-theory in the scriptures of the Sarvâstivâdins and of the Mahâyâna made it possible to see the teachings of the Theravâdins in their true perspective and to arrive at a deeper understanding of their philosophical and metaphysical foundations. The onesided

opinion of earlier scholars, that Buddhism is a purely rationalistic system without any metaphysical background—so to say floating in a kind of spiritual vacuum—represented the teachings of the Buddha as a cold intellectual doctrine, which fitted more into the European “Age of Reason” (which coincided with the beginnings of Buddhist research) than with a religion that inspired one third of humanity with hope and faith.

Helmuth von Glasenapp, who is well-known for his impartial works on the history of Buddhist thought, says : “The fact that formerly nothing was known about the Dharma-theory, is the cause that many scholars missed a metaphysical foundation in the canonical discourses, and therefore declared the Buddha—according to their respective temperament—as an agnostic or a mere teacher of ethics, or they deduced from his silence about God, soul and other concepts which contradict the Dharma-theory, a mystic secret doctrine about *Ātman*, etc....” Even more outspoken is Glasenapp in another article, in which he explains the Buddhist concept of “*dharmas*” (the Pāli version of the Sanskrit term “*dharmas*”) whose co-operation, according to their inherent law, brings about, what we conceive as “personality” and the “world” experienced by it. “This is a concept whose fundamental importance for the Buddhist view of the world and its doctrine of salvation has been revealed only in the course of the last thirty years. Since the word ‘*dhamma*’ (literally, the supporting element) has already in Pāli several meanings (universal law, righteousness, duty, property, object), one did not realize that besides these many meanings, it is used in the Pāli Canon also as terminus technicus for the ultimate, irreducible factors out of which everything is composed that we believe to perceive within and without ourselves. Since this fundamental concept of Buddhist philosophy had not been understood in its true significance, one could only appreciate the Buddha’s ethical principles and his doctrine of liberation; however, one could not realize that the practical side of Buddhism has a theoretical foundation, a ‘philosophy of becoming’, which is unique in the spiritual history of humanity, in so far as it explains everything that exists through the co-operation of only momentary existing forces, arising and disappearing in functional dependence of each other. Due to this Buddhism can renounce the concept of eternal substances (matter, soul, God) which in all other teachings form the supporting basis.”

Here we come to the core of the problem. What distinguished the Buddha from his contemporaries and what raised him above the general spiritual attitude of his country was his perception of the dynamic nature of reality. The four Noble Truths (consisting of the truth of suffering, of its origin, of its annihilation and of the way leading to the annihilation of suffering) as well as the Eightfold Path towards liberation form the general Indian frame of his teachings, but not what gives Buddhism its specific character. But when the Buddha put the *anattā*-idea into the centre of his teaching, he took the decisive step from a static to a dynamic view of the world, from an emphasis of ‘being’ to an emphasis on ‘becoming’, from the concept of an unchangeable, permanent ‘I’ (ego) to the realisation of the interdependence of all forms and aspects of life and the capacity of the individual to grow beyond himself and his self-created limitations. Thus the unsurmountable contrast between ‘I’ and ‘world’, ‘mind’ and ‘matter’, ‘substance’ and ‘appearance’, ‘the eternal’ and the ‘impermanent’, etc., was eliminated.

The doctrine of the Buddha is the antithesis of the concept of ‘substance’, which has governed human thought for millenniums. Just as Einstein’s

