

THE HUMAN SITUATION AND ZEN BUDDHISM¹
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My task, in this hour, is to present an overall view of Zen Buddhism with respect to the specific concerns of this conference, namely, depth psychology and psychotherapy. To this end, within the limit of my own unauthoritative understanding, I shall attempt to provide a general consideration of Zen Buddhism in its relation to the human situation.

Human existence is, initially, self-conscious, or, in the designation here to be preferred, ego-conscious existence. Man is not simply born into human existence. The infant is not yet human; the idiot never quite human; the “wolf-child,” or the psychotic is ever sheer animal. The pre-ego-conscious state of the infant, the abortive ego-consciousness of the idiot, the retarded ego-consciousness of the “wolf-child,” and the deteriorated ego-consciousness of the psychotic all derive their particular determination from what would be the norm of their developed and unimpaired being. This norm is that ego-consciousness which ordinarily first appear between the ages of two and five in a child born of human parents and reared in a human society. Forgoing at this time any phenomenological account of its onset and development, let us rather proceed immediately to an analysis of its nature and to an examination of its implications for the human situation.

Ego-consciousness means an ego aware or conscious of itself. Awareness of itself is expressed as affirmation of itself, the “I,” or, as I shall continue to call it, the ego. Affirmation of itself involves the individuation of itself, the ego differentiated and discriminated from that which is not itself—“the other,” or simply its own negation, “not-I” or “non-ego.” Affirmation of itself also entails, however, a bifurcation of itself.

Affirmation of itself includes itself both as affirmer and as affirmed. As affirmer it performs the act of affirming itself. As affirmed it is an existential fact presented to itself. The awareness and affirmation of itself in which it indeed emerges or appears is at once both an act undertaken by the ego and a fact given to the ego. The ego as subject-affirmer is not chronologically prior to itself as object-affirmed. Nor does its individuation precede its bifurcation. Immediately when there is ego-consciousness there is the ego, and immediately when there is the ego it is already object as well as subject, as much imparted to itself as it is the activator of itself. A living, active subject with freedom and responsibility, it is at the same time a passive, given object, destined, determined, and without responsibility. This is the perennial nature and structure of the ego in

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ego-consciousness. This is the initial situation of man in human existence, a situation which may be characterized as contingent or conditioned subjectivity.

Conditioned subjectivity, although conditioned, is, nonetheless, subjectivity. The rise of ego-consciousness marks the rise of subjectivity. Existence comes to be human existence precisely through subjectivity. As subject the ego is aware of and has itself. Further, as subject, encountering—and acknowledging—the subjectivity of others similarly aware of and having themselves, it can learn to control, discipline, and train itself, and thus to become a centered person. The infant, however, is not yet a person, the idiot never quite a person, the “wolf-child” merely a quasi-person, and the psychotic perhaps no longer a person. As subject the ego, in addition, is aware of and has a world, its world. Moreover, as subject it can, in the freedom of its subjectivity, ever rise above and transcend itself and its world in any given aspect. In expression of its inviolable integrity as subject-person—toward either its world or itself—it can always finally resist and say, “No!”

Again, as subject the ego can go out of itself and participate in the subjectivity of the other in friendship, compassion, and love. Also as subject it can have language and entertain meaning, can question, doubt, and understand, can reflect, evaluate, and judge, can conceive, fabricate, and use tools, can make and execute decisions, can work, and can be creative, expressing itself in or through some object or activity. Indeed, only as subject can it have an object.

In its subjectivity the ego thus has—and can rise above—itsself and its world, can love, can understand, can decide, can create, and can be productive. This is the greatness of the ego in ego-consciousness. This is the dignity of man in human existence.

Yet, just as subject—and this is part of its greatness—the ego realizes that its subjectivity is a contingent or conditioned subjectivity. Free, as subject, to transcend any given object-aspect of itself or its world, it has not the freedom, as ego, to transcend its subject-object structure as such. Even as transcender, it is still linked to that which is transcended. The ego as subject is forever bound to itself and its world as object. As subject it activates itself and has its world. As object it is given to itself in all of its particularity and finitude as part of the world in which it finds itself. Capable of having an object solely because it is a subject, it can never be a subject except insofar as it also is or has an object.

Object-dependent and object-conditioned, the ego is, further, object-obstructed. In the subjectivity in which it is aware of and has itself, the ego is at the same time separated and cut off from itself. It can never, as ego, contact, know or have itself in full and genuine in-dividuality. Every such attempt removes it as an ever-regressing subject from its own grasp, leaving simply some object-semblance of itself. Continually elusive to itself, the ego has itself merely as object. Divided and dissociated in its centeredness, it is beyond its own reach, obstructed, removed and alienated from itself. Just in having itself, it does not have itself.

As with its awareness of itself, so with its awareness and having of its world—which is actually one dimension of its awareness of itself—the very having is a not-having. In the ego’s awareness and having of its world, the world is always an object. Reflectively, in its subjectivity, the ego may conceive of the world as the totality in which it is itself included. As, however, the reflected

aspect of itself included in that world is an object-aspect, so, too, is the world so conceived an object to the ego as subject-conceiver. Whether in direct awareness or in conceptualization, the world is an object, from which the ego as subject is left distant, apart, and estranged.

It is precisely this—the dichotomy of its subject-object structure—which constitutes the inherent existential ambiguity, conflict, and contradiction of the ego in ego-consciousness. Bifurcated and disjoined in its unity, it is delimited by, but cannot be sustained or fulfilled in, itself. Isolated and excluded in its relatedness, it is restricted to, yet shut off from, a world in which and to which it belongs. Having and not having, at once bound to and conditioned by, and at the same time separated and cut off from, itself and its world, the ego is rent by a double cleavage, split within as well as without. Never pure subject in its subjectivity, never absolutely free in its freedom, it is neither the ground nor the source of itself or its world, both of which it has, but neither of which it ever completely has. This is the predicament of the ego in ego-consciousness. This is the misery of man in human existence.

The existential expression of this predicament is the ego's double anxiety about having to live and having to die. The anxiety of having to live and having to die are but two expressions of the one fundamental root-anxiety: the anxiety with regard to overcoming the gnawing inner cleavage and contradiction that prevents the ego from fully being itself. The anxiety relating to life stems from the necessity to contend with and resolve this contradiction. The anxiety relating to death arises from the possibility that life may end before a resolution has been attained. Only the ego in ego-consciousness confronts, in order "to be," the need to find and fulfill itself. This is an inherent imperative which is not yet present to the infant, never quite present to the idiot, hardly more than semi-present to the "wolf-child," and perhaps no longer entirely present to the psychotic. As regards the natural completeness of the animal, however, it is wholly non-existent.

