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old man's foolish grumblings." And then he implores them to "please take good care of yourselves." Thus with his always focused, ever-attentive mindfulness, Hakuin concludes with the essential non-essence of Buddhism and Zen: non-attachment and compassion. [ET 103]

So go out and kill some Buddhas, and a have a really, really nice day!

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Contents

The first Western Zen master, Heraclitus, said much the same thing: "The path up and the path down are one and the same." So if they ask about either path, the "opposite-way" response will show their identity. Hui-neng might have added that if they ask about the middle way, reply with the most radical extremes! So this is part of the sense behind the nonsense. However as truly generous and compassionate as Hui-neng was, he didn't really give all that much away. He gave away free menus, but he didn't give away free food. For describing how it works is not the same as releasing the spontaneity of consciousness that allows it to work. It's still up to us to work out our own spontaneity with diligence.

Another helpful hint comes from contemporary Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh. He says that "the response to the koan lies in the life of the practitioner." [ZK 57]. The koan is not a puzzle or riddle with one correct answer that the student has to guess. The koan is aimed at evoking, or provoking a certain state (or perhaps anti-state or statelessness!) of consciousness. Thus of two responses that seem formally identical one may be judged perfectly apt, another abysmally wrong, the pretext for a compassionate whack on the head. The koan isn't a test question (fill in the blank mind?); it's an opportunity to wake up. Sometimes the sleeper doesn't respond and needs a good dousing with cold water.

The koan is this wakeup call. Wake up and live!

IV. Last Words

In many of the classic Buddhist and Zen texts it's important to look at the opening and closing words. Often the parts that seem at first to be peripheral (dedications, salutations, etc.) convey some of the most crucial messages in the entire work. Hakuin concludes his Zen 101 course with two injunctions. First, he humbly begs his students to "overlook once more an

asked what it was, adding, "Don't say it's a pitcher." Some of the smarter monks came up with smart things to say. Then Isan the cook came up and kicked it over, breaking it. Bingo! Isan got to be abbot. The moral of this story: The urge to destroy a pitcher is a creative urge also. Which doesn't mean that we can achieve an awakened mind if we kick over a pitcher every time we see one. It's been done!

Commenting on this famous koan, Shibayama says that the "natural and free working flowing out of true Zen spirituality" should never be confused with "unusual or eccentric behavior with a stink of Zen." (287) Isn't this true of all behavior that "reeks of anarchy." How free from arche is it really? Is it free from the arche of reactive rebellion? Is it free from the arche of egoistic accumulation? Is it free from the arche of self-righteousness?

The real problem is not how to kick over a pitcher, but how to tear down that deceptive pitcher of the ego.

The Wisdom of Absurdity

So is it perfectly clear now? Do I have to draw a pitcher? If it's not, here are two more strong hints from some of our compassionate teachers.

Hui-neng, very early in the history of Zen, generously gives away much of the secret of the "inscrutable" responses of Zen. Zen mind is basically dialectic in action, training the mind to practice spontaneously in ones everyday life what some philosophers have merely written about. Notice that Hui-neng recommends an explicitly anarchic method, that is, one that subverts principles: "If people question you about principles, if they ask about being, reply with nonbeing; if they ask about nonbeing, reply with being. If they ask about the ordinary, reply with the holy; if they ask about the holy, reply with the ordinary; the two paths are relative to each other, producing the principle of the middle way." [SH 72]

> Zen anarchy? What could that be? Some new variations on the koans, those classic proto-dadaist Zen "riddles"?
>
> What is the Sound of One Hand making a Clenched Fist?
>
> If you see a Black Flag waving on the Flagpole, what moves? Does the flag move? Does the wind move? Does the revolutionary movement move?
>
> What is your original nature — before May '68, before the Spanish Revolution, before the Paris Commune?

Somehow this doesn't seem quite right. And in fact, it's unnecessary. From the beginning, Zen was more anarchic than anarchism. We can take it on its own terms. Just so you don't think I'm making it all up, I'll cite some of the greatest and most highly-respected (and respectfully ridiculed) figures in the history of Zen, including Hui-Neng (638–713), the Sixth Patriarch, Lin-Chi (d. 867), the founder of the Rinzai school, Mumon (1183–1260), the Rinzai master who assembled one of the most famous collections of koans, Dogen (1200–1253), the founder of Soto, the second major school, and Hakuin (1685–1768), the great Zen master, poet and artist who revitalized Zen practice.

