

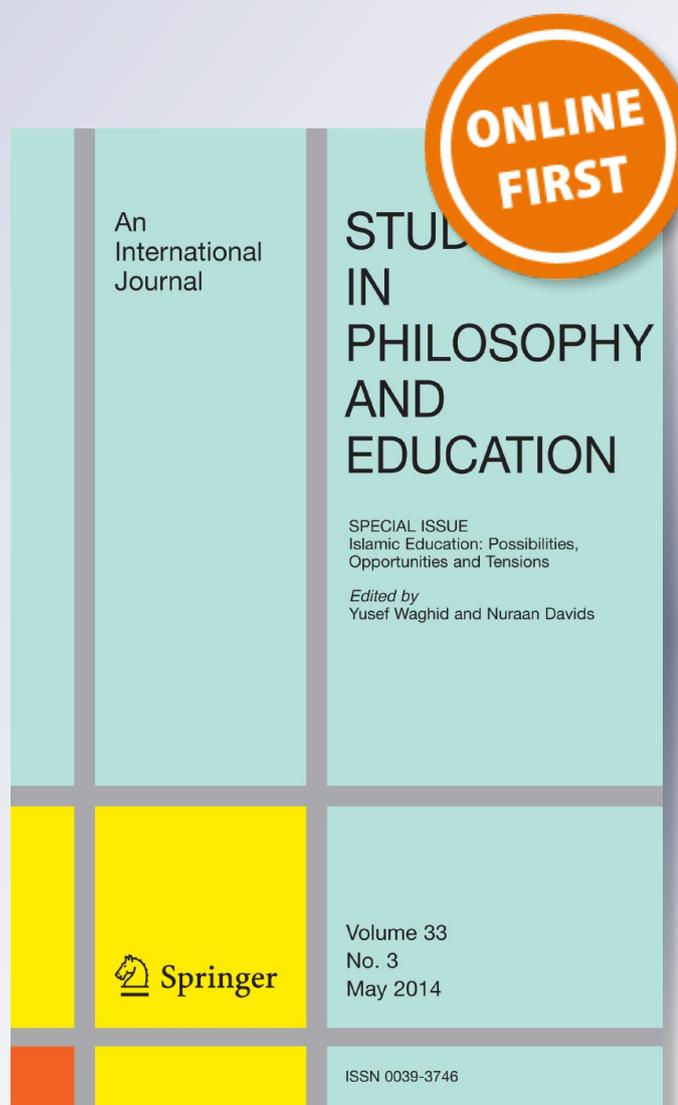
Zen and the Art of Storytelling

Heesoon Bai & Avraham Cohen

Studies in Philosophy and Education
An International Journal

ISSN 0039-3746

Stud Philos Educ
DOI 10.1007/s11217-014-9413-8



Your article is protected by copyright and all rights are held exclusively by Springer Science +Business Media Dordrecht. This e-offprint is for personal use only and shall not be self-archived in electronic repositories. If you wish to self-archive your article, please use the accepted manuscript version for posting on your own website. You may further deposit the accepted manuscript version in any repository, provided it is only made publicly available 12 months after official publication or later and provided acknowledgement is given to the original source of publication and a link is inserted to the published article on Springer's website. The link must be accompanied by the following text: "The final publication is available at link.springer.com".

Zen and the Art of Storytelling

Heesoon Bai · Avraham Cohen

© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2014

Abstract This paper explores the contribution of Zen storytelling to moral education. First, an understanding of Zen practice, what it is and how it is achieved, is established. Second, the connection between Zen practice and ethics is shown in terms of the former's ability to cultivate moral emotions and actions. It is shown that Zen practice works at the roots of consciousness where, according to the fundamental tenets of Buddhism, the possibility of human goodness, known as bodhicitta (awakened heartmind), lies. Third, it is suggested that storytelling is a viable and desirable means of moral education. Two examples of Zen stories are introduced, and interpretive commentaries are offered in the service of illustrating the major points made in this article.

Keywords Zen Buddhism · Zen Mind · Moral education · Enlightenment · Satori · Storytelling · Zen stories · Bodhicitta · Brahmavihara (the four immeasurables) · Compassion

The essence of Buddhism is not meditation or liberation from samsara. It is *kensho*, 'seeing into your nature.'

—Awa Kenzo, the archery master from *Zen and the Art of Archery* (in Stevens 2007).