theory of relativity influenced and changed the entire mode of modern thinking, in a similar way the anâtman-idea of the Buddha caused a revolution in Indian thought. This did not imply a negation of the religious principles of the past or a skeptical attitude towards metaphysical values; it was more in the nature of a re-valuation of these ideas in the light of experience and of a new spiritual perspective. The Buddha never doubted the continuity of life beyond death, nor the existence and attainability of higher states of existence and their influence on human life. He did not doubt the existence of a moral law, not that of a universe governed by equally strict and unalterable laws, and the world in which he lived was for him not merely a material phenomenon, but a manifestation of living and conscious forces. It was a world which was thoroughly alive with psychic forces, in a way which is unimaginable to people of our times. This becomes all too apparent in the 'soulless' and equally uninspiring interpretation of Buddhism by modern Buddhists, who confound the anâtman-idea with 'soullessness', a term which conveys a totally wrong impression. How can we speak about Buddhist psychology without presupposing a 'psyche'? The Buddha rejected the idea of an eternal, unchangeable soul-substance, existing as a separate entity or monade, but he never denied the existence of consciously directed spiritual and psychic forces, which in spite of their constant flow and change of form and appearance retained their continuity and organic unity. Man is not a mere mechanism of elements that have been thrown together by blind chance, but he is a conscious organism following its own inherent rules, in which individual tendencies and universal laws are in constant co-operation.

The Buddha freed the world of its "thingishness" as well as of its mere "illusionness" by opposing a dogmatically hardened and misunderstood 'âtma-vâda'—which originally was born from an experience of inner reality, the living breath of the universe within us,—but which in the course of time had frozen into the concept of an unchangeable individual self. The Buddha replaced the idea of an immutable, eternal soul monade, incapable of growth and development, with the conception of a spiritual consciousness yearning for freedom and highest enlightenment and capable of attaining this supreme goal in the course of a continuous process of becoming and dissolving.

In this process of transformation we find not only the source of transience and suffering, but also the source of all spiritual life and growth. When the Buddha spoke about this suffering, it was not an outcome of pessimism or 'Weltschmerz', but due to the realization that unless we recognize the nature and cause of our suffering, which is only another word for our imperfection and our wrong attitude, we could not make use of the tremendous potentialities of our mind and attain a state of perfect enlightenment which would reveal the universality of our innermost being. This realisation was not founded on logical conclusions, but on the Buddha's own experience in the attainment of illumination, in which he transcended the limitations of individuality by overcoming the illusion of egohood. This does not mean that his individuality was annihilated, but only that he did not mistake it any more as the essence of his being, but only as a vehicle, a necessary means to become conscious of his universality, the universality of the all-embracing mind.

Looking back from this experience of highest reality and self-realisation, the Enlightened One saw the world in a reversed perspective (reversed from the point of view of the ordinary man), namely in the perspective of

the anâtman-idea; and lo, this apparently inescapable, solid and substantial world dissolved into a whirling nebulous mass of insubstantial, eternally rotating elements of continually arising and disintegrating forms. The momentariness of these elements of existence (*dharmas*) which make up the river of life and of all phenomena, make it impossible to apply to them concepts like 'being' and 'non-being'. "The world, o Kaccâna, is given to dualism, to the 'it is' and the 'it is not'. He, however, o Kaccâna, who has realized with perfect wisdom how things arise in this world, for him there is no 'it is not' in the world. And he, o Kaccâna, who realizes with perfect wisdom how things disappear in this world, for him there is no 'it is' in the world." (Samyutta Nikâya II, 17)

'Being' and 'non-being' can only be applied to things or substances existing 'in themselves', i.e., to absolute units, as represented by our abstract concepts, but never to anything real or actual, because no thing and no being can exist in itself or for itself, but only in relationship to other things or beings, to conscious or unconscious forces of the universe. Concepts like 'identity' and 'non-identity' therefore lose their meaning. It was for this reason that the Sage Nagasena answered King Milinda's question, whether the doer is identical with the reaper of the fruit of his action (whether in this or in a following life) : "Na ca so, na ca añño." "He is neither the same, nor a different one."

The Buddha, therefore, replaces the concepts of identity and non-identity (which both represent extremes of abstract thought) by the formula of Dependent Origination (*pratīyasamutpāda*). This was much more than the proclamation of a scientific law of causation, as superficial observers maintained in order to prove the similarity to their own soulless and mechanistic world-view. Their causality presupposes a purely time-conditioned, unalterable sequence of events, i.e., a necessary and predictable course of action.

