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 audiences 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 know 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 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 broadcasting 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.

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 1960. 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, we may solve one problem, we simultaneously sow 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. Nonviolence is very safe.

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 panarch of the ethical path that
came to be called Chan 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 com-
mitted to Japan, where it is known as 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, Buddhah, and bodhisattvas in favor of training for direct intuition of
atonic 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 free-
dom and not to allow any thought to be caused by external objects. To meditate
means to realize the imperturbability of one’s original nature.”

The Great Way is not difficult
for those who have no preferences.
When joy and hate are both absent,
everything becomes clear and undisturbed.

Make the smallest distinction, however,
and heaven and earth are set infinitely apart.

Sengketsu

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 distorting 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 meet for months
before finally getting to zen without having to start over. Getting to zen 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 flow
through it like clouds, but they arise and then disappear, leaving no trace. What
remains is reality, “That Truthness.” In some Zen schools, this perception of truth-
ess comes in a sudden burst of enlightenment, or kensho.
When the mind is calm, action becomes spontaneous and natural. Zen prac-
tice teaches 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 Ox Herding Pictures

The ten Zen Ox Herding 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 footprint 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 a stick 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 briefly returns home empty-handed, 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, stick, 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.  

Brush and ink drawings by Gyokusho Jikuhana
tea, or simply breathing, reveals the “busyness of life” as unconditioned reality. Another tool used in one Zen tradition is the kōan. Here the attention is focused ardently on a question that hobbles 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 observed, “Kōan 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 unhindered by our concepts and judgments.” To concentrate on a kōan, one must look closely at it without thinking about it, experiencing it directly. Beyond abstractions, Roshi Kapleau explains, “The import of every kōan is the same: that the world is one interdependent Whole and that each separate one of us is that Whole.”

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 thinginess
Of all the things I see!

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 arising; 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