Zen and Moral Education: A Different Orientation

In this essay, we shall examine Zen Buddhism and one of its teaching devices: storytelling. What does Zen teach, and how does storytelling in the Zen tradition work as its

H. Bai (✉)
Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6, Canada
e-mail: hbai@sfu.ca

A. Cohen
Division of Arts & Sciences (Counsellor Education), City University of Seattle, Vancouver, BC,
Canada

teaching device? And most importantly for our present context, we should also ask: what does Zen have to offer in the way of moral education, if anything? Sekkei Harada (2008), a well-known contemporary Soto Zen master (Abbot of Hosshin-ji in Japan), himself stated: ‘The sufferings and deluding passions of human beings—namely, greed, anger, and ignorance—cannot be halted by reason or education’ (2). Does this mean that ‘Zen moral education’ is an oxymoron, and that it makes no sense to talk about moral education in the Zen tradition? Not at all. Harada Roshi (‘roshi’ means ‘teacher’ or ‘master’) goes on to say, ‘Only by awakening to the law of causality is it possible to stop [the sufferings and deluding passions]’ (Ibid.). He further instructs, while shedding light on the meaning of ‘awakening to the law of causality’: “In each place, at each moment, I would like you to continue living your life and entrusting yourself to cause and effect as-it-is. With absolutely no feeling of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction, abandon yourself to conditions as they arise. To abide serenely within these conditions is what is called ‘the life of zen’” (121). Thus, whatever teaching and learning efforts that go into this awakening would constitute the substance of moral education in the tradition of Zen Buddhism.

What the above means is that, in this tradition, moral education cannot be separated from awakening. One of the key understandings we wish to communicate in this essay is that there are different views of, therefore different approaches to, moral education, and Zen Buddhism represents one way. In the Zen tradition, ‘awakening’—this will be explained in more detail later—is the central aim. Attainment of enlightenment puts to rest human sufferings and delusions. It seems to us to follow that the world will become a more peaceful, harmonious, cooperative place—a ‘better’ world—when people are more kind and compassionate, less driven by greed, fear, and anger, and therefore more good-willed and generous. Helping people to create a better world through their becoming better human beings is certainly a goal of moral education, and in this sense, Zen Buddhism’s approach to such a goal through ‘awakening’ would count as a viable approach to moral education.

An Overview of Zen

Bodhidharma (fifth/sixth century, Southern India), the legendary figure who is credited as the transmitter of Chán (禪 pronounced as *chán* in Chinese, *zen* in Japanese and *seon* in Korean), was said to have sat for nine years in silent meditation before a wall. Silence, in the present context, is not the absence of sound or words but the quality of calm, clear, spacious, and radiant consciousness. Such silence is achieved through stilling and distilling the restless and fractious mind, often referred to as the ‘monkey mind’ in Buddhist discourse and folk lore, that continually puts out one rapidly flickering thought-after another on the screen of our consciousness. These mental perturbations have power over human consciousness. Human consciousness *reacts* in a variety of ways. The key word here is ‘reacts.’ There is a loss of awareness. The person is possessed by these moving pictures and ideas within the mind. The capacity to *respond* with wisdom and compassion is lost. The person will be reacting to what is within their consciousness. The tendency of our conceptual mind, which is the ordinary mind, is to lead us to *reify the thought*, whereby we think what we think *is* ‘real’ ‘objective’ truth and what we perceive *is* reality—that is, how things *are* in and of themselves. However, when our consciousness is stilled and distilled, becomes clear, simple and radiant, through *zazen* (坐禪, literally, seated meditation), we

come to recognize, according to the Buddhist teachings,¹ that various objects of the mind that we take as independently existing reality are nothing other than mental pictures flashing on the vast ontological screen of emptiness (空 in Chinese; Śūnyatā in Sanskrit).

What is the meaning of 'emptiness' here? It means that the phenomenal world—our existential home—is devoid of objects (things and beings) that exist *independently* of each other, in and of themselves, and hence *everything exists in connection with everything else*. It also means that our mind is empty of preconceptions and so we are able to 'truly' perceive the world, that is, the interconnection and interpenetration of all things. This very basic explanation here is based on the core Buddhist doctrine of *dependent origination* (*pratītya-samutpāda*). In this understanding, all beings and things that we can identify as something, including one's self, are best understood as co-existing, ever-changing 'web[s] of relationship, an exchange of energy and elements' (Vokey 2011). In Zen ontology, as in the New Physics, there are really no objects, meaning discrete, therefore, independently existing things, only ever morphing, flowing, pulsating webs of relationship. From the Zen Buddhism's point of view, the ordinary mind that sees independently existing things and beings is deluded (ignorant), and this ignorance is the source of human suffering. The historical Buddha's teaching of the First Noble Truth and the Second Noble Truth² refers to this fact of and reason for human suffering (Rahula 1974).