The *pratīyasamutpāda*, however, is not confined to a sequence in time, but can also be interpreted as a simultaneous co-operation of all its links, in so far as each of them represents the sum total of all the others, seen under a particular aspect. In other words : from the point of view of time and of the course of individual existence, i.e., from the mundane point of view, the formula of Dependent Origination can be interpreted causally, not however, from the standpoint of highest truth (*paramârtha*).

The causal interpretation is to a certain extent a concession towards a more popular understanding, which requires a concrete example related to actual life, and not a strictly logical, scientific formula. We, therefore, find even in the Pâli texts no uniformity in the presentation of this formula, in which sometimes several links are left out and where even the reversability of the sequence of certain links has been pointed out. This is not due to lack of logical thinking as some critics assumed, but shows that the originators of these different formulations wanted to demonstrate that they were not concerned with a strictly time-conditioned sequence of phenomena which would follow each other with mechanical necessity. What they wanted to point out was the non-substantiality and relativity of all individual phenomena. None of them exists in its own nature, independent of all the other factors of life. Therefore they are described as *sûnyam* : empty of self-nature, non-absolute.

But since no first beginning of any individual or of any inner or outer phenomena can be found, it means that each of them has the totality of the

universe at its base. Or, if we want to express this from the standpoint of time, we could say that each of these phenomena, and especially every individual, has an infinite past and is therefore based on an infinity of relations, which do not and cannot exclude anything that ever existed or is liable to come into existence. All individuals, (or rather all that has an individual existence) have therefore the whole universe as their common ground, and this universality becomes conscious in the experience of enlightenment, in which the individual awakens to his true all-embracing nature.

In order to become conscious of this all-embracing nature, we have to empty ourselves from all conceptual thought and discriminating perception. This emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is not a negative property, but a state of freedom from impediments and limitations, a state of spontaneous receptivity in which we open us to the all-inclusive reality of a higher dimension. Here we realize the *śūnyatā* which forms the central concept of the Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra. Far from being the expression of a nihilistic philosophy, which denies all reality, it is the logical consequence of the *anātman* doctrine of non-substantiality. *Śūnyatā* is the emptiness of all conceptual designations and at the same time the recognition of a higher, incommensurable and undefinable reality, which can only be experienced in the state of perfect enlightenment.

While we are able to come to an understanding of relativity by way of reasoning, the experience of universality and completeness can only be attained when all conceptual thought (*kalpana*), all word-thinking has come to rest. The realisation of the teachings of the Prajñā-pāramitā-sūtra can only come about on the path of meditative practice (*yogācāra*), through a transformation of our consciousness. Meditation in this sense is therefore no more a search after intellectual solutions or an analysis of worldly phenomena with worldly means—which would merely be a moving around in circles—but a breaking out from this circle, an abandoning of our thought-habits in order “to reach the other shore” (as it has not only been said in the *Prajñā-pāramitā-hridaya*, but already in the ancient Sutta Nipāta). This requires a complete reversal or spiritual transformation, a “turning about in the deepest seat of our consciousness”, as expressed in the Lankāvatāra-Sūtra. This reversal brings about a new spiritual outlook, similar to what the Buddha experienced when returning from the Tree of Enlightenment. A new dimension of consciousness is being opened by this experience, which transcends the limits of mundane thought.

The exploration of this consciousness, which goes beyond the boundaries of individual existence, is the special merit of the *Vijñānavādins* or *Yogācārins*, as they were also called, because they were not content merely with a theoretical exploration, but regarded practical experience as the only legitimate way for the acquisition of true knowledge. For them not the thought-process, but the consciousness itself is the ultimate judge of reality, and the deeper we descend into this reality, the clearer will its true nature reveal itself—a nature, before which all words turn back, because only negations like ‘infinity’, ‘timelessness’, ‘emptiness’ and the like, can hint at the enormity of this experience. In the universality of this primordial ground of consciousness, the *Vijñānavādins* discovered the source of all forms of existence, their dependent origination and transformation, and also their coming to rest in the state of perfect enlightenment.