It would be meaningless . . . to ask a young animal, for example, a kitten, what it intends or would like to be when it grows up. But the human child encounters, within as well as without, exactly this question. For simple biological or physiological growth or maturation does not as such constitute the growth, maturation, or fulfillment of the human as human. Undoubtedly, motherhood comprises more of a measure of fulfillment for the human female than does fatherhood for the human male. Consequently, the answer of the little girl, "I am going to be a mother," is accepted as appropriate, whereas if the little boy were to reply, "I am going to be a father," this would not be considered responsive and could arouse some consternation.

Still, acknowledging immediately that its connotation extends far beyond the merely biological, human motherhood does not encompass final realization of the human female as human. In fact, no role, function, or vocation can ever ultimately satisfy the human—male or female—as human. The ego, however, constrained by its inner contradiction to seek its completion, is beguiled by that contradiction into just this deception [i.e., that a role or function can bring fulfillment].

Available to itself—even as it contemplates its own subjectivity—only in terms of some object cast of itself, the ego naturally comes to confuse being fulfilled with "being something." In its attempt as subject to cope with its task of finding itself, it envisages some object-image of itself. Through this image it hopes at once to be able both to prove itself and to gain recognition and approval from the other, or, if not the allegiance of, then to gain control over or at least

independence of the other. For in its double alienation the ego encounters the absolute limitation imposed upon it by the subjectivity of the other as a challenge or, indeed, a threat.

Relying on its projected object-image to establish itself and overcome this threat, the ego may be led to take that limited, finite impression alone to be the whole of itself, its ground, its source, and its ultimate meaning, by which it is to be sustained, and through which it is to be fulfilled. Most or perhaps all of its subjectivity is now devoted and, in effect, subordinated to the content, or contents, necessary to realize the vision—wealth, power, prestige, masculinity, femininity, knowledge, moral perfection, artistic creativity, physical beauty, popularity, individuality, or “success.” Virtually identifying with these contents, it focuses exclusively upon them and upon the conception of itself that they constitute. In this fixation and attachment it easily falls prey to the arch delusion of egocentricity. Ever in search of, yet ever elusive to, itself, the ego, object-dependent and object-obstructed, comes to be object-dominated and object-deluded.

Whether the object-image envisioned becomes actual or remains fanciful and idealized, the basic deception involved is the same. The ego in its totality is never merely any object-feature of itself or its actualized subjectivity—its body, mind, talents, position, “personality,” goodness, profession or vocation, social or biological function, class, culture, nation, or race. However truly great the husband, wife, parent, ruler, scientist, thinker, artist, professional or businessman or businesswoman, however much [wealthier] such an ego is, however much more it [possesses], it does not have itself fully as ego, nor has it realized itself ultimately as human.

Expressing genuine subjectivity in going out of [itself] and giving itself in love, creativity, devotion to an ideal, or dedication to a task, it continues to be bound to and dependent upon the particular object-element of that expression—the specific loved one, artistic activity, ideal, profession, or work. Perpetually enthralled (enslaved) in the inherent predicament of conditioned subjectivity, incapable of being a subject without an object, it is immediately circumscribed and curtailed by the object. Hence the ambivalence—in [loving people] or [loving things]—of the hidden or open hostility toward that which is loved. This hostility, as well as the pride and special interest of the ego as subject in the love (or creativity, or morality), corrupts and defiles that love (creativity, and morality) provoking within the ego deep-rooted qualms of its own impurity, guilt, or, if religiously oriented, sin.

The ego, requiring an object to be a subject, can never attain complete fulfillment in or through any object. Such fulfillment, while authentic, is still limited, temporary, and tarnished. Despite the true richness of its creative subjectivity, the actual abundance of the contents of its life, the real greatness of its accomplishments and successes, the ego is left unfulfilled. Unable to sustain itself within itself, and perhaps tormented by feelings of its own undeservedness, guilt, or sin, it comes to know melancholy and despondent moments of loneliness, frustration, or despair. Inwardly plagued by restlessness, insecurity, or a contempt and even hatred of itself, outwardly it possibly manifests any number of psychological or psychosomatic disturbances.

Yet often the ego manages to contain these pangs of disquietude and to finish out its life in just this condition. But even as it does so, it is under the continual threat that the smoldering deep-seated uneasiness may erupt and surge forth in an uncontrollable anguish and dread. This could occur should the ego no longer be able to rationalize away its sense of unworthiness or its sense

of guilt, should it become morbidly uncertain of the divine forgiveness of its sin, or should the components necessary to maintain its object-image otherwise come to be lost, destroyed, or unavailable, or, while remaining, prove disillusioning, grow empty, or simply cease to be engaging. Finally, some ordinary occurrence in daily life can bring the abrupt traumatic realization that not only is every possible content transitory and ephemeral, but so, too, is the ego itself. Ever vulnerable, in youth as well as in age, to illness and infirmity in body and mind, it must die.

Intellectually, the inevitability of its death is, of course, known to the ego all along. Actually experiencing, however, the prospect of its own non-being as a shattering existential shock in effect utterly destroys the illusion as to the possibility of its consummation in terms of any object-image. The traumatic anxiety about having to die is acutely poignant testimony to the final inability of any object-aspect or object-content to satisfy the human ultimately as human. Caught fully and apprehensively in the double anxiety of having to live and having to die, the ego undergoes the excruciating torment of the most piercing indecision of all: to be or not to be.

This singularly probing misgiving—the uncertainty of the ego whether to endure any longer its struggle for fulfillment—is, perhaps, the profoundest expression of its plight: nothing it can do can resolve its contradiction. As long as the ego remains simply as ego, the contradiction inherent in it also remains.

In open and honest recognition of its strait, the ego may have the courage and strength to take its negativities upon itself and continue to strive “to be.” Although frequently an effort of heroic character, this still does not constitute positive realization. An affirmative expression of meaningful subjectivity in accepting, bearing, and suffering, the fulfillment adumbrated² is, at best, latent and anticipatory rather than actual. At worst it again becomes delusive, involving in this instance a subject-delusion.

In enduring and withstanding, the ego sometimes thinks it to be itself assuming and sustaining total responsibility for itself and its existence. Forgetting that as object it is a passive, given fact beyond appropriation by its own acts or decisions as subject, it succumbs to the delusion of hubris. Blinded by this delusion, it dares, even in the throes of the overwhelming catastrophes of its life, to declare nonetheless that it is “the master of its fate,” that it is “the captain of its soul.”

This deception, moreover, is usually maintained only through the suppression of any emotion, warmth, compassion, or love. The same ego-will which disciplines and steels itself against its negativities often comes to be rigid, brittle, and unyielding, fearful of ever relaxing its tautness lest it collapse completely. Yet, it is exactly this unremitting strain which keeps it continually precarious, under the constant threat of snapping and breaking down. Overwrought, over-responsible, and over-repressed, it may abruptly abandon itself to just the opposite extreme.