I. Smashing States of Consciousness

This is what all the great teachers show: Zen is the practice of anarchy (an-arche) in the strictest and most super-orthodox sense. It rejects all "arches" or principles — supposedly transcendent sources of truth and reality, which are really no more than fixed ideas, mental habits and prejudices that help create the illusion of dominating reality. These "principles" are not mere innocuous ideas. They are Imperialistic Principalities that

intrude their sovereign power into our very minds and spirits. As anti-statist as we may try to be, our efforts will come to little if our state of mind is a mind of state. Zen helps us dispose of the clutter of authoritarian ideological garbage that automatically collects in our normal, well-adjusted mind, so that we become free to experience and appreciate the world, nature, and the "Ten Thousand Things," the myriad beings around us, rather than just using them as fuel for our ill-fated egoistic cravings.

Zen is also the strictest and most super-orthodox form of Buddhism — and at the same time the most iconoclastic, revolutionary and anarchistic one. The roots of Zen go back to the beginnings of the Buddhist tradition — not to any founding sacred documents or to any succession of infallible authorities, but to the experience that started the tradition: the anarchic mind! Forget the "ism" of Buddhism. It's not ultimately about doctrines and beliefs. The "Buddha" that it's named after means simply the awakened mind or somebody, anyolebody, who happens to "have" that kind of mind. And Zen (or Ch'an, in Chinese) means simply meditation, which is just allowing the mind to be free, wild, awake, and aware. It's not about the occasional or even regular practice of certain standardized forms of activity (sitting and walking meditation, koan practice, being inscrutable, trying to look enlightened, etc.). Equating meditation with silent sitting is something that Zen simply will not stand for! Zen is also intimately linked to the absurd, but it can't be reduced to doing and saying absurd things, as in the popular caricature of Zen. Zen is not nihilism, but is (like all Buddhism) the Middle Way between hopeless nihilism and rigid dogmatism (does a dogmatist have a Buddha-nature?).

Original Minds

Zen is also the practice of the Middle Way (Madhyamaka) philosophy. In particular, the form called prasangika, the philo-

The blade that uncuts us from the cat, and from everything else.

Yo Mama A Shit Stick

"The Buddha is a Shit Stick." "Yo Mama a Shit Stick." The one koan with a clear solution. But Zen never lets us take the easy way out. Let us investigate further.

"A monk asked Unmon, 'What is Buddha?' Unmon said, 'A shit-stick!' (Kan-shiketsu)" (161) There have been a lot of theories about the intriguing question of the exact nature if this famous shit stick. Shibayama says it may have been "a bamboo tool used in ancient China to pick up and take away feces from the road." [ZC 161] Apparently if you meet the feces on the road you don't kill it, you carry it away. Get the picture? Catch bullshit at four. Serious Zen practice. Somebody has to do it and very few are interested.

Shibayama says that "for Master Unmon, here, the whole universe was a shit-stick." [ZC 161] Right, we've all had days like that. But no, he means that there is "no room for such an idle distinction as dirty and clean." [ZC 161] However, as true as this might be it's also a bit too obvious. Shibayama warns that the koan's aim of awakening should never be subordinated to the quest for a reasonable or ingenious response. On the other hand, he adds that the shit-stick has "another role to play" that can't be overlooked: it "roots out any possible preoccupation in the student's mind such as 'virtuous Buddha, inviolable holiness' and the like." [ZC 162]

Whatever else it might be, the shit-stick is a cure for all kinds of Holy Shit.

If It Ain't Fixed, Break It

And nothing is fixed! The famous master Hyakujo wanted to find an abbot for a monastery. He put a pitcher on the floor and

even more pertinently, "Do mice have a Buddha nature?" Anyhow, Nansen came in, held up the cat, and said "Say something and I won't kill the cat! If you can't say anything, I'll kill it!" None of them could figure out what Nansen wanted them to say, so he killed the cat. Apparently these monks were better at disputing how many fleas can dance on the back of a cat than they were at acting. The next evening, Joshu returned to the temple. Nansen greeted Joshu, telling him what happened with to the poor cat (and to the really poor monks). Nansen asked Joshu if he could have saved the cat. Joshu took off one of his sandals, put it on his head, turned around and walked out. Nansen said, "If you had been there, you would have saved the cat!"

