

Preface

Zen is Taoism disguised as Buddhism. [...] The spirit of Zen is about naturalness, spontaneity, and inner freedom.

The Way that is common to Taoism and Zen escapes definition. In both traditions it is undefinable and unexplainable, elusive, frustratingly near and far, always close yet just outside intellect's reach.

The Historical Connections

Because it was beyond words it was simply called the Way, the Tao. [...] (The) original Taoism was known at first as Quietism. Based on personal experience rather than belief, it would have no part of organized religion, rituals, and priests. Knowledge and influence came from within, not from institutionalized systems.

Much of Taoist literature is an admonishment against becoming caught in any system, whether moral, political, philosophical, linguistic, or religious. With such freedom, belief is replaced by experience.

Their Taoism involved, ostensibly, no belief; it was and continues to be an aesthetic philosophy rather than a religion.

The purpose of protracted sitting is not to perpetuate itself but to release the practitioner into the spontaneity and freedom of merely being.

Ch'an

The essential attributes of philosophical Taoism: a thoughtless spontaneity in both action and inaction; a merging of self with a larger natural oneness; an honoring of nature through experience and imagery; an aversion to the dogma imposed by words and institutions.

Hui-Neng

Sitting meditation defeats its own purpose by deliberately attempting to eliminate the very thing that can only be done by not deliberately doing it.

Life creates death for a Taoist; **the incomparable experience of being alive requires an end that enhances the value of living.**

Zen Without Buddhism

Taoism is not religious like Buddhism. [...] Buddhism, in effect, rejects the world, viewing it as a place of suffering, transience, and imperfections; Zen accepts the world exactly as it is, unconditionally receiving whatever experience is offered. [...] **Zen includes Buddhism but Buddhism does not include Zen.**

(The Buddha's) conclusion was to believe and trust nothing but experience.
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Everyone (is) enlightened, just as everyone, conscious or not, willing or not, (follows) the Tao.

The only purpose of any consideration of Zen is eventually to be freed of that consideration.

The purpose of the formal sitting of *zazen* is to become calm and empty, to shed everything -- even the shedding -- so that there is no sitting, no sitter, not even Buddhism or the Buddha.

Zazen (formal, sitting meditation) is about Buddhism, not about Zen.

The aliveness of Zen has entirely to do with eliminating the conceptualizations that organize, categorize and institutionalize experience.

All the teachings of Buddhism and all the disciplines of Zen Buddhism are not Zen.

The process of searching for Zen seems at first to be a further violation of Zen.

Induced silence and enforced stillness are not Taoism or Zen.

Everyday Zen

All the scholarly literature and all the searching discussion about Zen are merely intellectual exercises that have little to do with Zen itself. [...] **Zen just is.**

When stripped of formality and returned to its natural shape, Zen is earthy and ordinary. Nothing special.

Zen is not the dismissal of awareness; it is awareness uninhibited by reflection upon itself.

Everyday moments become the stillness of sitting meditation. [...] Immersion in the everyday is the essential practice of the Taoist sage.

The deliberate, conscious practice of Zen is a self-defeating process, an exercise in futility.

The simplicity is the difficulty. [...] The whole experience of life is enlightenment itself.

(Zen is) a holistic way of being ordinary. [...] The goal of the inner practice is to transform the process of living into an artful union with the outer world.

Everyday Zen, like philosophical Taoism, runs the risk of being too subtle to be noticed at all, too ordinary even to be recognized.

Zen and Buddhism (are) related but not synonymous. [...] Most people have no conceptual grasp of Zen, which is the best approach to it.

(Zen) has always been the essential wisdom of nature, and the enlivening force in human insight and creativity.

When (Zen) is itself, it is so uncontrived and subtle that it goes nearly unnoticed. **And no one can deliberately do it.**

The Tao is too ordinary to be understood.

(Taoism and Zen) distrust words and systems. Both depreciate ego and a mindfulness that is deliberately self-conscious. Spontaneity is cultivated.

Emptiness is espoused as a condition of total receptivity.

(The main purpose of Zen and Taoism) is full engagement in physical existence through the “cultivation of the inner life.”

Anything that can be said about (Zen and Taoism) is incomplete, misleading, and largely wrong. [...] **One uttered word of explanation is wrong, but silence is not enough.**

Anyone who knows anything about Taoism and Zen will recognize that analyzing them so they can be considered and compared -- indeed, writing anything about them -- is fundamentally foolish.

The Way is sensed directly, without verbalizing, theorizing, or philosophizing.