Epistemology (how we know what we know, and what counts as knowledge) follows from ontology (how we understand reality and being). Ethics (how we should and can live, based on investigation of justifiable moral claims and judgments) follows from epistemology and ontology. Attainment of a Zen state of consciousness or Zen Mind,³ known as *satori*, changes the way we see the world, treat each other (humans and non-humans), and act. Eihei Dōgen (1200–1253), the founder of the Sōtō school of Zen Buddhism in Japan and revered as a foremost scholar in Zen Buddhism, has left the following verse concerning what it is to attain Zen Mind in his major writing, *The Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching* or *Shōbōgenzō*: "To learn what the path to Buddhahood is, is to learn what the True Self is. To learn what the True Self is, is to forget about the self. To forget about the self is to become one with the whole universe. To become one with the whole universe is to be shed of 'my body and mind' and 'their bodies and minds'" (Dōgen 2007, 32). Dōgen's verse here describes a radical shift from the ordinary egoic states of consciousness that categorically separate self from not-self (Other) to the post-egoic nondual states of consciousness that experience the inter-beingness of self-other. The latter, as we have been describing, is a hallmark indicator of *Zen* consciousness, or as Shunryu Suzuki (1973) names it with his aptly titled book: *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind*.

The word *Zen* is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese character 禪 that in turn is derived from the Sanskrit word *dhyāna*. *Dhyāna* means 'meditation' or 'meditative state.' The Zen states of consciousness are characteristically different from the ordinary dualistic conceptualizing mind that predisposes a person to see the world and act in terms of self-other, right-and-wrong, moral-immoral, mind-matter, head-heart, and means-end. The

¹ The literature and scholarship concerning the nature of Zen and related non-ordinary consciousnesses is vast and extremely complex, and lies outside the purview of the present paper. For the purpose of this paper, the authors of this paper will abide by the practice-based teachings and elucidations concerning Zen consciousness by such modern Zen teachers as Thich Nhat Hahn (1998), Sekkei Harada (2008), and Seung Sahn (1982).

² The Third Noble Truth states that suffering can cease when the origin of suffering is addressed; and the Fourth Noble Truth states that there is the way to the cessation of suffering.

³ In Japanese, as in Chinese and Korean, 'mind' (心) refers to the integrated 'mind' and 'heart', thinking and feeling. A better translation of 心 would be 'mind-heart' or 'heart-mind'.

ordinary mind also perceives linear causality in a universe of discrete entities and events, and cultivates the sense of the independently existing 'I,' the self. Zen practice aims to free oneself from entrapment in this ordinary egoic consciousness that tends to continually precipitate anger, greed, and ignorance—the *Three Poisons* in Buddhism. The Zen practice takes in the poisons and alchemically transforms them into 'Buddha-nature,' as Harada Roshi calls it. He states:

Anger, ignorance, greed, as well as all kinds of anxiety, impatience, and irritation, exist within the 'everyday mind.' This is called 'everyday mind *as-it-is* is the Way.' I would like you to realize that it is a mistake, then, to throw away something bad that is inside us. In Buddhism, however, everything is Buddha-nature, so there is nothing to throw away. The problem lies within your thoughts, how you think. Inevitably you cannot accept your thoughts, so you create distance between you and them. As I often say, zazen is the way to verify that you and your thoughts are one (Harada 2008, 54).

Psychologically speaking, ordinary life experiences filtered through ordinary consciousness are conducive to a person feeling divided and fractious, tense, anxious, stressed, insecure, and subtly and not so subtly, disturbed and dissatisfied. These were the Buddha's observations of the human psyche, which could be confirmed by anyone who pays close and careful attention to his or her consciousness as in zazen practices. So cardinal was this insight, attained through meditation, into human beings that the Buddha made *dukkha* to be the First Noble Truth. 'The exact meaning of the First Noble Truth is this,' states Houston Smith and Philip Novak (2003, 34): 'Life (in the condition it has got itself into) is dislocated. Something has gone wrong. It is out of joint. As its pivot is not true, friction (interpersonal conflict) is excessive, movement (creativity) is blocked, and it hurts' (Ibid.). The standard English translation of *dukkha*, 'suffering', does not do justice to its nuanced meanings that include: an existential imbalance, discontent and despair; dis-ease; frustration; and a general sense of malaise. Continually unrelieved, the *dukkha* state of consciousness tends to explode or implode, when suitably provoked, into varying degrees of anger, blame, hatred, guilt, ill will, violent feelings, and so on, against others (implosion) or against one's self (implosion). Insatiable desire, covetousness, and greed may also arise as avoidance and defences against feelings of *dukkha*. (We may note here how the current consumer culture of capitalism feeds on our *dukkha*.) Since the source of *dukkha* is the ordinary dualistic consciousness itself, when one is freed from it and experiences Zen consciousness, *dukkha* subsides, as water quenches thirst, and what emerges is a natural and spontaneous ease, balance, clarity, peace, flow, wellness, and blissfulness. All of which is associated with such emotions and attitudes or dispositions as empathy, gratitude, kindness, generosity, compassion, and sympathy when encountering and interacting with human and non-human others. These kinds of emotions and dispositions seem to us to be closely associated with living as a moral being.