Joshu's action was a totally spontaneous, right? His lightening Zen mind was not disturbed by mere logical reasoning. How Zen it is! Or was there actually an underlying logic? The logic of reversal. To act by not acting. To say something by saying nothing. The sandal's place is reversed, from the toe to the head. Things are turned heals over head. Joshu puts Nansen in the place of the cat. Where was Nansen's compassion? Joshu puts himself in the place of Nansen, who has been placed in the place of the cat. Mumon alludes to all these reversals: "Had Joshu only been there,/He would have taken action,/ Had he snatched the sword away,/ Nansen would have begged for his life." [ZC 109]

Shibayama suggests that the monks were engaging in "speculative religious arguments." [ZC 110] Something similar to the speculative political arguments of today, though with the internet, political monks from east, west and every other direction can now join together to dissect cats in a million different ways. Albert Low notes that it is said that "the sword of prajna" that Nansen used to kill the cat is "a sword that cuts not in two but in one." [WG 112] Maybe it should be said that it cuts into none! It's the magical sword that uncuts!

sophical anti-philosophy of the great Indian sage Nagarjuna (c. 150–250). It's said that the king of the Nagas, a race of superhuman serpent people, appeared to Nagarjuna and gave him the Prajnaparamita (Perfection of Wisdom) sutras. Western supernatural snakes are sneaky and deceive us with dangerous knowledge, but Eastern ones are compassionate and help us poor deluded humans gain a little wisdom. Awakened by the wisdom he found in the sutras, Nagarjuna went on to demonstrate that all discourse about the nature of reality is nonsense. Actually he showed that it is nonsense, it isn't nonsense, it both is and isn't nonsense, and it neither is nor isn't nonsense. Then he showed that everything he just showed isn't true. Actually that it is true, it isn't true, it both is and isn't true, and it neither is nor isn't true. Then he showed that all this stuff he just showed about truth is nonsense, etc. etc. We could go on but you get the point. Zen practitioners got it, and decided to create their own unique ways of using words and concepts to destroy our illusions about words and concepts.

Going even further back in history, Zen's origin can be traced back to the time that Shakyamuni Buddha went to Bodhgaya, sat down under the Bodhi Tree and invented meditation. Of course he didn't really invent it but that's as good a point as any to mark its beginning and we have all those fantastic statues to remind us of him sitting there. You can almost hear the giant sucking sound as the void begins to swallow everything up! Anyway, Zen is the meditation school, so its very name points back to that experience.

Another event that's sometimes seen as the origin of Zen (can't something have several origins?) is Shakyamuni Buddha's famous Flower Sermon at Vulture Peak. A huge throng assembled to hear his Buddhaship's profound words. Many of them must have been desperate for an infallible guru to save them from all that angry karma snapping at their asses. But all he did was silently hold up a flower before the teeming multitude. (If you think this lousy article is a disappointment, imag-

ine what they thought!). But a single person, Kashyapa, smiled, showing that at least one person got it. That there's nothing to get! This could also be looked upon as the point at which irony entered the history of thought, a tradition carried on fiercely by Zen, but much neglected by later deadly serious spiritual and political tendencies, including the most radical and anarchistic ones.

How Empty Is It?

Most of the time when the Buddha did sermons he did talk, but he tended to emphasize that all things — including his own words and concepts — are empty. What he meant by that is that like everything else they're empty of "inherent being" or substantiality. They're nothing but a lie "in themselves." The truth is always elsewhere — his words and everything else can only be understood as inseparable parts of an interrelated web. This web is often pictured as "The Jewel Net of Indra," an infinite expanse of gems, each one reflecting the light of all the others. We distort the interconnectedness and interdetermination of the entire infinitely — faceted Intergalactic Net when we abstract separate objects and egos from it.

This is a very radical teaching. Blake had the same idea: that if the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear as it is: Infinite. The Heart Sutra, which is one of the most important Buddhist texts and is recited daily in many monasteries, shows the revolutionary implications of this idea of deep interrelatedness (dependent origination or pratitya-samutpada), the idea that all things open into the infinite.

This sutra says that all dharmas, the constituents of all beings, are "marked with emptiness," and that "in emptiness there is no form, nor feeling, nor perception, nor impulse, nor consciousness; No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; No forms, sounds, smalls, tastes, touchables or objects of mind; No sight-organ element, … No mind-consciousness element; … no ignostudent of Zen: hand to hand combat with King Kongan, the million pound gorilla.