If we want to give credence to the early scriptures of Buddhism, which without exception agree in their description of the *Buddha's Enlightenment*,

we can have no doubt that here we are confronted with an experience of such all-embracing universality that all limitations of time and space were transcended and with them the illusions of the substantiality of our empirical world and of our separate egohood.

Recognizing this experience as the real starting point of Buddhism and not only as a distant, more or less theoretical aim or ideal, the followers of Ch'an Buddhism in China and of Zen in Japan, try to go back to the very origin of Buddhist tradition by insisting on the spontaneity of the human mind, which basically is not different from that of the Buddha, if only we can free it from the cobwebs of habitual thought and prejudice. They maintain that we have to replace book-knowledge by direct experience, scholarliness by intuition, and the historical Buddha by the Buddha within us, i.e., by the awakening of the potentialities of our own mind which will lead to the realisation of perfect enlightenment. It is a courageous attempt, which requires complete self-dedication and complete surrender of one's whole being, without reservations, without holding back anything to which our ego can cling. It is like playing 'va banque' on the spiritual plane, a game in which one may gain everything or lose everything,—because to miss the aim even by a hair's breadth is equal to being world's apart from it. The Ch'an practice has therefore been compared to with a leap into a bottomless abyss, with a letting go of all familiar ideas and prejudices. The precipice is the unfathomable depth of our own consciousness, which yawns beyond the narrow circle of our egocentric world of illusions. In order to find the courage to leap into the depth, we require a certain inner preparation and a spiritual stimulus that is strong enough to take the risk. Unless the mind has become mature enough to recognize or to become aware of its own depth there will be no urge to explore it and no faith in the final result of this daring undertaking. It is here where the faith in the Buddha, as one who has gone this way (this is the meaning of the appellation 'Tathagata'), comes in, a faith that is justified by the result and the example of his life and the lasting effect it had on all who followed him. But unless we are ready to take the risks which the Buddha took, when he set out on his lonely way to enlightenment in the forest of Uruvela, nothing can be gained. Those who feel content in their ignorance or in their limited knowledge, will have no inclination to take this risk, either because they have not yet reached the point where the problem begins or because they trust the flimsy superstructure of their logical speculations under which the problem has been buried. The former know nothing of the gaping abyss, the latter believe that they can bridge it intellectually.

The follower of Ch'an or Zen, however, knows that all logical and philosophical solutions and definitions are limited and onesided, because reality lies beyond all contradictory, mutually exclusive pairs of opposites with which our two-dimensional logic deals. He therefore uses his thought-activity only as a means to become conscious of the unthinkable and to realize the problematic character of the world and the mystery of his own existence, without expecting solutions which go beyond the limited nature of his intellect. He therefore tries to avoid ready-made mental associations and judgements and endeavours to remain in a state of pure contemplation, seeing things as if he were seeing them for the first time, spontaneously, without prejudice, free from likes or dislikes.

Then everything will become a wonder and a door to the great mystery of life, behind which the wealth of the whole universe is hidden, together