Here, in contrast to taking upon itself and forbearing the negativity of its predicament, the ego instead undertakes to avoid or disavow that negativity. It attempts “to be” not in spite of, but in

² Adumbrate: To give only the main facts and not the details about something, especially something that will happen in the future. To foreshadow, outline.

disregard of, its limitations as a conditioned subject. Held in the bondage of an object-dependence and object-constriction, the ego endeavors to escape—rather than bear—that bondage by refusing to acknowledge the seriousness of the object aspect as such. [This it does] by contriving to forget [the object-aspect] or by presuming to deny it altogether.

Ignoring the nature or components of its acts and decisions, the ego would now immerse itself in a flood of doing, acting, and deciding—either in search of distraction, or else exclusively for the sake of doing, acting, and deciding. In the latter case, seeking to realize a pure subjectivity free from all object-constraints, the ego, misled by an implied fallacy of reductionism, falls into a double delusion. While assuming that as active subject its sheer subjectivity will reduce the object aspect, it fears that unless it is continuously active as subject, it will itself be reduced to object.

Whatever the motivation, however, subjectivity denuded of the seriousness of its object content ceases to be meaningful subjectivity. It quickly degenerates into aimless doing simply to “keep busy,” vacuous “having fun,” impulsive spontaneity, indulgent assertiveness, irresponsible non-conformity, wanton caprice, or unbridled libertinism and licentiousness. In any instance, such subjectivity is unable to provide other than diversionary interests and satisfactions or momentary and fleeting “thrills,” and even these gratifications steadily weaken and begin to turn acrid and arid in the next moment. In frenzied desperation, the ego is driven to heighten the intensity of this supposed subjectivity—more and more non-conformity, more and more “getting away from it all,” more and more narcotics, alcohol, and sex and its perversions.

The process is pathetically vicious. Incapable of being eradicated, the object aspect inherent in the subject-object structure of the ego is only rendered further and further poverty-stricken, destitute, and useless, while the subjectivity of the ego, denied in turn any significant object element, becomes increasingly meaningless, empty, and dissolute. Unmindful of the fact that it can never be a subject unless it also is or has an object, the ego, in its attempt to reduce the object aspect through an irresponsible abandonment to subjectivity, succeeds merely in reducing itself as a whole. Left ensnared in the very impasse it had sought to avert, it still has looming before it the abyss and despair of the yawning inner hiatus [gap] which frustrates and thwarts it from fully being itself.

Having failed in its alternate endeavors “to be,” unable to tolerate the anxiety or the burden of a continued contending with this seemingly impossible task, the ego may have the temptation—even the compulsion—to give up all further effort. Virtually choosing “not to be,” in the power of its subjectivity, it undertakes to elude its strait by abandoning that subjectivity. Whether through religious or secular idolatry, cynical negative indifference, slavish submission to collective conformity, psychological regression to the unawakened dependency of its infancy, or outright psychotic disintegration, the ego would evade its predicament by surrendering its freedom and responsibility, and with them itself as an authentic subject.

For the human as human, that is, for the ego in ego-consciousness, this, too, entails a dual deception. While forsaking subjectivity is still an expression of subjectivity, the ego in ceasing to be a true subject ceases to be a true ego. Any relinquishment by the ego of its subjectivity necessarily involves the diminution, impairment, or loss of itself as ego. In the blind superstition

or obsequiousness of idolatry, in the nihilistic denial of the meaning and value of whatever act or decision, in the abject [conformity] to the crowd, in the attempted return to the womb, or in the retreat and withdrawal into a psychosis, the human as human is negated or even destroyed. Abandonment of subjectivity is as delusive as abandonment to subjectivity.

Finally, no longer able to cope with, endure, or escape its plight, the ego, out of an agonizing sense of helplessness in its felt *aporia* (impasse), may choose “not to be”—not through abandonment of its subjectivity, but through abandonment of itself. In the overwhelming anguish and despondency of the unviability and apparent unresolvability of its basic contradiction—in whichever of its manifestations—the ego directly undertakes its own annihilation in suicide.

Thus, whether exploring efforts toward resolution, acceptance, avoidance, or abandonment, the attempts by the ego to deal with its intrinsic contradiction are, at best, under the constant threat of collapse, transitory, partial, or fragmentary, and, at worst, under a deception or delusion, nihilistic and destructive. Not that any single mode is ever pursued exclusively. In its actual life the ego usually combines several, in varying degrees, and with varying predominances. All, however, positive or negative, responsible or irresponsible, profound or superficial, stem ultimately from the one fundamental longing of the ego, caught in the inner and outer alienation and estrangement of its inherent contradiction, to find and to fulfill, to really know, to come home to and to fully be and have itself in and with its world. This longing and its quest for fulfillment constitute the central and ultimate concern of the ego in ego-consciousness. This quest and this fulfillment constitute the existential beginning and the final end of Zen Buddhism.

According to its tradition, Zen, or Ch'an³ Buddhism in effect began in China when a perplexed sixth-century Chinese, Shen-kuang, discontent with his learned and erudite Confucian and Taoist study, heard of the presence at a nearby Buddhist temple of a Zen teacher from India and undertook to visit him. The Indian master, Bodhidharma, sitting crossed-legged facing a wall, continued sitting and did not receive the caller. Shen-kuang, resolute out of a deep disquietude, kept returning. Finally, one night he remained standing there throughout a heavy snow storm, until, at dawn, the snow reached his knees. Moved, Bodhidharma inquired the purpose of this action. In tears, the Chinese begged the Indian teacher, would he not grant the benefit of his wisdom to help troubled beings? Bodhidharma replied that the way was unbearably difficult, involving the greatest trials, and not to be attained by those lacking in perseverance or determination. Hearing this, Shen-kuang took out a sword he was carrying, cut off his left arm, and placed it in front of the Indian monk. Only in that moment did Bodhidharma accept him as a student, giving him the new name Hui-k'o.⁴

Venturing to interpret this account—very likely legendary—in what may be considered its symbolic significance for an understanding of Zen Buddhism, one first notes that an unsettled and distraught ego moves toward the teacher. The Zen master waits, as it were, for a questing ego to come to him. Even then he is apt not to accord direct recognition. On the surface his initial response sometimes appears to be slighting or discouraging. This seeming inattentiveness, or

³ *Ch'an* is the first syllable of the Chinese *ch'an-na*, (pronounced in Japanese *zenna*) a transliteration of the Sanskrit, *dhyana*, a kind of “concentration” or “contemplation.”

⁴ This rendition is taken from the Record of the Transmission of the Lamp, vol. 3.

even rejection, is, however, but a mode of probing the seriousness of the quest. When the master has been convinced of the ultimacy of that seriousness, open acknowledgment and reception are immediately forthcoming.