Zen and Ethics

Zen transforms the matrix of ignorance, greed, and anger—the *Three Poisons* of ordinary egoic human consciousness as identified by the historical Buddha, Gautama—rendering one to inhabit four states of consciousness classically known as *Brahmavihara* (*Brahma abidings*, also known as the *Four Immeasurables*): loving kindness or benevolence (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), empathic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity or tranquillity (*upekkha*).

These are emotional and dispositional states, and they are particular manifestations of the fundamental quality of human heart-mind, known in Buddhism as *bodhicitta* (literally, 'enlightened heart-mind'; which, signifies the union of wisdom and compassion). Buddhism posits that *bodhicitta* is what we really are fundamentally (Bai and Scutt 2009). In this sense, we are always and already *buddhas*. But we don't realize that; we don't see it, obstructed by the conditions of the Three Poisons. The historical Buddha illustrated this existential condition of ours, using the metaphor of being shot with a poisoned arrow. He likens the Buddhist practice to removing this arrow from our body.⁴ The Buddhist philosophy and practice can be seen as a program of existential detoxification. Once detoxified, we are naturally in touch with *bodhicitta*.

Still, a question may arise from us who are enquiring about Zen's contribution to moral education: Are the abovementioned *Four Immeasurables* 'moral emotions'? And do they lead one to become a moral person? Probing further, we may ask: What makes these emotions 'moral' emotions? Our response: The Zen study and practice that aims at being awake is inseparable from learning to become a morally good person. An awakened person is *naturally inclined to be* kind, good-willed, generous, compassionate, non-reactive, and wishes for others' happiness. By practising to be more fully awake, one expands one's capacity for these moral qualities or attributes. While there would still be room for inquiry and discussions about different ways, especially culturally sensitive and appropriate as well as situationally skilful ways, that awake or awakening human beings can embody and enact these moral qualities, their moral orientations and foundations would be undisputable.⁵

What we identified as moral emotions, such as the Four Immeasurables, however, need sustained cultivation and practice in order for them to become a stable force in one's psychic life and can play the role of moral motivation and agency. Usually, emotions as feeling states come and go, often rapidly. One may feel compassionate at one moment in one context, but at another moment in another context, one may feel otherwise. Given this, what is required is consciousness training, such as Zen study and practice, whereby one becomes stably and firmly *established* in the Four Immeasurables. The following verse by Thich Nhat Hahn, attributed to the voice of the Buddha teaching his son, Rahula, clearly underlines the importance of dedicated and sustained practice:

Rahula, practice loving kindness to overcome anger. Loving kindness has the capacity to bring happiness to others without demanding anything in return. Practice compassion to overcome cruelty. Compassion has the capacity to remove the suffering of others without expecting anything in return. Practice sympathetic joy to overcome hatred. Sympathetic joy arises when one rejoices over the happiness of others and wishes others well-being and success. Practice non-attachment to overcome prejudice. Non-attachment is the way of looking at all things openly and equally. This is because that is. That is because this is. Myself and others are not separate. Do not reject one thing only to chase after another. Rahula, loving kindness, compassion,

⁴ Please read the Parable of the Arrow at <http://www.sln.org.uk/storyboard/stories/b13.htm>.

⁵ Often the examples of Imperial Japanese Army soldiers and officers who were trained in some kind of Zen meditation technique and who committed atrocities and war crimes during the Second Sino-Japanese War and World War II are mentioned to question Zen Buddhism's claims to non-violence and compassion. In response, we wish to point out, first of all, that it is erroneous to equate Zen Buddhist cultivation with the concentration technique in Zen meditation, and secondly that, to cite Robert Thurman, Buddhism is 'a system of education' whereby humans can become truly and deeply compassionate (Public lecture, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, 2008). We can be sure that the Imperial Japanese Army was not receiving a Buddhist education and training.

sympathetic joy, and non-attachment are beautiful and profound states of mind. I call them the Four Immeasurables. Practice them and you will become a refreshing source of vitality and happiness for others (Thich Nhat Hahn 1991, 17–18).

