

Right The Chinese communists dismantled the system whereby one quarter of the men in Tibet were monks, supported by the laity and holding considerable secular power. But spirituality persists among the people, who include full-length prostrations in their prayers.



Far right One of the most beloved of Tibetan Buddhist deities is Tara. She is savior and mother of the world; she protects us and helps us to achieve our spiritual longings. (Detail of Tibetan thangka, 18th/19th century, tempera on cotton.)



headquarters, Dharamsala, in the mountains of northern India. A repository of traditional Tibetan culture, it has become a magnet for spiritual seekers.

Despite persecution, religious fervor and ceremony still pervade every aspect of Tibetan life, from house-raising to ardent pilgrimages. Monks and laypeople alike meditate on *thang-kas* and **mandalas**, visual aids to concentration and illumination, which portray a Buddha or Bodhisattva surrounded by deities in a diagram symbolically representing the universe. Both also chant mantras. A favorite one is the phrase associated with the beloved Tibetan Bodhisattva of mercy, Avalokitesvara: *Om mani padme hum*. It evokes awareness of the “jewel in the lotus of the heart,” that beautiful treasure lying hidden within each of us. Because some emphasis is placed on the number of repetitions, mantras are written out thousands of times and spun in prayer wheels or placed on prayer flags which continue the repetition of the mantra as they blow in the wind.

Zen: the great way of enlightenment

Buddhism was transmitted from India to China around 50 CE and thence to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, absorbing elements of Taoism along the way. Then, according to tradition, in the fifth century, Bodhidharma, a successor to the Buddha, traveled from southern China to a monastery in northern China. There he reportedly spent nine years in silent meditation, “facing the wall.” On this

RELIGION IN PUBLIC LIFE

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Surely one of the best-known and most-loved spiritual leaders in the world, His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama is a striking example of Buddhist peace and compassion. Wherever he goes, he greets everyone with evident delight. Even when addressing audience of thousands, he looks around the hall with a broad, childlike grin, which seems directed to each person individually. His example is all the more powerful because he is the leader in exile of Tibet, a small nation that knew extreme oppression and suffering during the twentieth century.

The simplicity of His Holiness's words and bearing give no evidence of his intellectual power. His Holiness was only a peasant child of two in 1937 when he was located and carefully identified as the reincarnation of the thirteenth Dalai Lama. He was formally installed as the fourteenth Dalai Lama when he was only four and a half years old, thus becoming the spiritual and temporal ruler of Tibet. He was raised and rigorously educated in Lhasa in the Potala. One of the world's largest buildings, it then contained huge ceremonial halls, thirty-five chapels, meditation cells, the government storehouses, national treasures, all records of Tibetan history and culture in 7,000 huge volumes, plus 2,000 illuminated volumes of the Buddhist scriptures. He was educated according to the traditional system of Tibet, which stressed broadening and developing the mind to acquire many kinds of knowledge and also to study and practice advanced Buddhist teachings.

Such a rigorous grounding in religion, maintains the Dalai Lama, brings steadiness of mind in the face of any misfortunes. He says,

Humanitarianism and true love for all beings can only stem from an awareness of the content of religion. By whatever name religion may be known, its understanding and practice are the essence of a peaceful mind and therefore of a peaceful world. If there is no peace in one's mind, there can be no peace in one's approach to others, and thus no peaceful relations between individuals or between nations.²⁸

The Dalai Lama's equanimity of mind must have been sorely challenged by the Chinese invasion and

oppression of his small country. In 1959, when he escaped from Tibet to lessen the potential for bloodshed during a widespread popular revolt against the Chinese, Tibet was home to more than 6,000 monasteries. Only twelve of them were still intact by 1980. It is said that at least one million Tibetans have died as a direct result of the Chinese occupation, and the violence against the religion, the culture, and the people of Tibet continues today as Chinese settlers fill the country.

In the face of the overwhelming military power of the Chinese, and in any case armed with Buddhist precepts, the Dalai Lama has persistently tried to steer his people away from violent response to violence. Asserting that

"Nonviolence is the only way. . . . It's a slower process sometimes, but a very effective one," he explains:

Practically speaking, through violence we may achieve something, but at the expense of someone else's welfare. That way, although we may solve one problem, we simultaneously seed a new problem. The best way to solve problems is through human understanding, mutual respect. On one side make some concessions; on the other side take serious consideration about the problem. There may not be complete satisfaction, but something happens. At least future danger is avoided. Non-violence is very safe.²⁹

While slowly, patiently trying to influence world opinion so that the "weak" voice of Tibet will not be extinguished by Chinese might, the Dalai Lama has established an entire government in exile in Dharamsala, India, in the Himalayas. There he and Tibetan refugees have built schools, orphanages, hospitals, craft cooperatives, farming communities, monasteries, and groups preserving traditional music and drama. From this base, he travels tirelessly, and with a punishing schedule. In his effort to keep the voice of Tibet alive, he has also emerged as a great moral leader in the world. His quintessentially Buddhist message to people of all religions is that only through kindness and compassion toward each other and the cultivation of inner peace shall we all survive as a species.



experiential foundation, he became the first patriarch of the radical path that came to be called Ch'an Buddhism, from the Sanskrit *dhyana*, the yogic stage of meditation. Although this traditional account of its origins and founder is not fully accepted by scholars as absolute fact, it is known that this way was transmitted to Japan, where its name became **Zen**.