The Death of Dog

"A monk asked Joshu, "Does a dog have a Buddha Nature?" Joshu said, "Mu!" This great Zen master didn't seem to know that the correct Buddhist answer is "yes," since all sentient beings have a Buddha Nature. Shibayama Roshi says that "although literally 'Mu' means No, in this case it points to the incomparable satori which transcends both yes and no, to the religious experience of the Truth one can attain when he casts away his discriminating mind." [ZC 21] But even as he betrays the secret of Mu, Shibayama Roshi tricks the reader. For if "Mu" transcends both yes and no, it will also transcend "any religious experience of the Truth," which it will brutally murder along with the various Buddhas and Patriarchs that Shibayama says we slay with the Great Sword of Mu. And when we cast away the discriminating mind, don't we cast a discriminating eye on everything we see, including the works of Mumon and Shibayama Roshi?

Shibayama himself later says that while we are conceptualizing "transcending both yes and no," the "real 'Mu' is lost forever." [ZC 22] Another monk asked Joshu, "Does a dog have a Buddha Nature?" Joshu said, "U!" Yes! Had Joshiu then decided to come down on the side of spiritual correctness? Not while the sound of "Mu" is still echoing in the background.

Does a dog ever appear in this koan? Give it a bone!

The Resurrection of the Cat

At Nansen's temple the monks of the East Hall and the monks of the West Hall were arguing about a cat. The nature of their dispute has not been passed down. But who knows? Maybe it was "Does a cat have a Buddha nature?" Or perhaps

It's a bit like the well-rounded individuals who do a bit of hatha yoga at the Y, but never suspect that there could be a yoga of diligent study, compassionate action, and selfless devotion.

Hui-neng also notes the problem of making a fetish out of zazen or sitting meditation. There are, he says, "confused people who sit in meditation fanatically trying to get rid of illusion and do not learn kindness, compassion, joyfulness, equanimity, wisdom, and expedient skills." These people are "like wood or stone, without any function," and "are called nonthinking." [SH 93] Hakuin learned the same truth from his "decrepit old teacher" Shoju Rojin, who said of the Zen monks of his time: "What are you really like? I'll tell you. Large sacks of rice, fitted out in black robes." [ET 15] Sort of like the dummies at the end of "Zero for Conduct."

Zen offers us a double-edged sword. One edge is the Buddha-killing edge for slaying those Buddhas, patriarchs, traditions, rituals, and revered texts that would enslave us for the name of our own liberation. The other edge is the killing-Buddha edge that cuts in the opposite direction. For those Buddhas, patriarchs, rituals and texts that might enslave us, once slain with the uncutting sword of non-discrimination, can help us annihilate everything else we hold dear.

Nothing is spared in this massacre — Lin-Chi, who said to "Kill the Patriarch if you meet him on the road" was himself a patriarch.

III. The Koan: Entering the Jetstream

Let's enter the weird world of Mondo Zendo. OK, so what is the sound of one hand clapping? Struggling with such a koan (Japanese), kungan (Chinese), or kongan (Korean) is central to Zen practice, particularly in the Lin-Chi or Rinzai tradition, the lightening-mind school. It's a daunting task for the beginning

rance, no extinction of ignorance … no decay and death, no extinction of decay and death… no suffering, no origination, no stopping, no path… no cognition, no attainment and no non-attainment." [HS 91, 97, 113] It's pretty much no nothing, and this destroys the basis for everything, including all the most fundamental tenets of Buddhism. The central teachings, the Four Noble Truths of Suffering, the Cause of suffering, the Cure for suffering, and the Way to effect the cure are all undermined, because here is no suffering, no causality, no cessation, no way!

And Buddhism is all about the "awakened mind," right? Tough luck: "no mind!"

Have A Little Compassion

How depressing! Everything's running on empty, all our goals are pointless, and nothing we say communicates anything! But irony strikes again. Realizing these limits is part of the therapy that we need to escape the real suffering that comes from living in a constantly-disappointing bad-dream world of illusion. A world in which we pretend that what is empty is full, that we (unlike anybody else) can literally do the impossible, and that our own personal ideas are a good substitute for reality. Though neither our suffering nor the ego that we think undergoes the suffering have "inherent existence," there is a real experience of suffering that hits us when we succumb to these illusions. The dissatisfaction, hopelessness, anxiety and depression that follow lead us to lash out angrily at the world, and to struggle desperately to gain impossible control over it, so we end up inflicting even more suffering on the humans, cats, dogs, door frames and other beings that have the bad luck to stand in our way.