However, the serious practice of the Four Immeasurables proves to be difficult for most of us. We face challenges from within: our ordinary consciousness does not easily foster the Four Immeasurables. For example, ordinarily, one loves another so long as the other conforms to one's expectations, likes, and desires, but the moment the other fails to meet one's projections, love cools down and can even turn into hatred. One day we say, 'I love you,' and another day, we say, 'I hate you.' The same goes for all other emotions. Hence these unstable emotions and the associated thoughts of the 'monkey mind' cannot support or be the basis for moral conduct. For instance, universal compassion that all the great world religions promote (Armstrong 2010) cannot really be practiced unless and until we collectively and individually break through the straightjacket of our egoic consciousness. Such break-through takes committed and dedicated study and practice. An awakened consciousness is free to choose, spontaneously 'knows,' and is not 'had' and driven by egoic consciousness.

As well, there is a tendency in the ordinary mind to become didactic and impositional, and even manipulative, when others do not take in our 'moral' teachings. In the context of moral education, such a tendency turns moral education into *moralism*. When we see our children lacking compassion, we start to lecture to them, even menacingly, that they 'ought' to be more compassionate. 'Ought' and 'should' are the most frequently used words in our moral vocabulary. They are often backed up by various threats of shame and consequences for non-compliance and/or failure to produce desired behaviours. If our exhortations are 'successful,' we have the problem of achieving limited and limiting moral behavior that is subtly and not so subtly fear-based and fear-driven, and that most likely inhibits or interferes with the subjected person's development of psychological maturity and ethical integrity (Cohen 2009). It is not likely that one can become genuinely moral by being told, instructed, exhorted, let alone threatened to be so. Zen philosophy and practice is clear that if we want genuinely moral persons, we cannot compel people to be moral, however well-meaning. We can only help others to work on themselves, be *awakened* from within to the understanding of reality as interbeing (dependent co-origination) and associated egolessness (no separate self) and objectlessness (no independently existing objects), and to embody and enact this understanding in their daily life.

Sitting meditation is said to be the royal road to enlightenment. But there are back alleys, side streets, and garden paths to enlightenment practice that are sometimes more effective for specific purposes. Besides sitting meditation (*zazen*), along with many forms of traditional Zen arts (e.g., tea ceremony, calligraphy, painting, and martial arts) and the more contemporary variations (e.g., writing, movement arts, improvisational arts), storytelling can also effectively contribute to our enlightenment effort and learning. In fact, in the Zen tradition, Zen stories play a major role, as we shall see. We begin the next section with an exploration of storytelling as a way of moral education.

Storytelling as a Way of Moral Education

Teaching has many different aims and objectives in current educational practice. To name a few well-known ones: instruction, edification, information transmission, skill development, interaction, admonition, inspiration, and transformation of the person. The last aim,

transformation, is the most complex and difficult, yet in our view the most worthwhile since it is through transformation that we as individuals and cultural groups re-invent and renew ourselves in response to the exigencies of the time and in the service of being more whole and more fully alive. However, teaching for transformation is not to be mistaken with directly changing our students or children. Teaching, we must re-emphasize, is not a moral practice even if it has a moral content, for example, teaching moral values and virtues. Any intention and direct attempt at changing another person, no matter how worthy and important the aims and reasons are, fundamentally contradict, we argue, the heart of morality, which requires seeing another being, human or non-human, as having their own subjectivity and intrinsic worth. From this understanding, then, the task of the moral educator is to find or create suitable and conducive conditions in an educational environment that are optimal for the facilitation of the growth and development of students as moral beings, and *invite* them to try out what is available in the environment. Our view here is consistent with Zen philosophy and Zen practice in that what matters in teaching is creating optimal learning conditions within which a person can recognize and begin to realize their enlightened mind-heart (*bodhicitta*) and its non-dual nature, and can work on transforming what has obstructed the emergence or manifestation of this enlightened nature.

Transformation of the person is about the person seeing the world differently, feeling different emotions, desiring differently, or different kinds of things, having different attitudes, relating to the world differently, and acting differently. Finally it is about having a different sense of self and identity, albeit often subtly. In short, it is a radical (meaning, 'by the roots') change to the being and identity of a person. Given that education for transformation that does not violate or compromise the students' subjectivity and capacity for agency necessarily has to be one that *invites* students to try out, for their own evaluation, different ways of being in the world and seeing the world, we suggest that a most powerful pedagogic means to support this goal is storytelling.

The Bakhtinian notion of the 'space of authoring' (Holland et al. 1998) offers us a good way to understand the power of story as a transformative teaching tool. A story presents to the reader or listener a virtual world populated not only by human action but also by intention, desire, emotion, perception, volition, and sensations. By virtue of entering and participating in an imaginative story-world, a person lets go of, or at least may hold more loosely, his or her old patterns and meanings, and thus is open and receptive to trying out vicariously patterns of thinking and ways of looking and feeling that are unfamiliar and fresh. Story listening has the potential to facilitate a different state of consciousness in the listener, at least temporarily, and in that altered state an openness may emerge that allows for new possibilities of being—possibilities that are predisposed to be in line with the experience of awakening and seeing the world nondually.