It is, indeed, just the all-compelling and unrelenting existential plight leading him to approach and to keep returning to Bodhidharma, to expose himself to a show storm, and to cut off his own arm that establishes Hui-k'o symbolically as the first Zen "student." Perturbed and distressed in his inner contradiction, unrelieved by classical learning, Hui-k'o goes to Bodhidharma in search of alleviation and resolution, and is ready, in that pursuit, to stake his total being.

Whatever the historicity of this incident, it is precisely this root-fundamental quest born of the inherent human predicament that constitutes, when brought before a Zen teacher, the existential beginning of Zen Buddhism. Without it, although one sit in crossed-legged meditation for decades at innumerable Zen temples, engaging in countless interviews with a myriad of Zen masters, one remains, notwithstanding, a student of Zen in name alone. For Zen Buddhism, finally, neither is in itself nor does it offer any objective, substantive content to be studied as such psychologically, religiously, philosophically, historically, sociologically, or culturally. The only valid component of Zen Buddhism is one's own concrete life and existence, its basic contradiction and incompleteness, and, in distinction to the mere longing, the actual quest for reconciliation and fulfillment. If what goes under the designation of Zen Buddhism does not, in fact, deal with and undertake to resolve the intrinsic existential plight of the ego in ego-consciousness, despite any claims it may make to "orthodoxy" it is no longer authentic Zen Buddhism.

Accepted as a genuine Zen student, Hui-k'o then inquired after the truth. Bodhidharma declared it was not to be found outside of oneself. Hui-k'o, nevertheless, bared his plaint. His heart-mind was not at peace, and he implored the master to pacify it.

Here is further confirmation that Hui-k'o's impelling vexation stemmed from his inner contradiction. The Chinese term, *hsin*, rendered as heart-mind, can mean heart or mind, but is more than either alone. The Greek, *psyche*, or the German, *Geist*, probably approach it more closely. In the terminology of this presentation, it may be taken to be the ego as subject. The ego as subject, in its situation of conditioned subjectivity, plagued by disquietude and unrest, pleads for pacification.

Bodhidharma, in anticipation, had already begun his guidance and instruction in declaring that a resolution could not be gained from the outside. Not yet comprehending, and, perhaps, out of felt helplessness, or even desperation, Hui-k'o persisted and presented his plight, requesting Bodhidharma to alleviate it.

What was Bodhidharma's response? Did he delve into Hui-k'o's past—his personal history, parents, early childhood, when he first began to sense the disturbance, the cause, symptoms, and attending circumstances? Did he explore Hui-k'o's present—his occupation, marital status, dreams, likes, and interests? Bodhidharma's reply was: "Bring forth your heart-mind and I shall pacify it for you!"

Eschewing all the particularities of Hui-k'o's life, past or present, Bodhidharma plunged immediately and directly into the living core of the human predicament itself. The ego, caught in the clutches of its own intrinsic contradiction and split, which it can neither resolve nor endure, is challenged to produce not anything it may feel to be its problem, but itself as apparent sufferer of the problem. Bring forth the ego-subject that is troubled! Bodhidharma, and Zen Buddhism after him, realizes that finally and fundamentally it is not that the ego has a problem, but that the ego is the problem. Show me who it is who is disturbed and you shall be pacified.

Beginning thus with Bodhidharma and continuing ever thereafter, the basic, unveering approach of Zen Buddhism, whatever the special form or mode of its methodology . . . has been just such a straightforward, concrete assault upon the contradictory dualistic subject-object structure of the ego in ego-consciousness. The sole and exclusive aim has remained throughout to overcome the divisive inner and outer cleavage separating and removing the ego from itself—and its world—in order that it may fully be and truly know who and what it is.

Hui-neng (7th century), after Bodhidharma the second great figure in the annals of Zen, being visited by a monk, asked simply but pointedly, “What is it that thus comes?” It is recorded that it took the monk, Nan-yo, eight years before he could answer. On another occasion, this same Hui-neng inquired: “What is your original face prior to the birth of your father and mother?” That is, what are you beyond the subject-object structure of your ego in ego-consciousness?

Lin-chi (9th century), founder of one of the two major schools of Zen Buddhism still extant in Japan, where he is known as Rinzai, once charged:

“There is one true man without a title on the mass of red-coloured flesh; he comes out and goes in through your sense gates. If you have not yet borne witness to him, look, look!”

A monk came forward and asked, “who is this true man without a title?”

Rinzai came down from his chair and taking hold of his chest demanded, “Speak, speak!”

The monk hesitated, whereupon, letting him go, Rinzai exclaimed, “What kind of dirt rag is this true man without a title!” So saying, Rinzai went back to his room, leaving the monk to chew on his words.”⁵

To help the ego awaken and to realize this “true man without a title,” that is, to fully be and truly know itself, there arose among certain Zen teachers—notably those of the Lin-chi or Rinzai School—the use of what is known in Japanese, as the koan. This is a development especially of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when Zen, or Ch'an, Buddhism, having acquired great esteem and wide renown throughout China, attracted many who no longer came out of any compelling existential need. Earlier masters would probably have reacted with the same outward indifference and disregard as did Bodhidharma. These later teachers, however, in the sincere and compassionate desire to help all inquirers, began now to initiate their relationship to the [student] by means of a koan.

⁵ Quoted from D. T. Suzuki, *Living by Zen* (Tokyo, Sanseido, 1949)

The first Chinese Sung master to employ the koan somewhat systematically, Ta-hui (12th century), on one occasion spoke as follows:

Whence are we born? Whither do we go? He who knows this whence and whither is the one to be truly called a Buddhist. But who is this one who goes through this birth-and-death? Again, who is the one who knows not anything of the whence and whither of life? Who is the one who suddenly becomes aware of the whence and whither of life? Who is the one, again, who, facing this koan, cannot keep his eyes focused, and as he is not able to comprehend it, feels his innards altogether put out of order as if he had swallowed a fiery ball that he couldn't expel? If you wish to know who this one is, apprehend him where he cannot be brought within the fold of reason. When you thus apprehend him, you will know that he is after all above the [bondage] of birth-and-death.⁶

The ultimate objective remains the same: to know and apprehend who [you are] beyond "the fold of reason," that is, beyond the subject-object structure of intellection. Toward this end the koan, a kind of question, problem, challenge, or demand presented by . . . the master, is intended to serve a twofold function. The first is to penetrate to the depths and quicken at its source the . . . basic underlying concern of the ego in ego-consciousness. The second is, while stirring this fundamental longing and its quest, to keep them properly rooted and directed. For it is not sufficient that they simply be aroused. They must, in order to avoid the many deceptive and delusive pitfalls in which they may become attenuated or go astray, also be carefully guided and even fostered.

In the earlier or pre-koan phase of Zen Buddhism, the [student] generally came out of the provocation of his own life experience, already bestirred by some existentially oppressing perplexity. Normally, however, the "question" or concern had not yet been plumbed to its ultimate depth. Although kindled naturally, known neither in its root-source nor in its true nature, and hence without an adequate form, it could easily become veiled or deflected. Despite a genuine intensity and seriousness, the longing and quest were thus usually blind, amorphous, and confused, requiring a correct grounding and focus.