with the Great Emptiness which makes this plenitude possible, though it may frighten us, because it is so inconceivable to our senses and appears so abysmal to our ego-centered consciousness, bent as it is to maintain its own identity. If we could give up this egocentric discriminating and dissecting attitude of our intellect even for one moment, the true nature of all things would manifest themselves "like the sun that rises through empty space and illuminates the whole universe unhindered and without limits." In other words, as soon as we succeed in silencing the restless activity of our intellect and give a chance to our intuition, the pure all-embracing spirit in us will manifest itself. We need not shun sense-activities or the perception of sense-objects, but only our ego-conditioned judgements and attitudes. We must understand that the true spirit (the depth-consciousness) expresses itself in these perceptions and sense-activities, without being dependent on them. One should not form judgements on the ground of such perceptions, nor should one allow one's thoughts to be determined and led by them. And yet one should abstain from imagining the universal consciousness as something separate from them or to renounce them in the pursuance of religious aims. (This is why asceticism was rejected by the Buddha and replaced by a control, but not by a suppression of the senses.) One should neither cling to them, nor renounce them, neither dwell upon them nor reject them, but one should remain independent of everything that is either above or below us or around us. There is no place in which Ch'an (*dhyâna*, the way of inner vision) could not be practised, because it is not concerned with an ascetic negation of the senses or the material world as conceived by the senses, but with the gaining of a deeper, wider, more universal consciousness, which comprises both sides of reality: the finite and the infinite, the material and the immaterial, mind and matter, form and the formless, the impermanent and the eternal, the conditioned and the unconditioned.

The more and the longer we can abstain from seeing things habitually, the more we shall realize their inconceivable, essentially unlimited nature. Habit kills intuition, because habit prevents living experience, direct perception. When our thinking has advanced to the point where the existential problem arises, we should not allow ourselves to be satisfied with intellectual solutions or lose ourselves in the pursuance of facts and figures, proofs and abstract truths, which are incontrovertible but have no bearing on life or which—as in the case of science—create more problems than what they can solve. But we should have the courage to penetrate to the very limits of thought, where words become paradoxes and logic turns against itself.

In the moment in which we open our inner eye—instead of looking outward into a world of apparent material reality—illusion disappears and we suddenly become aware of true reality. This is why the Dhyâna-school speaks of 'sudden enlightenment'. It is a reversal of our perspective, a new orientation, which leads to a revaluation of all values. Due to this the world of sense-perception loses its absoluteness and substantiality, and takes its rightful place in the order of relative and time-conditioned phenomena. Here begins the path of the Buddha, the path towards the realisation of Buddhahood within ourselves, as represented by the main meditation schools of Mahâyâna Buddhism like Ch'an and Zen.

Meditation was always the main requisite of the Buddhist doctrine of liberation. However, the more the different techniques of meditation, their psychological definitions and their metaphysical and philosophical principles

were explained, classified and fixed in commentaries and sub-commentaries, the more the practice of meditation was neglected and suffocated by theoretical discussions, and moral rules and regulations and endless recitations of sacred texts. The reaction was a revolt against scriptures and learnedness and a return to a more spontaneous and direct experience. The pedantry of scholastic thought and intellectual logic was countered by the weapon of the paradox, which like a sharp sword, cut through the knots of artificially created problems, with the speed of a flash of lightning that gives us a glimpse of the true nature of things. The paradox, however, is a double-edged sword. As soon as it becomes a matter of routine, it destroys the very thing which it helped to reveal. The force of a paradox, like that of a sword, lies in the unexpectedness and speed with which it is handled—otherwise it is not better than the knife in the hand of a butcher.

As an example for the ideal use of paradoxes, we may mention the Sûtra of the Sixth Patriarch. He succeeded in expressing the spiritual attitude of Ch'an in a way which neither offends our commonsense nor attempts to make commonsense the measure of all things. The reader of this scripture is introduced from the very beginning into the right atmosphere, which enables him to rise from the plane of his every-day consciousness to the spontaneous participation in the reality of a higher level of consciousness. The figure of the Sixth Patriarch impresses one by his natural spontaneity, which should be inherent in every human being and with which the unprejudiced reader can easily identify himself. In this way he is able to participate inwardly in the experiences and teachings of the Sixth Patriarch, whose very life has become a symbol of Ch'an Buddhism at its best.

The novice of Kwang-tung, whose mind was not yet burdened by any philosophical problem, penetrates spontaneously into the centre of spiritual life: the experience of Buddhahood. This experience does not depend on monastic rules and learnedness, on asceticism and virtuousness, on book-knowledge and the recitation of sacred texts, but only on the realisation of the living spirit within us.