Story-Listening and Beginner's Mind

Transformation favours what is known in Zen as the *beginner's mind*. Sunryu Suzuki Roshi's oft-quoted line goes like this: 'In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few' (Suzuki 1973, 1). Listening to storytelling cultivates the beginner's mind. When we enter a story, the first thing that may happen is activation of openness and suspension of usual, habitual, and largely unconscious ways of being and perceiving. At the moment we adopt different points of view and possibilities of experience, a story becomes a space where there is temporary suspension of the constructed

identity of the self. We take on and experiment with different views, roles, positions, 'voices,' action, and even personalities. ('Persona' means 'theatrical mask' in ancient Latin. 'Personality' comes from 'persona'.) We would like to suggest that the inter-psychic space, where storytelling and listening take place, becomes, or *is*, a Zen space once we can self-reflexively recognize that such space is none other than emptiness (*sunyata*) within which all forms and manners of discursivity takes place (Bai 2002).

As indicated previously, the connection between the attainment of Zen consciousness of nonduality and moral education—seen from the Zen perspective—is that the recognized moral qualities of compassion, generosity, kindness, care, being responsible, and so on, all arise, spontaneously and expansively, from the Zen consciousness. What this means is that, as far as the Zen tradition is concerned, the Zen training and transformation is functionally moral education. Attain the enlightenment; ethics follows (Cook 2002). The Japanese Zen master, Dōgen, was emphatic about this point. In fact, he taught that meditation, ethics, and enlightenment are one and the same (*ibid.*).

In identifying enlightenment with ethics, we may, however, unwittingly mislead our reader. A Zen-realized person is aware and respectful of, but not bound by the conventional morality, social norms of conduct, and decorum of his or her time and place. The 'crazy wisdom' that Zen sometimes speaks of has to do with the fact that a realized person, seeing the world from the nondual perspective, and flowing expansively with compassion and wisdom that arise from Zen consciousness, may find the conventional ways of being moral to be limited and inadequate, not to mention lacking creativity. Thus she may set out to act in ways that may appear strange and seemingly 'crazy' by the conventional criteria of being moral. We will shortly see some examples of this in the well-known stories that we would like to share with the reader.

Before we launch into Zen storytelling, we would like to explain briefly the nature of Zen stories and how they fit in with in the enlightenment process. The Zen traditions of China, Japan, and Korea, have generated an extensive collection of pithy stories, questions, statements, and dialogues that took place often as exchanges between Zen masters and students. Such exchanges are known as *koan* (in Chinese, 公案) whose literal meaning is 'public record'. There are many well-known collections of *koans*, such as *The Blue Cliff Record*, *The Gateless Gate*, *The True Dharma Eye*, *The Book of Equanimity*.

There are some 1,700 *koans* (Mascetti 1996, 8) today, and they are still being seriously employed in the training of Zen students. These stories connect the reader (or listener) to the Zen ancestors who experienced illumination in one form or another, and left a record for the future generations to get a taste of the enlightenment experience. Mascetti explains this well:

Koans are a living memory of a time long past but still essential to our soul, when mind and logic did not rule people, but intuition and oneness with nature were the essential ways of expression and understanding. Koans are like resonating echoes of a part of ourselves that we need to call back to the surface in order to taste enlightenment. Koans are the art of turning to our own light and being illuminated by it (16).

Harada Roshi expresses the same but in a much more concrete way:

All of the buddhas and enlightened ones who appear in collections of Zen sayings and records are you. They are speaking about each one of us (2008, 53).

In the space of storytelling and listening, we get to try out the Zen consciousness of our enlightened ancestors, seeing through their eyes and feeling their heartbeat of *bodhicitta*.

We have selected two well-known Zen stories from *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* (Senzaki et al. 1957) to illustrate many of the key points that we have been discussing so far. As the title of this book suggests, these Zen stories contain the flesh and bones of our enlightened ancestors: in trying on these stories, we *become*, as Harada suggested, these ancestors.

Zen Stories

Is That So?

The Zen Master Hakuin was praised by his neighbours as one living a pure life. A beautiful Japanese girl whose parents owned a food store lived near him. Suddenly, without any warning, her parents discovered she was with child. This made her parents angry. She would not confess who the man was, but after much harassment at last named Hakuin.

In great anger the parents went to the master. ‘Is that so?’ was all he would say. After the child was born it was brought to Hakuin. By this time he had lost his reputation, which did not trouble him, but he took very good care of the child. He obtained milk from his neighbors and everything else the little one needed.

A year later the girl-mother could stand it no longer. She told her parents the truth—that the real father of the child was a young man who worked in the fish market. The mother and father of the girl at once went to Hakuin to ask his forgiveness, to apologize at length, and to get the child back again.