Zen claims to preserve the essence of the Buddha's teachings through direct experience, triggered by mind-to-mind transmission of the *dharma*. It dismissed scriptures, Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas in favor of training for direct intuition of cosmic unity, known as the **Buddha-nature** or the Void.

A central way of directly experiencing the underlying unity is *zazen* (sitting meditation). "To sit," said the Sixth Zen Patriarch, "means to obtain absolute freedom and not to allow any thought to be caused by external objects. To meditate means to realize the imperturbability of one's original nature."³⁰

*The Great Way is not difficult
for those who have no preferences.
When love and hate are both absent
everything becomes clear and undisguised.
Make the smallest distinction, however,
and heaven and earth are set infinitely apart.*

Sengtsan³¹

Prescriptions for the manner of sitting are quite rigorous: one must take a specific upright posture and then not move during the meditation period, to avoid distracting the mind. Skillful means are then applied to make the mind one-pointed and clear. One beginning practice is simply to watch and count each inhalation and exhalation from one to ten, starting over from one if anything other than awareness of the breath enters the mind. Although this explanation sounds simple, the mind is so restless that many people must work for months before finally getting to ten without having to start over. Getting to ten is not really the goal; the goal is the process itself, the process of recognizing what comes up in the mind and gently letting it go without attachment or preferences.

As one sits in *zazen*, undisturbed by phenomena, as soon as one becomes inwardly calm, the natural mind is revealed in its original purity. This "original mind" is spacious and free, like an open sky. Thoughts and sensations may float through it like clouds, but they arise and then disappear, leaving no trace. What remains is reality, "True Thusness." In some Zen schools, this perception of thusness comes in a sudden burst of enlightenment, or *kensho*.

When the mind is calmed, action becomes spontaneous and natural. Zen practitioners are taught to have great confidence in their natural functioning, for it arises from our essential Buddha-nature. It is said that two Zen monks, on becoming enlightened, ran naked through the woods scribbling on rocks.

On the other hand, the Zen tradition links spontaneity with intense, disciplined concentration. In the art of calligraphy, the perfect spontaneous brushstroke—executed with the whole body, in a single breath—is the outcome of years of attentive practice. Giving ourselves fully to the moment, to be aware only of pouring tea when pouring tea, is a simplicity of beingness that most of us have to learn. Then whatever we give ourselves to fully, be it painting, or serving

Zen Oxherding Pictures

The ten Zen Oxherding Pictures metaphorically illustrate the stages along the spiritual path, with the meaning of each picture to be found through meditation. We are the herdsman (worldly self) who is searching for the elusive ox (our true nature) in the wilderness. In the second picture, the herdsman notices the footprints of the ox. In the third, he catches sight of the ox. In the fourth, he struggles mightily to grasp the ox. In the fifth, he tames the ox with tether and whip, until "well tended and domesticated, the ox grows pure and gentle."

In the sixth stage (illustrated upper right), the seeker has found and tamed the ox and leisurely returns home riding high upon it, playing tunes "full of infinite meaning." In the seventh, he reaches his home but the ox disappears.

In the eighth stage (below left), both ox and herdsman have disappeared—"Whip, tether, person, ox: ALL IS EMPTY! Blue sky, all and all around." In the ninth stage, Returning to the Source, "Inside his hut, he does not see any object outside." The final, tenth stage (below right), the enlightened one returns to the marketplace with helping hands and a wide grin on his face.¹¹

Brush and ink drawings by Gyokusei Jikihara





Ceremonial tea in Japan, a ritual way of inculcating direct awareness, simplicity, and self-restraint.

tea, or simply breathing, reveals the “thusness of life,” its unconditioned reality.

Another tool used in one Zen tradition is the *koan*. Here the attention is focused ardently on a question that boggles the mind, such as “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” or “What is your face before your parents’ birth?” As Roshi (venerable teacher) Philip Kapleau observes, “*Koans* deliberately throw sand into the eyes of the intellect to force us to open our Mind’s eye and see the world and everything in it undistorted by our concepts and judgments.” To concentrate on a *koan*, one must look closely at it without thinking about it, experiencing it directly. Beyond abstractions, Roshi Kapleau explains, “The import of every *koan* is the same: that the world is one interdependent Whole and that each separate one of us is that Whole.”³³

The aim of Zen practice is enlightenment, or *satori*. One directly experiences the unity of all existence, often in a sudden recognition that nothing is separate from oneself. As one Zen master put it:

*The moon’s the same old moon,
The flowers exactly as they were,
Yet I’ve become the thingness
Of all the things I see!*³⁴

All aspects of life become at the same time utterly precious, and utterly empty, “nothing special.” This paradox can be sensed only with the mystically expanded consciousness; it cannot be grasped intellectually.

Pure Land: calling on Amida Buddha

Zen is essentially an inner awareness in which great attention is given to every action; it has little appeal for the laity. Other forms developed in India and the Far East have much greater popular appeal. One of the major trends is known as