

ZEN



Zen Circle (Enso, detail) by Torei Enji (1721-1792),
hanging scroll, ink on paper, *Glitter Yelen Collection*.

A Zen Koan

A monk asked his master to express Zen on paper so that he would have something tangible to study. At first the master refused, saying, “Since it is right in front of your face why should I try to capture it with brush and ink?” Still the monk continued to plead with the master for something concrete. The master drew a circle on a piece of paper and added this inscription: “Thinking about this and understanding it is second best; not thinking about it and understanding it is third best.” The master did not say what is first best.

–Zenga: Brushstrokes of Enlightenment

Zen Buddhism is often defined by practitioners as a religion beyond words. Its ultimate goal of enlightenment (*satori*) cannot be achieved through the reading of scriptures. Nor can it be achieved through the worship of images and ceremony. The path to enlightenment is a deeply personal experience in which an individual breaks through the delusions of selfishness to be spontaneously “awakened” to one’s true inner self.

In today’s docent slide lecture you will learn about Zen Buddhism and how artist-monks expressed the spirit of their religion through brush and ink paintings known as Zenga. Please refer to the following definitions to assist you with your studies of Zen Buddhism.

Zen Buddhism Glossary

ascetic: A person who is devoted to a life of solitude and self-denial often for religious purposes

Bodhidharma (Japanese Daruma; pronounced: Da-roo-mah) (ca. 470–543):
The founder and first patriarch of Chan Buddhism in China. He was an Indian monk who practiced asceticism and traveled to southern China from India in the 6th century bringing the teachings of what is called Chan Buddhism in China and developed into Zen Buddhism in Japan. After an encounter with Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty, he traveled to Luoyang, China, where he meditated at the Shaolin Monastery. It is here that he practiced zazen facing a cave wall for 9 years. In Japanese Zen paintings, he is often depicted with ethnic features associated by Japanese of the time with Indians: large eyes, curly hair, beard, and prominent nose. He is often depicted meditating in deep concentration.



Side View of Daruma by Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1769), hanging scroll, ink on paper, *Gitter-Yelen Collection*.

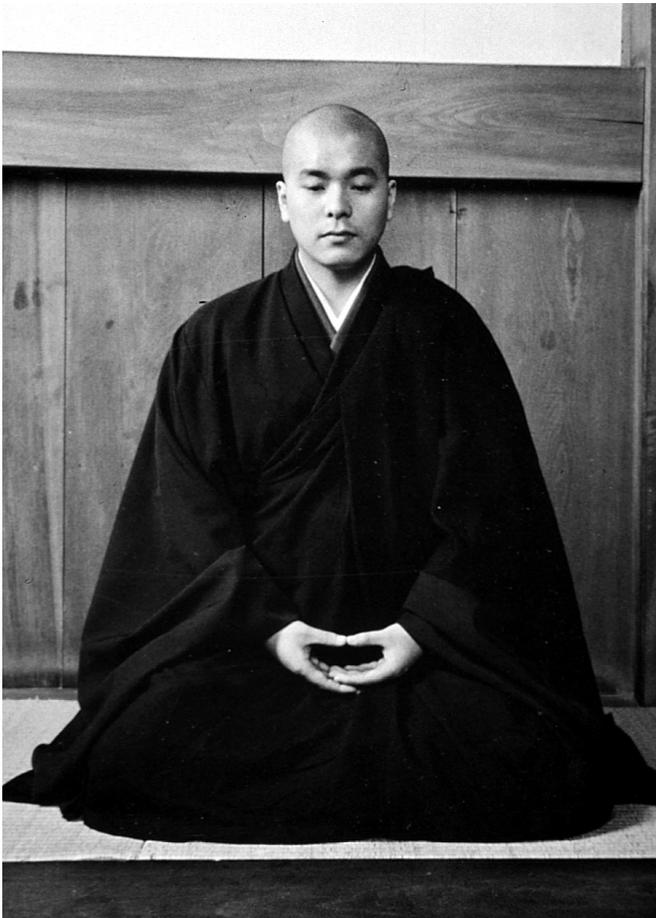
Buddhism: A religion based on the teachings of Prince Siddhartha Gautama who lived in northern India in the 6th century BCE. He left his royal life to find a release to human suffering, and the endless cycle of rebirths that Buddhists believe makes up one's existence. After years of searching, he achieved perfect understanding while meditating under the bodhi tree; then he became the Buddha, the "Enlightened One." There are many forms of Buddhism. Zen is a school of Mahayana Buddhism that stresses the liberation, or enlightenment, of all beings.