Taoism and Zen do not evolve toward some advanced knowing but, instead, revert to an earlier condition of simple clarity. The process of unlearning becomes more important than learning; emptying is given precedence over filling. Then, without apparent effort or struggle, without apparent thought or knowing, the unlearning somehow engenders insight, and the emptiness is filled.

Zen in the West

Most people have no conceptual grasp of Zen, which is the best approach to it.

Zen has always been the essential wisdom of nature, and the enlivening force in human insight and creativity. [...] Almost everyone knows about (Zen), but almost no one knows what to do about it. [...] When it is itself, it is so uncontrived and subtle that it goes nearly unnoticed, or it passes for luck or grace or some nameless equivalent. Like Taoism, it happens but few recognize it. **And no one can deliberately do it.**

Wordlessness

The essence of Taoism and Zen cannot be expressed in words, so both traditions express caution about using them. [...] Words are to be avoided, yet they are unavoidable. [...] The problem with words is that they confuse the distinction between metaphorical experience and direct experience. [...] Care must be taken that the spell of words is not mistaken for direct awareness. [...] Never mistake the word for the thing.

Because the mystery cannot be known or named, it is called the Tao.

One can in fact say things that sound alright but mean nothing at all.
(Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power*)

Words transfer the immediacy and power of direct experience into the fiction and vicariousness of metaphors. These metaphors are then mistaken for suchness or just-so-ness, as if naming a thing somehow bestows on it authenticity and irrefutability.

Language, like pure intellect, moves experience inexorably into the abstract, away from the finality of grounded reality.

The Way can be entered only without words. But it cannot be approached without words.

Selflessness

Selflessness is not a denial of self; instead, it is a kind of distancing that permits self to function in the context of not-self.

Self is treated as a part of consciousness but not as the locus of consciousness. [...] Rather than a static thing, self can be thought of as a shifting reference position for consciousness. #

Not even personality has to be taken personally.

The way to be free of a constricting self is to accept it. [...] All effort to negate self only succeeds in affirming it. [...] Self is not a thing but a reference position.

At the end of this process, there is still a body that walks, eats, and talks; **there is still a consciousness although it is no longer bound to a center that is rigidly defined as self.**

(The self) eventually becomes a kind of universal self, the embodiment in one person of everything that is in all people.

Selflessness cannot be reached deliberately; it cannot be cultivated or contrived. It just happens spontaneously as the conceptual habits of a confining consciousness give way to **a consciousness that is nonconceptual.**

The world is experienced more directly and immediately as selfless insights see things the way they are rather than the way self wants them to be.

Since self cannot be eliminated by deliberate willfulness its diminished by a passive process, one that permits self to recede gently in its own way and in its own time. This happens by mindfulness alone. [...] The inner rebalancing must take place without deliberate effort.

Softness

There is structure in the tumult, patterns in the chaos. Such a principle is the underlying character of Taoism and Zen.

By yielding...

overcome.

By bending...

remain straight.

Softness overcomes hardness.

The formless is greater than the form.

Without any rules to follow, an appropriate response is possible to all situations.

Trying to define art, like trying to define Taoism and Zen, is a waste of time.

It takes a special discipline to release the preconceptions and reflexes that prevent a fluid spontaneity of response.

Emptying of certainty, even the deliberate cultivation of profound confusion, is really a means of softening, of opening, of becoming so inclusive that nothing is excluded.

Taoism and Zen cannot properly be understood, but they can be experienced. #

Insight in Taoism gradually surfaces through a process of elimination, by discovering what is not the Way. This process continues until a “feeling” begins to coalesce. This feeling falls entirely outside the bounds of explanation or rules.

The *koan* process is really an incisively calculated technique to induce a **state of softness or receptivity through absolute uncertainty**.

The Way is finally accessible when softening has dissolved the structures of thought and feeling that obstruct spontaneous being. [...] A condition of moment-by-moment insight unbounded by conceptual limits. [...] A sense of contextual perspective that places each act and instant in the center of a balanced unfolding. [...] Things are permitted to be received as they are without idealizing or romanticizing them, without denying or regretting them.

Things are as they are and as they are becoming, and once you realize this in its active, not resigned, meaning there is nothing really to worry about. -- R.H. Blyth, *Games Zen Masters Play*

All questioning is a way of avoiding the real answer which, as Zen tells us, is really known already.

Oneness

Words are separateness; oneness is something more than words can say. Words cannot explain oneness, but they can point beyond themselves to something unsayable.

All words are a necessary futility.

Detachment invites opening and receptivity. [...] A new state of awareness is reached without any apparent connection to the previous one.