When, in this period, the student, during an encounter with the master, would receive a piercing challenge or demand—for instance, "Bring forth your heart-mind!" "What is it which thus comes?" "What is your original face prior to the birth of your father and mother?" "When you are dead, cremated, and the ashes scattered, where are you?"⁷ or, simply, "Speak! Speak!"—the effect was to provide just the needed orientation and guidance. Even so, such challenges, questions, or demands were not called koans. These spontaneous, unstructured exchanges between master and student were instead termed *mondo*, or, in Chinese, *wen-ta*, literally, question-and-answer. But since these *mondo*-exchanges did prompt, ground, and direct the radical and ultimate concern of the ego, many of them were subsequently used either as koans or as the basis of koans.

⁶ Quoted from Suzuki, *Living by Zen*, pp. 171-172.

⁷ Quoted from Suzuki, *Living by Zen* p. 189.

The koan in its double function may therefore be considered a deliberate and calculated attempt to secure a result previously obtained naturally and without contrivance. Conversely, it can perhaps be said . . . that the earlier student had his own natural koan, natural as to the burning substance, although still to be given a proper form or focus, whereas in the later period, when the inquirer approached neither with a suitable form of the question nor yet existentially fired to its all-consuming content, the master himself sought to foster both by initially presenting such a “question” from the outside. In this instance, the koan, rather than being partially natural, was totally given.

But again, it must be emphasized immediately that as long as the “question” or koan continues to be “on the outside” or “given,” the effort is futile, and there is, finally, no Zen Buddhism. In its character and structure, however, as well as in the mode of its application and usage, the koan is carefully designed as a safeguard against precisely this danger. For by its very nature the koan does not permit itself to be fitted into any dualistic subject-object scheme of the ego in ego-consciousness. It can never even be meaningful, much less be “solved” or satisfied, and remain an object external to the ego as subject. This is strikingly illustrated by one of the most widely given “first” koans, “*Mu!*” or in Chinese, “*Wu!*”

The basis of this koan, like that of so many others, is a previously recorded *mondo*-exchange. The ninth-century Chinese master, Chao-chou (Japanese, Joshu), once being asked if a dog had Buddha-nature, replied “*Mu!*” (taken literally, “It has not!” but also being the sound of a dog’s bark). As a formal, given koan, however, this one-syllable response is completely removed from the narrow confines of the initial inquiry, and presented simply by itself for the student to “see,” or to “become.” The koan is, “See *Mu!*” or “Become *Mu!*” Clearly this can have no significance and can in no way be handled, dealt with, or realized within the framework of any subject-object dualism.

Similarly, when the koan is taken from one of the aforementioned *mondo*-exchanges, “What is your original face prior to the birth of your father and mother?” or when it is the koan preferred by the eighteenth-century Japanese master, Hakuin, because it contained more of a noetic element, “Hear the sound of one hand!” these problems or challenges can never be answered or met, and, indeed, have no meaning within the subject-object structure of ego-consciousness, its intellection, or logic. Whatever the noetic element which the koan may have, to come to its “resolution” or “understanding” is impossible if it is approached as an object-question or object-problem by the ego as subject, epistemological or otherwise.

Whether “*Mu!*” “The “sound of one hand,” “Where are you after you have been cremated?” or one’s “original face,” the koan, natural or given, offers nothing tangible, nothing to grasp, nothing to take hold of as object. Should the student try to objectify it, under the careful and alert master his maneuver is sharply repudiated and the supposed “solution” is uncompromisingly rejected.

Sometimes, however—for example in the “koan system” as it has developed in Japan—some object-aspect of the form or content of the particular koan may yet remain in the accepted presentation. To filter this out and to broaden and deepen the still-limited realization, the student is given another koan, and then another, and another. Improperly applied, this “koan system”

becomes its own impediment and eventually succumbs to the very danger that the koan was originally intended to guard against.

The only valid content of the koan is the contending ego itself. The genuine quest to “solve” the koan is the quest of the split and divided ego to come to its own reconciliation and fulfillment. Considered from the side of its origination, the koan is itself an expression of that fulfillment. Whether he initially realizes it or not, the authentic struggle with the koan is the struggle of the student to fulfill himself. In either case—natural or given—this koan effort continues to be delusive or vain if undertaken by the ego as subject venturing to deal with or handle its problem as object. For, as has already been seen, it is exactly the existential dichotomy between subject and object that is the problem of the ego.

Zen Buddhism, however, usually has not tried to explain this intellectually, conceptually, or analytically, as I have attempted to do. Zen rather prefers to hit the ego solidly and directly—in the natural *mondo*-exchange or in the formal, given koan—with challenges and demands which the ego in its subject-object disjunction can never meet. These assaults, through expressions of consummate fulfillment in word, deed, or gesture, constitute Zen’s own peculiar and unique mode of concretely declaring—and endeavoring to get the ego to grasp—that in no way can the ego ever complete itself within itself, that it cannot possibly—in terms of its subject-object structure—resolve the contradiction which is this very subject-object structure itself.

The preliminary objective of the koan is, therefore, to impel and incite not merely noetically, but affectively and physically as well, what in the terminology of Zen Buddhism is called the “great doubt”—and to do so in such a way that the ego becomes totally and existentially the “great doubt block” itself. Unless the ego does come to be the “great doubt block” itself, it cannot be said to have arrived at the “great doubt.”

Toward this provisional end, as well as toward its final end, the koan was combined with the already existing practice—in Zen methodology—of sitting crossed-legged in a form of sustained “concentration,” called, in Japanese, *zazen*.⁸ This discipline of seating oneself with legs crossed, each foot upon the opposite thigh, spinal column straight, and hands folded or overlapping in front, in a kind of “contemplation” or “meditation” was prevalent in India long before Buddhism. It was supposedly in this posture that Sakyamuni came to his own fulfillment. It was also in this position that Bodhidharma was reported to have been seated when visited by Hui-k’o. But a century later Hui-neng rebelled against what he recognized to be the purely formalistic and quietistic corruption of this practice. Accordingly, not much mention of it is made immediately following him. Nonetheless, it is generally agreed that Zen monks and students of the period must all have taken to it at some time or another.

With the natural koan, the inner dynamic of this “concentration” derives from one’s own internal disturbance and disquietude. The focus and direction is most apt to be that provided by the master during a recent interview or exchange. The student, after such an encounter, is very likely to carry its effect into the meditation hall and sit with it in *zazen*.

⁸ In Chinese, *tso-ch’an*, literally, “sitting-*dhyana*,” but perhaps better rendered as “Zen sitting.”