The Sixth Patriarch attained to a state of spontaneous enlightenment without study and book-knowledge, though on the other hand it was through listening to the recitation of the Diamond Sûtra that his interest was aroused and his spiritual eye was opened. Spontaneous experience, therefore, can very well be the product of an ancient hallowed tradition, if this tradition contains symbols of a supra-mental reality of formulations which lead the mind beyond the narrow circle of mundane reasoning. In the unexpected clash between a sensitive mind and such symbols and formulations the doors of inner perception are suddenly opened and enable the individual to identify himself with this supra-mental reality contained in those mysterious formulations and symbols.

The Sixth Patriarch came from a good but impoverished family in Kwang-tung. One day while he was selling fire-wood on the market of Kanton, he listened to the recitation of the Diamond Sûtra, and this evoked such a deep response in him, that he decided to enter a monastery of the Ch'an school, whose abbot was the Fifth Patriarch. He became a novice there, and as such he was given the lowliest work in the monastery's stable and kitchen. One day the abbot called up all his disciples in order to choose his successor. He asked them to write a stanza about the innermost nature of the mind,

However, nobody dared to do this, with the exception of the learned Shin-shau whom everybody regarded already as the successor of the Fifth Patriarch. He wrote his verse on the wall of the corridor, in order to find out the opinion of the Patriarch and to announce his authorship only if the Patriarch was pleased with the stanza. The Patriarch, however, though he praised the lines, asked Shin-shau to meditate upon them a few days more and then to write another stanza which showed that its author had passed through 'the gate of enlightenment', in other words, that he had really experienced what he wrote about.

Two days later it happened that a young man, who passed by the room, in which the young novice from Kwang-tung was husking rice, recited aloud the stanza of Shin-shau. The novice thereupon went into the corridor where Shin-shau had written his stanza and asked a visitor, whom he met there by chance, to read the verse for him, since he himself could neither read nor write. After the visitor had read out the verse to him, the novice said that he had also composed a stanza and asked him to write it under the lines of Shin-shau.

When the other monks saw the new stanza, they were filled with wonder and said to each other : "How was it possible that we allowed such an enlightened person to work for us?"—The Patriarch, however, who feared the jealousy of the other monks, who might harm the novice, if they knew that he was to become his successor, erased the stanza with one of his sandals and asked the young man to call on him during the night. When everybody in the monastery was deep asleep, he gave the novice the insignias of his future office and made him the Sixth Patriarch. He then bade him to leave the monastery at once and to return only after the passing away of the Fifth Patriarch. He did so, and when he returned with the robes of office, he was recognized as the Sixth Patriarch.

Let us now consider the stanzas of Shin-shau and of the Sixth Patriarch, because they give us a valuable insight into the mental attitude of the Ch'an School. The stanza of Shin-shau ran :

"Our body is like a bodhi-tree,
Our mind like a clear mirror;
From hour to hour it must be cleansed,
So that no dust can collect upon it."

This verse does not only show a pedantic concern for the preservation of the purity of the 'inner mirror' (the Original Mind—which is at any rate beyond 'purity' and 'impurity'), but apart from this it shows that the author of this stanza does not speak from his own experience, but only as a man of letters, because this verse is based on a saying in the Svetasvatara Upanishad :

"Just as a mirror, that was covered with dust
Shines forth like fire, if it is cleansed,
In the same way will he, who has realized the nature of
the soul,
Attain the goal and liberate himself from grief."

Thus Shin-shau was only repeating the standpoint of the Upanishads, without having experienced the reality of the Original Mind, while the young novice, who had grasped the quintessence of the Diamond Sūtra in an act of direct

perception, had experienced in that moment the true nature of the mind. This is shown by his stanza, which at the same time rejects that of Shin-shau by revealing the Buddhist point of view, as understood by the masters of Ch'an:

"The Bodhi is not a tree at all,
Nor is the mind a case of mirrors.
When everything is empty,
Where could the dust collect?"