enlightenment (Japanese *satori*, pronounced sah-toe-ree): Full awakening to one's true inner self, also known in Zen Buddhism as realizing one's true Buddha-nature. Through self-realization, the true nature of existence is revealed.

koan (pronounced: koe-ahn): A verbal exchange between master and disciple in which the master presents the disciple with a paradoxical question or phrase. This question or phrase cannot be solved by logical reasoning. It is meant to force the discipline to arrive at a solution intuitively thereby achieving enlightenment.

patriarch: The founder of a school of Chinese Buddhism and his successors of great masters who transmit the teachings of the Buddha.

zazen (pronounced: zah-zen): Sitting meditation. Zazen is not focusing on a specific object or thought. Instead, it is the liberating of one's mind of all thought into a state of emptiness (a complete emptiness that is also complete fullness) from which the practitioner hopes to experience spontaneous awakening to the inner self (enlightenment).



Zen monk practicing zazen. Reprinted from *Eihei-ji* [ed. by Eihei-ji Hosankai]. Copyright 1979 by Eihei-ji & Shinagawa Shoten.

Zen (Sanskrit *dhyana*; Chinese *chan*): Literally, meditation. A school of Mahayana Buddhism brought to China from India in the 6th century by the Indian monk-ascetic Bodhidharma. In China, the religion would be influenced by the indigenous philosophy and religion of Taoism. By the 12th century, the religion reached Japan, where it gained a large following especially among the samurai (warrior class). In Japan there are three sects of Zen Buddhism: Rinzai, Soto, and Obaku.

The goal of Zen Buddhism is to attain self-realization and, in turn, enlightenment (full awakening) through self-discipline and deep meditation. It teaches that by liberating the mind from the constraints of logical reasoning, one can break through the delusions of life and realize one's true inner self. This is accomplished intuitively and spontaneously, not through the study of scriptures, ceremony, or worship of images.

Zenga (pronounced: zen-gah): Paintings by artist-monks with no formal art training. Zenga often expressed Zen teachings using spontaneous brushwork and humor, frequently by the depiction of scenes from folktales and legends. The common people in small villages of Japan found these art works especially appealing and accessible.

Getting Started with Zazen (seated meditation)

Meditation is best practiced in a quiet, private space. Locate an area where you will not be disturbed by noises such as from a television or radio. Review the following steps to assist you in learning the art of meditation. Now you may begin your studies in zazen.

Tip: Find a balanced sitting position by first swaying back and forth in a large pendulum motion. Gradually sway less until you stop in the center position.

1. Remove your shoes.
2. You may choose to face the wall (just as Bodhidharma did, and the Soto school practitioners do) or face into the room (as the Rinzai school practitioners do).
3. Sit cross-legged on the cushions. Find a comfortable position, sitting close to the edge of the round cushion. If your knees do not touch the ground, use the small square pillows to support them. See different positions in diagrams below. If sitting cross-legged is painful, you may sit on the edge of the platform with your feet flat on the floor.
4. Keep your spine straight all the way through to the top of your head, ears over your shoulders, nose in line over your navel, chin slightly drawn in, knees in line. Arch your spine slightly at the waist, so that your behind is thrust out for support.
5. Rest the back of your left fingers on the inside of your right, and lightly touch the ends of your thumbs together to make an oval—this is the hand gesture of meditation.
6. Keep your eyes open slightly, and direct your gaze down to the ground about three feet in front of you. Do not bow your head. Try not to focus on anything with your eyes.
7. Place your tongue on the roof of your mouth, and hold your teeth together without grinding them or tightening your jaw.
8. Relax your abdomen, and breathe using your abdomen not your chest.
9. Most people begin meditation practice by counting breaths to quiet the mind. Count to ten—”one” for inhale, ”two” for exhale, ”three” for inhale, ”four” for exhale, etc. When you reach ”ten,” start over again. When you lose count, start over at ”one.”
10. Now you are in the position of meditation.



Full Lotus Position

Right foot over left thigh, left foot over right thigh, both knees touching mat.



Half Lotus Position

Left foot over right thigh, right foot under left thigh, both knees touching mat.



Burmese Position

Legs uncrossed, left or right foot in front and both knees touching mat.