In the case of the formal, given koan, however, the ego, not yet roused to the same compelling intensity of its plight, often still lacks the necessary “concentrating” power to “attack” the koan. Thus there arose alongside of the koan and *zazen*, especially in the Rinzai school in Japan, what are known in Japanese as the *sesshin* and *sanzen*.

Depending on the monastery, one week of the month six or eight times a year is devoted entirely by the monk or student to *zazen*—and his koan. Arising usually at 3 a.m., he continues in this *zazen*—except for light work chores, sutra-chanting, meals, a lecture, interviews with the master, and short rest periods, which may be omitted—until 10 p.m., or later, for seven consecutive days. This period is called a *sesshin*, and the daily compulsory and voluntary visits—from two to five—to the master are called *sanzen*.

Under the stimulation of such a regimen with its taut and serious atmosphere, the given koan may begin to take effect. The student, prodded by the stick of the head monk when dozing comes upon him, exertion wanes, or stiffness and tiredness set in, and spurred, inspired, goaded or even driven by the master, finds himself to be more and more caught by his koan. As every response he presents to it is rejected, he becomes increasingly dislodged, shaken, and unsteady in whatever assurance or complacency he originally had. Gradually, having less and less to offer, yet persistently pressed with the same unrelenting demand for an “answer,” the student grappling with the koan, unable as a some-one to deal with his problem as a some-thing, encounters the exact frustration and despair known by the ego in its natural quest to fulfill itself.

The inability of the koan to be resolved as an object by the ego as subject is, in fact, precisely the inability of the ego as ego in its subject-object bifurcation to resolve the existential contradiction that is that bifurcation. For the student, the given koan, also, is now, like the natural koan, a mode or expression of the actual “question” or quandary of the ego itself, and the struggle for its “solution” an equally torturing life-and-death struggle. The koan thus comes to be, as regards the student, a living crisis, taking over as the central and exclusive concern of his entire being. His confronting it is, indeed, his confronting his own predicament in all of its immediate and burning urgency. Not able to cope with it, he truly “feels his innards altogether put out of order as if he had swallowed a fiery ball that he couldn’t expel.”

This accounts for one reason why the monk or student, when he has not yet arrived at a “determination,” frequently refuses to see the teacher, and why, for the compulsory *sanzen* visits, he has sometimes to be beaten, pulled, dragged, or, as once was actually witnessed, forcibly carried by four other monks out of the meditation hall and into the interview.

The master’s insistence upon a response to the koan does not issue in any sense from an external, strange, or heteronomous authority. Quite the contrary. A genuine teacher is an embodiment of the ultimate fulfillment of the agonizing ego itself. His demand for a resolution of the koan, natural or given, is in reality the longing and questing critical mandate of the ego for its own resolution. The refusal to see the master arises from the incapacity of the ego to face itself in its acute lack and inadequacy—tellingly mirrored, as it were, by its consummate completion in the person of the teacher. Staying away affords at least a temporary respite from having to meet in full and uncompromising honesty the imperative of its own inner conflict for mitigation and relief. Having had, during the many previous audiences, its efforts and attempts . . . pared away

and discarded, the ego fights to keep itself sheltered and to avoid not only the embarrassment of disclosure in its already partial nakedness but also the torment of a further or complete exposure in total nakedness. For the threat to the ego of such a total naked exposure in its bared root-contradiction could appear to it to be a threat to its very existence, carrying with it the terror of possible insanity or death.

Expressed in more Zen-like metaphor, the ego, denied and deprived the function of every other aspect and part of itself, is left clinging by its teeth to a branch overhanging a precipice. Holding on to this last remnant of itself, it feels that it can still, at least for the present, preserve itself, albeit in an almost intolerable condition. In this critical circumstance, to be forced to encounter itself genuinely and authentically in the person of the teacher and receive the compelling commands: “Speak!” and “Speak quick!” can be for it a trying ordeal indeed. And this all the more so when it realizes that should it undertake, before the master, to stay put and not respond, it may even be prevented the use of those teeth. Somehow it senses that, ultimately, this is an absolute necessity which, in fact, it must undergo, but which, at the moment, it is not able to undergo.

Not that this denying or proscribing by the master is ever a simple nihilistic negation. What is methodically and rigorously stripped away is that which the ego as subject is able to hold on to or deal with as object. This also involves those contents which could, or do, afford a limited or qualified fulfillment. For as long as the ego as subject continues to be or cling to an object, its inner contradiction and predicament as ego remain. The aim is, therefore, to remove all available object-constituents—including the body itself—toward the end of baring and exposing in its naked contradiction the very subject-object structure of the ego as such. Without an object, the ego, unable to be a subject, becomes itself untenable. Yet, it is just to this radical and fundamental moment that Zen wishes to drive, and there to challenge, in the words of a contemporary teacher: “Without using your mouth, without using your mind, without using your body, express yourself!”

Pressed to this extremity, the nature of the student’s quest and struggle begins to be altered. His *zazen*, hitherto undoubtedly a struggling with and a concentrating upon the koan as an object, is now, shorn of the objectified koan as well as of all other content, itself rendered object-less. This is but the culmination of the process started when the koan began to have its effect and to enter into the student’s innards, eventually to permeate his whole being. Becoming less and less external, it became less and less accessible for ordinary contemplation or meditation. At last, it has been completely divested of every conceivable object-aspect. Nevertheless, it still persists, unsettled and unresolved, and with it, the unremitting exhortation from the master, as from the ego itself, for settlement and resolution.

As with its koan, so with itself. The ego, in an existential quandary which it can neither compose, endure, abandon, or escape, is unable to advance, unable to retreat, unable to stand fixed. Nonetheless, it remains under the impelling admonition to move and to resolve. Thoroughly and systematically denuded, deprived of the use of all its powers, contents, resources, abilities, and, finally, its very body, it faces—notwithstanding—the commanding imperative of the teacher to present and express itself. In this apparent *cul de sac* the ego undergoes a felt anguish of utter

futility and helplessness that ordinarily could lead to suicide. In the Zen situation, however, this anxiety and despair never become submerged into any such total negative hopelessness.

Unlike the ego in a pre-suicidal state, the student with a true master has before him the living assurance of a possible solution to his problem. The teacher, expressing the genuine love and compassion of ultimate reconciliation, not only bolsters and supports through that love, but existentially encourages and reassures simply by his being. The student somehow senses that the master is the student even more than the student is himself. In this he also feels the teacher to be bearing as much as himself the actual trial with its suffering and distress. The master is thus, for the student, the authority, affirmation, and love of the complete fulfillment of the student's very own existence.

The student, on the other hand, is for the teacher at once the teacher himself, although another, whom the teacher must, out of his love and compassion, thrust into the tormenting pit of the utterly raw and exposed inner contradiction. On his part, the master is obliged to tear away and probe into the central core of the wound, for only when fully laid bare and existentially realized can it heal.