The Original Mind, realized as the "Buddha Mind" or the principle of 'bodhi', which is a latent property of every consciousness, is not only a reflection of the universe—something that 'mirrors' the universe—but it is the universal reality itself. To the limited intellect it can only appear as a kind of metaphysical emptiness, the absence of all qualities and possibilities of definition. 'Bodhi' is therefore not something that has originated or grown like a tree, neither is the mind a mere mirror, which only reflects reality in a secondary capacity. Since the mind is itself the all-embracing emptiness (*śūnyatā*), where could dust ever collect? "The essence of the mind is great, we say, because it embraces all things, for all things are of our nature." Thus it is not a question to improve or to cleanse our mind, but to become conscious of its universality. What we can improve is our intellect, our limited individual consciousness. This, however, can never lead us beyond its own limits, because we remain in the strictly circumscribed circle of its inherent laws (of time and space, of logic and causality). Only the leap across the boundary, the giving up of all those contents which fetter us to those laws, can give us the experience of the totality of the spirit and the realisation of its true nature, which is what we call Enlightenment.

The true nature of our mind embraces all that lives. The Bodhisattva-vow to free all living beings is therefore not as presumptuous as it sounds. It is not born from the illusion that a mortal man could set himself up as the saviour of all beings or the redeemer of the whole world, but it is an outcome of the realisation that only in the state of enlightenment we shall be able to become one with all that lives. In this act of unification we liberate ourselves and all living beings which are potentially present and are part of it in the deepest sense. This is the reason, why according to the teachings of the Mahâyâna, the liberation from one's own sufferings, the mere extinction of the will to live and of all desires, is regarded as insufficient, and why the striving after perfect enlightenment (*samyak-sambodhi*) is regarded as the only goal worthy of a follower of the Buddha. As long as we despise the world and merely try to escape from it, we have neither overcome it nor mastered it and are far from having attained liberation. Therefore it is said: "This world is the Buddha-world, within which enlightenment can be found. To search after enlightenment by separating oneself from the world is as foolish as searching for the horn of a hare." For: "He who treads earnestly the path of the world, will not see the faults of the world."

In a similar way we should not imagine that by the suppression of thought or of our intellectual faculties we can attain enlightenment. "It is a great mistake to suppress all thought" says Wai-Lang, the Sixth Patriarch. Ch'an is the way to overcome the limitations of our intellectual attitude. But first we must have developed our intellect, our capacity to think, to reason and to discern, before we are able to appreciate Ch'an. We cannot overcome or go beyond the intellect, if we never 'had one', i.e., if we never developed and

mastered it; because only what we master is really our own. The intellect is as necessary for the overcoming of mere emotionality and muddleheadedness, as intuition is necessary for overcoming the limitations of the intellect and its discriminations.

Reason, the highest property of the intellect, is what guides our purposive thought. Purposes, however, are limited; and therefore reason can only operate in what is limited. Wisdom (*prajñā*) alone can accept and intuitively realize the unlimited, the timeless and infinite, by renouncing explanations and by recognizing the mystery, which can only be felt, experienced and finally realised in life—but which can never be defined. Wisdom has its roots in experience, in the realisation of our innermost being. Reason has its roots in thought. Yet wisdom will not despise either thought or reason, but will use them where they belong, namely in the realm of purposeful action as well as for science and for co-ordinating our sense-impressions, perceptions, sensations, feelings and emotions into a meaningful whole.

Here the creative side of our thought comes into play, which converts the raw material of experience into a reasonable world. How big or how small this world is, depends on the creative faculty of the individual mind. The small mind lives in the world of his ephemeral needs and desires, the great mind in the infinity of the universe and in the constant awareness of that fathomless mystery which gives depth and width to his life and thus prevents him from mistaking his sense-world for ultimate reality. He, however, who has penetrated to the limits of thought dares to take the leap into the Great Emptiness, the primordial ground of his own boundless being.