All things are terms, not entities. They exist in the abstract world of thought, but not in the concrete world of nature. -- Alan Watts

Any word, any notion, any intellectual conceptualization, any serious invention by thought shatters the delicate spell of oneness. [...] The goal of Taoism and Zen is to return to this oneness while **allowing the game of separateness**.

Because of oneness, nothing matters; because of separateness, everything matters.

Oneness is experienced as a great stillness, as an emptiness in which all separateness happens. #

Emptiness

Emptiness is a special kind of something. The limits of all things are defined by it. Everything that exists is contained in emptiness. Emptiness is what everything else cannot be. #

Zen is often described as taking away everything that is not Zen. And the Tao is essentially discovered by learning what not to be and do. [...] **The Way in both Taoism and Zen is approached by emptying, by abandoning what is not the Way, by eliminating questions rather than finding answers, by opening to what cannot be known.**

The Way can be recognized but not explained. #

*There is no greater sin than desire,
No greater curse than discontent,
No greater misfortune
than wanting something for oneself.*

*He who is attached to things
will suffer much.*

(Ease, freedom, spontaneity, timing) can occur only without a conscious intention to make them happen. [...] Any considered awareness of this process subverts the Way by converting it into something deliberate. Saying it, spoils it; thinking it, loses it; doing it, destroys it.

How can we receive the world if we have no inner emptiness. #

The appropriate receptivity only happens when emptiness arrives of itself. #

Nothingness

Whereas emptiness is relative, nothingness is absolute, a notion that cannot be conceived and does not have a conceivable counterpart.

Nothingness and everything become the same experience as they conceptually disappear in opposite directions into the one absolute.

Nothingness is the defining background that gives meaning and perspective to the foreground of all experience. Like emptiness gives context to fullness, nothingness gives context to awareness. #

This nothingness in Zen, like the Taoist's Tao, is a pervasive, unknowable something that has all the attributes of nothing yet is somehow something.

The first and most difficult step in reaching nothingness, the crucial phase, is reaching this point of crises that demands **a total surrender to the overwhelming complexity of understanding.**

The wisdom, the peace, the grace of Taoism and Zen come from a special uncertainty. The result is **a condition of perpetual preparedness, an easy readiness** that takes an appropriate shape for every particular circumstance.

After awareness has been transformed by nothingness, everything is the same as before except that the old is now fresh, alive, and meaningfully ordered.

To know that there is nothing to know, and to grieve that it is so difficult to communicate this "nothing to know" to others -- this is the life of Zen, this is the deepest thing in the world.

The Tao is the nothingness that is everything. [...] It can be neither lost nor found. It cannot be explained with words. It cannot be known with thoughts.
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Balance

The essence of Taoism and Zen is the art of living rather than the philosophy of life. #

Suzuki Roshi on the inner experience of Zen: The sights we see from the train will change, but we are always running on the same track. And there is no beginning or end to the track.

In both Taoism and Zen the objective seems to be to bring one's own balance into accord with the larger balance. [...] **Nothing needs to be done or changed.** [...] **Balance is the full acceptance of each instant.**

Balance is also inseparable from emptiness, nothingness, softness, selflessness, and those other terms that constitute the language of Taoism and Zen.

Paradox

Paradox bewilders thinking that is bound by the conditions of language. Taoism and Zen use paradox to create an insight that cannot be explained by any system of understanding. (To generate) an awareness that is neither logical or linear.

We cannot practice...unless we cease to care whether the world yields to us or not; and for that very reason it will yield.

Wanting gets in the way of having; seeking to know obstructs the knowing.

Explanation fails. Language fails. That is exactly what is supposed to happen. Words are clearly limited since every word is defined by every other word.

The Tao is unavoidable because “you yourself” are it. But the paradox is that it cannot be deliberately practiced.

Non-Doing

Non-doing is action or inaction that occurs spontaneously, selflessly, and unconditionally.

When non-doing appears as inaction it is peaceful, silent and still; when it appears as action it is thoughtless, reflexive, and intuitive.

Even the simple art of living proceeds best without the fumbling deliberations of a self. Life is lived best when it is living itself.

Real calmness should be found in activity itself.

Everything is allowed to change in concurrence with an inherent and unknowable order that is synonymous with the Taoist and Zen notion of the Way. An inner stillness is prerequisite to outer influence.

The true purpose is to see things as they are, to observe things as they are, and **to let everything go as it goes.**

Everything is crucially important yet not one thing matters. #

Spontaneity

Freedom from distraction allows the spontaneity that is key to the practice of Taoism and Zen.