As yet, the pain and anxiety of the ego in its ostensible prostration do not issue from the wound or contradiction directly, but derive from the ego as bearer of the wound. Denied, from without, all object-content, the ego, from within, still not subjectless, and hence still not genuinely objectless, continues to hold on. Once, however, it can become the unwrought root-contradiction, then the contradiction supports and bears itself, and the exterior or simply felt negativity of the ego is left behind.

The preliminary objective, consequently, is for the ego, bodily as well as mentally, to come to be this radical contradiction or "great doubt block." The "great doubt" or "great doubt block" is no other than the intrinsic predicament of the ego in ego-consciousness totally and exhaustively exacerbated. The initial purpose of the koan—and the accompanying methodology of *zazen*, the *sesshin*, and *sanzen*—is to get the ego to arouse, to crystallize, to bring entirely to the fore, and then, rather than endure, to become wholly and authentically the living contradiction which, as ego, it veritably is.

In order that the ego thus be true to itself as ego, it must expend itself and actualize its ultimate limit not in terms of its external failures or impossibilities, but in terms of its inner structural antinomy.⁹ As an ever object-oriented subject, for the ego to approach this actualization it is usually necessary that every possible content for its object-orientation be spent, depleted, or denied. Unable as subject to make any further effort away from itself toward the outside, it may then undergo an internal transformation, not remaining as subject and simply reversing its orientation inwardly upon itself as object in introspection, but becoming instead, radically and consummately, its inherent root-contradiction. Only when it has become fully that contradiction does it finally come to be subjectless and objectless. For as that core-contradiction, ego-consciousness is, itself, arrested and checked. Ceasing to be a fluid, conditioned subjectivity, it is now, without subjectivity or objectivity, one total, solid, existential block.

⁹ Antinomy: fundamental conflict or contradiction.

This is not, however, either the pre-ego-consciousness of the infant, the abortive ego-consciousness of the idiot, the retarded ego-consciousness of the “wolf-child,” the deteriorated ego-consciousness of the psychotic, the numbed ego-consciousness of the anesthetized, the lethargic ego-consciousness of the stupor, the quiescent ego-consciousness of dreamless sleep, the suspended ego-consciousness of the trance, or the inert ego-consciousness of the coma. This is rather ego-consciousness itself, in and as its own radical contradiction, stayed and impacted. It is neither vacant nor blank, nor does it cancel itself and dissolve. While blocked and constricted, lacking active discrimination between subject and object, itself and not itself, it is not at all dull or lifeless. It is, indeed, most sensitive. Moreover, being as yet unresolved, its struggle continues, although no more by or of the ego merely as ego. Ego has at last become koan, and both have become the struggle and “concentration” itself, the “great doubt block” itself, the root-contradiction itself, subjectless and objectless.

This is the ego thoroughly exhausted as ego. No longer subject or object, it is unable to strive or attempt. In contradistinction to the only seeming helplessness of the pre-suicidal state, this is consummate existential helplessness itself, in which even suicide is impossible. As long as the ego as subject can undertake an act, albeit its own annihilation, it is not truly helpless.

Similarly, it is the ego acutely and genuinely its root-contradiction which constitutes the true dilemma, the true impasse, the true *cul de sac*, the true nihilism of valuelessness and meaninglessness, the true *aporia* of “no exit.” This is the plight and the predicament of the ego utterly and conclusively excoriated, shorn of every veil and integument (covering). This is ultimate negativity itself.

This ultimate negativity, while a necessary antecedent and not simply negative, is, however, still a precondition. It is not yet resolution or fulfillment. Becoming the “great doubt block,” that is, the root-contradiction in its root, is not the final end.

No longer in its subject-object contradiction, the ego as that contradiction itself is wholly attenuated, disabled, and immobilized. Its being objectless and subjectless is a negativity of total bondage and obstruction, in which subject and object in their contradictory dualistic polarity completely impede and impound each other in one constricted, helpless clog. Being thus negatively subjectless and objectless, having neither mind nor body, is not sufficient. Without body, without mouth, and without mind, there must be expression. The root-contradiction or “great doubt block” remains to be radically and fundamentally broken up and resolved.

It is only, however, when this critical state of the “great doubt block” has been fully actualized that it can be uprooted. It is precisely in this condition of the most intense, most delicate tension, that some chance event of daily life, or perhaps some word, deed, or gesture of the master, can suddenly spark the basic and revolutionary upheaval in which this root-contradiction “great doubt block” instantaneously breaks up in what is at the same time a break-through.

Just as the ego in ego-consciousness is initially both an act and a fact, so its eruption and resolution also have the quality of act as well as of fact, but now neither relatively so nor merely of the ego as ego. For even as the root-contradiction “great doubt block,” ordinary ego-

consciousness is, in effect, already transcended. Although still a negative absence of distinction between subject and object, itself and not itself, as the “great doubt block” it encompasses the entire realm of being, including the very differentiation of being from non-being. As the root-contradiction in its root, it is the abyss of being, or, more properly, the abyss of the antinomy between being and non-being, existence and nonexistence. But, while negatively the contradiction and abyss, it is this same root-core which is—positively—the ground and the source.

Approached from the ego, this core is the ultimate extremity and final limit, the innermost center of the contradiction that is ego-consciousness. Actualized as this center, the ego is expended but not yet completely consumed. As long as it remains this root-core in terms of itself—even though exhausted—it continues to be that root negatively—as the root-limit, root-barrier, and root-impediment. As such, the ego is only “as if dead.” When, however, this negative root-core, bursting, uproots and turns on itself, then the ego truly dies the “great death,” which is at once the great birth or “great awakening.”

The “great death” is the ego dying to itself in its radical negativity. In no sense a relative nihilistic destruction or expiration into a hollow void or nothingness, this abrupt uprooting and reversal is, rather, the break-up and dissipation of the contradiction, of the abyss, of the *aporia*. The annulment and negation of ultimate negativity, it is itself positive. The negative dissolution is at the same time a positive resolution. The ego negated as ego in the central contradiction of its ego-consciousness attains, through this negation, positively and affirmatively, its resolution and fulfillment. In dying to itself as ego, it is born and awakens to its Self as Self.

Again to be emphasized is that the root-contradiction in its root is not here any metaphysical or ontological postulate. It is a most urgent and burning actuality. So, its bursting and turning upon itself is also a concrete reality. Breaking up and dissolving as that root-core contradiction, the ego gains, with direct immediacy, reconciliation and completion. The constricted and obstructed ultimate limit is now the freely functioning primordial source and ultimate ground. No longer centered in the root-contradiction of initial ego-consciousness, it is instead centered in the ground and source of its Self. Root-limit, reversing and turning on itself, becomes root-source and root-ground. This radical, cataclysmic uprooting, turning, and reversing by, of, and at the root-core, is called, in Zen, in Japanese, *satori*.¹⁰

The *satori* break-up and dissolution of the expended and arrested ego in its root-contradiction at the root is the awakening of the ego or the root to its ground and source in its Self. From the perspective of ego-consciousness in its core-contradiction “great doubt block,” the total break-up, disintegration, and death is an awakening and break-through to its Self. But from the opposite perspective, the awakening and break-through to its Self is the awakening and opening up of its Self. This is, truly, Self-awakening: that which awakens is that which is awakened, that by which it is awakened, and that to which it is awakened. Act as well as fact, it is at the same time its Self the ground, root-source, and prius of act and fact.