Hakuin was willing. In yielding the child, all he said was: ‘Is that so?’ (Senzaki and Reps 1957, 22)

Commentary

Hakuin Ekaku (1686–1769 or 1685–1768) was a greatly venerated and influential Japanese Zen master. The essence of this story and its moral message is, of course, contained in the three word question, ‘Is that so?’ This is a surprising response from someone who did not impregnate the girl. If Hakuin was an ordinary person, he would have most likely been rather angry at being accused of a grave falsity and would have been vehemently correcting the old couple. But Hakuin does not defend himself. In fact, given that in those days they did not have the DNA testing, it would have been impossible for Hakuin to prove that he was not the father, as long as the girl and her lover did not come forth with the truth. What would Hakuin the enlightened master do in this situation? What does an enlightened mind think, feel, see, and do?

Recall the four states of consciousness that an enlightened person inhabits: loving kindness or benevolence (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekka*). Hakuin must have felt the deepest compassion for the utterly vulnerable baby who was coming into the world stigmatized and risking rejection. The baby’s well-being, let alone survival, is at stake. He undoubtedly also felt deep compassion for the vulnerable girl who would be scared to death about her illegitimate affair with the fishmonger being found out by her parents and the villagers. Hakuin must also have felt compassion towards the distressed and addled parents of the girl. Abiding in equanimity and filled with benevolent wishes for all concerned, Hakuin is

not personally reactive and does not get angry and outraged. This way of being, however, is not possible without an enlightened, non-dual consciousness, that is, a consciousness without the usual narrowly defined and dualistic ego-consciousness. His enlightened consciousness can empathize with everyone concerned and fully grasp all aspects of their experience.

Wisdom in Zen Buddhism and Buddhism in general is an integrative knowing and acting that emerges in the moment, and moment-by-moment, from enlightened states of consciousness. An extraordinary measure of compassion requires an extraordinary consciousness, and this is where Zen or similar training comes in. Many decades of Zen training enables Hakuin to practice an extraordinary measure of compassion and wisdom. This story of Hakuin, the Great Zen Master, unconcerned by his fallen reputation, going door to door all day long to beg for mother's milk to nurse the little baby, is one of the most deeply moving accounts of compassion in the annals of Zen Buddhism.

A Cup of Tea

Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era (1868–1912), received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen.

Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring.

The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself. 'It is overfull. No more will go in!'

'Like this cup,' Nan-in said, 'you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?' (Senzaki and Repts 1957, 19)

Commentary

A perfect story for those of us who have been, shall we say, over-schooled and under-educated from a Zen perspective. Ordinary thinking is what we may call 'objectified thinking' in that it is mostly focused on mental objects and is driven by them. Consistent with the tenets of the acquisitive society, the more mental objects and their correlates, the objects themselves in the material world, we collect and acquire, and manipulate, the happier we seem to believe we will be. In saying this, we are not suggesting that mental objects are 'bad' or acquiring them is 'bad'. That would be very 'un-Zen'! As Harada Zenji would remind us, every thing and being has the Buddha-nature. But we forget this. We become acquisitive and avaricious, and, like the Professor in the story, lose sight of the Zen consciousness—the *space* within which mental objects appear, and which is the experience of our enlightenment and associated happiness.

We live in a society of 'knowledge economy' wherein 'knowledge acquisition,' 'knowledge mobilization' and 'knowledge transfer' are top-priority pursuits. Zen tradition (and, again, Buddhism in general) counteracts this unbalanced and limiting tendency, and trains us to pay attention to the ontological and epistemological space within which mental objects show up and interact. Our beingness is far more than a filing cabinet or, even, a state of the art computer. Being is not an empty space marked by absence of things but is a charged and generative space full of energetic presence that nourishes, restores, renews, and balances us. That space is re-claimed through ongoing, regular Zen practice. This is an optimal space for teachers to be in, for it is their energetic and timely presence that is the

single most effective teaching 'tool' that teachers have (Personal communication, Toronto, ON, Canada, Miller, 2011).