The unfolding of circumstances proceeds with an inherent wisdom that is greater than one's own deliberateness. Spontaneity happens when there is no interference with this larger wisdom.

Spontaneity begins with a subtle and delicate detachment, a gentle and patient distancing from what is learned, from what is considered, and from what is owned as personal. The purpose of detachment in Taoism and Zen is to provide the necessary space in which direct and spontaneous action can occur. Such distancing prevents the doing from being crowded by deliberation. At the same time, it permits a special closeness.

It is helpful to **think of this inner space as a process rather than a thing**, as a condition of consciousness that experiences but does not conceptualize.

The sage is guided by what he feels and not by what he sees.

The Way in Taoism and Zen is more accurately an aesthetic process of being than a philosophy of life.

Spontaneity must derive from both the inner world that is called self and the outer self that is called the world.

When all doing is happening with the spontaneity of just being ordinary, this is living the practice of Taoism and Zen. The simplicity of this process becomes difficult only when considered.

The water moves but the river remains unchanged. The river is the stillness; the flowing of the water is the moving circumstances. [...] **Zen is not something that changes and grows; it is the changing and growing itself.** [...] Trust the changing more than the change.

Ordinariness

The real answer to any fundamental question is experience itself. The first mistake is asking the first question. Ordinary experience, just being natural, is the answer to all fundamental questions. [...] The trick is to be wholly empty while remaining receptive to concrete and specific experience. **The boundless mystery of life is vividly explained merely by being alive.**

Being fully present explains the meaning of life; being wholly empty provides the receptivity that understands this explanation. #

Playfulness

The instinct that holds life as valuable must also hold it as worthless. Without this balance of opposite measures, life would be a commodity too valuable to spend on living.

When placed beside the serious finality of life, the rules of people seem relative, arbitrary, and often foolish.

In Zen, laughter is not merely permitted, it is insisted upon. -- The World of Zen by Nancy Ross

The grandness of self-importance is the empty bubble so easily popped by the common act of dying.

Suchness

It is simply what is --experience without any complications from questions, considerations, concepts, or thoughts. It is reached by emptying. [...] Suchness is everything intrinsically itself. It is the result of direct experience without any interference by symbolism, metaphor, judgment, prejudice, or systems. #

In the pursuit of Tao, every day something is dropped. --The Lao Tzu

Words chase themselves in circles trying to explain things that are not words. The best language can do is point to suchness. **Suchness is there in the emptiness that fills with awareness.**

It is reality experienced directly with an unconcerned mind, with a totally neutral attitude, with an absolute indifference that is fully present in the fullness of each moment. Suchness is only suchness when it is so engaged in experience that it is wholly unaware of itself.

In Taoism and Zen, suchness is accommodated by emptying. This is the process of clearing away the attitudes, the judgements, the roles, and all the conditioned patterns of thinking and feeling that shape ordinary experience. This means no questions, no answers, no explanations, no justification, no rationalizations, no utilitarianism. It also means no moralizing, no personifying, no empathizing. In brief, none of the ways in which experience is directed by purposefulness, self-centeredness, and the dispositions of learning.

Suchness disappears promptly when it becomes associated with religion.

Our existence is nothing but a succession of moments perceived through the senses. -- Jean Jacques Rousseau

Time without self is timeless.

The essential nature of suchness is profound neutrality, inner stillness, and clarity that sees through the contesting poles of right and wrong, guilt and innocence, justice and injustice. [...] **Suchness has no room for the conflict of good and bad.**

Self (is) a soft and flexible persona (that) is worn for the practical purpose of identification. (I am not Steve Mays, I am only called Steve Mays)
Self cannot reach suchness carrying the weight of its own awareness. [...] Awareness that is not personalized is not burdened or confined, is not encumbered or distracted.

“I don’t have to have faith. I have experience.” -- Joseph Campbell

Suchness is reached by letting go of everything, by completely trusting the inner process of emptying.

“The true mind is ‘no-mind’, which is to say that it is not to be regarded as an object or thought or action, as if it were a thing to be grasped and controlled. The attempt to work on one’s own mind is a vicious circle.” -- Alan Watts

Emptiness is the cleansing condition that allows suchness to arise as fullness. This experience cannot be manufactured by effort or will; it cannot be devised or contrived by thought. Like the Way of Taoism and Zen, suchness just comes of itself. “It” happens when “It” is ready. Then a new awareness is born from the old. And the end is recognized as the beginning.

<u>Word</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
zen	65
taoism	30
experience	25
words	18
process	15
suchness	15
emptiness	14
world	12
spontaneity	12

awareness	12
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