¹⁰ In Chinese *wu*, literally awakening or apprehending.

As ground and source neither dynamic nor static, it is not, however, a dead identity or a vacuous, abstract universality or oneness. Nor is it a simple non-duality or a “false sameness.” Although its Self is the ground, source, and prius of the static and dynamic, it never remains in its Self, but is forever giving rise to expression of its Self. Indeed, awakened to its Self, it realizes that the very subjectivity of the ego as subject even in its contradictory duality, finally derives and springs from its Self. Similarly, the ultimate font of the longing and quest of the ego to overcome its alienation and estrangement and to complete and fulfill itself is also precisely its Self. Broken off from its Self, it longs and quests to return to its Self. The ego in its dual contradiction of having, yet not having, itself and its world, is in the plight of having, yet not having, its Self.

In initial ego-consciousness, in addition to being separated and removed as subject from itself, the other, and its world as object, the ego is moreover cut off and obstructed as ego from its own ground and source. Its individuality, fragmented from within and isolated from without, is ungrounded and therefore unsustainable. Such an individuality, rent within, dissociated without, and strange to its own source, can never genuinely know or affirm itself because it never is or has itself genuinely. Solely in dying to itself as ego and awakening to its Self as Self is its authentic, autonomous in-dividuality actualized for the first time. Ceasing to be mere ego, it is hereafter what may be designated or characterized as Self-ego, or ego-Self.

The inherent predicament of the existentially contradictory dualistic subject-object structure of the ego in ego-consciousness is ultimately resolved only when that living root-contradiction breaks up and dies to itself at its root, awakening in resolution and fulfillment in and as its Self as Self-ego. Its Self being the ground of itself as ego, it is at last free from the split and cleavage of any inner or outer dualistic duality. No longer struggling “to be” out of the gulf and abyss of an unresolved, bifurcated core, it now both is and issues forth from its Self as the fount and wellspring of itself as subject and object.

Unlike the conditioned subjectivity of initial ego-consciousness, no more does object bind, obstruct, circumscribe, or curtail subject. Nor, as in the state of the “great doubt block,” do subject and object immobilize each other in the depth of their contradictory duality. Uprooted and reversed in and at that contradictory core, they are henceforth rooted and centered in their ultimate source. Trans-rooted and trans-centered, they cease to impede in mutual contradiction and become, instead, the free-flowing manifestation of that source.

From the perspective of the ground-source in and of its Self, precisely this free and continuous flow out of its Self as subject and object is its return, unhindered and unhampered, to its Self, through time, but in Eternity. Again, this is Self-manifestation: that which manifests is that which is manifested, that through which it is manifested, and that of which it is manifested.

From the perspective of the awakened subject, fully realized as the unfolding of its ultimate ground, it is pure or unconditioned Self-subject, as its object is pure or unconditioned Self-object. Just as subject is expression and function of its Self, so, too, is object equally expression and function of its Self. As pure, unconditioned subject and object, subject is, indeed, object, as object is, indeed, subject. Their duality, no longer contradictory or dualistic, is hereafter a reconciled non-contradictory, non-dualistic duality. Moving unobstructed and unimpeded in the absolute freedom of unconditioned subjectivity, subject mirrors object and is mirrored by object,

as object mirrors subject and is mirrored by subject. That which mirrors is that which is mirrored, that from which it is mirrored, and that in which it is mirrored. Ego, ego-consciousness, and its subject-object duality, becoming trans-rooted, trans-centered and transformed, are now the non-contradictory, non-dualistic duality of ego-Self, or Self-ego.

As Self the source of itself as ego, Self-ego is at once with form as it is without form. It is formless form. As inexhaustible ground, it is without any definite fixed form, which formlessness is also not a fixed form. Neither theoretical nor abstract, this formlessness is its Self the fountain-spring of form. Because formless, it is able, in actual existence, to give rise to, to express its Self in, and to be all forms.

In its awakened Self-awareness and fulfillment as Self-ego, it is and has the form of itself as Self-ego. As ground-source, however, it is never simply the form of itself as Self-ego. Itself and not-itself as form in space, ego-Self is its own being and its own non-being as existence in time. It is, indeed, realized *ecstasis*, beyond itself and not-itself, beyond its being and its non-being. It may assert in unconditional affirmation, “I am” and “I am not,” “I am I” and “I am not I,” “I am I because I am not I,” “I am not I, therefore I am I.” Unconditional Self-affirmation is, in fact, an unconditionally dynamic Self-affirmation-negation, or, Self-negation-affirmation. (This may be considered, as well, to be the nature—or *logos*—of Love.)

Further, reconciled to and completed in its Self as Self-ego, it is the other, as the other is its Self. Itself and other being but an aspect of the duality of subject and object, just as it is itself an unfolding of its Self, so, too, is the other equally an unfolding of its Self: “I am I,” “Thou art thou,” “I am thou,” “Thou art I.”

As with subject and object, itself and the other, so with itself and its world. “When I see the flower, I see my Self; the flower sees my Self; the flower sees flower; the flower sees its Self; my Self sees its Self; its Self sees its Self.”

Here is living, creative Love in consummate activation and fulfillment, ever expressing its Self, ever that which is expressed. That which expresses is that which is expressed, that with which it is expressed, and that for which it is expressed. Here, alone, is total and unconditioned affirmation of subject and object, of itself, of the other, of the world, of being, for here, alone, is total and unconditioned affirmation of its Self, by its Self, through its Self as Self-ego.

Now it is and knows its “original face” prior to the birth of its parents. Now it sees “*Mu!*” hears “the sound of one hand,” and can present its Self “without using its body, mouth, or mind.” Now it apprehends who and where it is “after its cremated ashes have been scattered.”

This, finally, is human existence completed and fulfilled beyond the existential contradiction of its initial ego-consciousness. This, at last, is Man ultimately realized as Man fully being and having him-Self and his world, able to “transform mountains, rivers, and the great Earth, and reduce them into Self,” and to “transform Self and turn it into mountains, rivers, and the great Earth.”¹¹

¹¹ See Suzuki, *Living By Zen*, pp. 26-27.

This, in my limited understanding, is the relation of Zen Buddhism to the human situation.

Erich Fromm, D. T. Suzuki, Richard De Martino. *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, N.Y., Harper Colophon Books, 1960 (pp.142-171).