Consummate teachers, like Nan-in in the story, are those who can be fully present for, and orchestrate, *teachable* moments with precision that can penetrate students' consciousness and create potential for self-examination and reflection. This is the Zen of teaching. But, again, such consummate skills do not emerge overnight in any field. Daily Zen training, which includes studying the teaching tales of zen, whether in sitting or moving, alone or in company, throughout one's lifetime that enables him or her to be in touch with reality, moment-by-moment, in the most direct, intimate, visceral, and precise ways is a 'method' for developing the non-dual consciousness that we have described in this paper. This kind of Zen training enables the capacity of the educator to be highly intuitive, which means having a developed capacity to notice what goes on in the thinking, sensing, and feeling fields of people in the most sensitive and penetrating way, and to make meaningful sense of it. The basis of such highly refined knowledge of others is refined self-knowledge, for the self is the instrument of sensing others. The daily Zen training disciplines one to gain mastery over all aspects of oneself to the extent that one is not reactive at all but can sensitively and skilfully respond, with unwavering nerves and full presence, to what actually is happening. The distinction to be made here is between reactivity and responsiveness. The latter means having an on-going flow of response that is responsive to the individuals, the contexts, great and small, and the moment. A teacher who can be fully present in this way, or is, at least as most of us are, working on becoming increasingly so, can create a powerful condition for transformative learning for students.

And most importantly to us for the topic we are addressing in this chapter, being is the home of *bodhicitta* that manifests compassion, benevolence, generosity, loving kindness, and equanimity. A person who is filled with abstract and disembodied knowledge will be out of touch with *bodhicitta*. He or she will be energetically and emotionally malnourished and drained, and will lack the spontaneity and creativity that come more naturally and easily when a person is imbued with Zen consciousness. The professor in the story is really the average ordinary person in our culture whose mind is saturated with disembodied knowledge and cluttered with information.

This Zen story has a special relevance for all of us in the present culture, who are acutely challenged by the knowledge gap: the gaps among knowing, acting, and being. It seems that we are being challenged at an exponentially increasing rate by the gap in the present consumer and information age. We, the authors, believe that the way we educate people to be indiscriminate consumers of knowledge and information, rather than lack of information, is the problem. When the Zen master continues to pour the tea into the professor's cup when the cup is already full, he is demonstrating and illustrating, in the most direct and visceral way, the problem of disembodied knowledge, and the over-valuation of discursive knowledge.

Zen stories are not phenomenological narratives that give rich and detailed description of the chattering mind, confused thoughts, wavering and quivering hearts, and tortured psyche. There is an elegant, if not stark and dramatic, simplicity to the telling of these stories. A lot is unsaid and left out, and the effect is similar to looking at Zen paintings: mostly untouched white space with a few bold, decisive, and fluent strokes that captures the essence of the matter. White untouched space in the Zen paintings, pregnant with possibilities of being and its unbound freedom, invites us to dwell in the space of radiant emptiness.

References

- Armstrong, K. (2010). *Twelve steps to a compassionate life*. New York: Alfred A. Knoff.
- Bai, H. (2002). Zen and the art of intrinsic perception: A case of haiku. *Canadian Review of Art Education*, 28(1), 1–24.
- Bai, H., & Scutt, G. (2009). Touching the earth with the heart of enlightened mind: The Buddhist practice of mindfulness for environmental education. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 14, 92–116.
- Cohen, A. (2009). *Gateway to the Dao-Field: Essays for the awakening educator*. Amherst, NY: Cambria.
- Cook, F. D. (2002). *How to raise an ox*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Dōgen, E. (2007). Shōbōgenzō. Trans. H. Nearman. Mount Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press. <http://www.urbandharma.org/pdf/Shobogenzo.pdf>.
- Harada, S. (2008). *The essence of Zen: The teachings of Sekkei Harada*. Boston, MASS: Wisdom Publications.
- Holland, D., Skinner, D., Jr, W. L., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Laing, R. D. (1969). *The divided self*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Mascetti, M. D. (Ed.). (1996). *Koans: Lessons of Zen*. New York: Hyperion.
- Rahula, W. (1974). *What the Buddha taught*. New York: Grove Press.
- Sahn, S. (1982). *Only don't know: Selected teaching letters of Zen master Seung Sahn*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications Inc.
- Senzaki, N., & Repts, P. (trans. 1957). *Zen flesh, Zen bones: A collection of Zen and pre-Zen writings*. Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle.
- Smith, H., & Novak, P. (2003). *Buddhism: A concise introduction*. New York: Harper One.
- Stevens, J. (2007). *Zen bow, Zen arrow: The life and teachings of Aw Kenzo, the archery master in 'Zen and the Art of Archery'*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Suzuki, S. (1973). *Zen mind, beginner's mind: Informal talks on Zen meditation and practice*. Boston: Weatherhill.
- The parables of arrow. <http://www.sln.org.uk/storyboard/stories/b13.htm>.
- Thich Nhat Hahn. (1991). *Old path white clouds: Walking in the footsteps of the Buddha*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.
- Thich Nhat Hahn. (1998). *The heart of the Buddha's teaching: Transforming suffering into peace, and liberation*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Vokey, D. (2011). Moral education for the 21st century: A Buddhist view. In J. DeVitis & T Yu. New (Eds.), *Character and moral education: A reader*. York: Peter Lang.