So what can we do? Shakyamuni Buddha once said that if you find someone who has been wounded with a poison arrow, the most urgent thing is not to find out who shot the arrow, what the bow was made of, who made the arrow, etc. but

to remove the goddam arrow! Every day we observe a world of people walking around with arrows sticking out of their chests. We look in the mirror and see an arrow protruding from our very own skull. Lost in thought, on whatever irrelevantly exalted or distractingly trashy level, we somehow forget to show a little compassion for others or even ourselves and get to work on extracting those arrows.

Zen is about that compassionate action. It's the way of negation, but it's also the most positive and practical path imaginable. According to Hui-neng "the spirit of the Way means always behaving respectfully, universally respecting and loving all creatures, without disdain." [SH 91] If we open ourselves to really experiencing other beings and nature, we can stop dominating and manipulating them, and begin to appreciate and even love them. This bundless care for other beings is expressed in the Shiguseigan or boddhisattva vow that's recited at the end of zazen (sitting) practice. It begins: "beings are countless; I vow to save them all." Cross my Heart Sutra and hope to neither be born nor die! If I can't save trillions, maybe I can at least save a few billion. Zen urges us to aim our anti-arrows very high!

Living In Lotus Land

It should be clear now that Zen is not a form of mere escapism — in fact it's just the opposite. It does promise an escape — an escape from suffering and the illusions that cause it. But it teaches that liberation from illusion and suffering can only be achieved by a more intense experience of the reality of the world and of nature. Zen, for all its ascetic practices, revels in worldliness. It's true to the Buddhist teaching that Samsara, the crazy, bustling, dusty world of constant change is itself Nirvana, the liberation that results from complete awakening. Hui-neng says that "Seeking enlightenment apart from the world/ Is like looking for crawfish tails on a nutria." [SH 23, slightly revised] Hakuin expresses the same idea when he says that "This

Dharma!" There's a bit of irony in lecturing the Buddha on the Dharma! But what's really absurd is all these Buddhas running around looking for gurus to give them the truth. "Students don't have enough faith in themselves, and so they rush around looking for something outside themselves." [ZT 23]

Nothing outside, nothing inside.

Stone Buddhas

Another reproach, similar to the charge of authoritarianism, that is sometimes leveled against Zen is that it is ritualistic. Zen sometimes appears ritualistic for the very good reason that it has a lot of rituals. But it must also be seen as the most scathing attack on all forms of ritualism. Hui-neng did the best job of demolishing this distortion of Zen. For Zen, a central problem with rites and rituals is that they easily fuel what Hui-neng calls the "religious ego": the condition of those "who understand and practice yet entertain a sense of attainment, producing a self-image." [SH 93] None, he says, can attain "great liberation" as long as they cling to this ego that constantly gazes at itself in a spiritual mirror, admiring all the layers of merit collecting on the sacred self. A consciousness very similar to that of the political militant who glories in possessing the correct line, the sacred sectarian truth.

Hui-neng also shows how some people confuse sunyata, the emptiness of all things, including the mind, with the need to turn the mind into a vacant lot. They assume that when all the greater and lesser vehicles are on the road, wheels turning, the parking lot of the mind is finally vacant. But Hui-neng attacks this as the "wrong view" of those "deluded people who sit quietly with empty minds, not thinking of anything whatsoever, and claim this is greatness." [SH 17] He doesn't say that this kind of practice is necessarily a bad thing, but rather that we shouldn't take it for "the essence of Zen" or as an occasion for great spiritual pride at having the emptiest mind on the block.

So then Zen says we should look away from the world and all external authorities, and turn inward to find our source of authority? Far from it! We need freedom from both internal and external authorities and principles. After all, all those external authorities control us only because they take on the form of a powerful image within our mind. So Lin-Chi says, "Whether you're facing inward or facing outward, whatever you meet up with, just kill it! If you meet a Buddha, kill the Buddha. If you meet a patriarch, kill the patriarch. If you meet an arhat, kill the arhat. If you meet your parents, kill your parents. If you meet your kinfolk, kill your kinfolk. Then for the first time you will gain emancipation, will not be entangled with things, will pass freely anywhere you wish to go." [ZT 52] If we kill all these dominating authority-figures (images or figurations within consciousness), then we can experience the reality behind the image, the reality of mind, the reality of beings.

Lin-Chi exhorts the "Followers of the Way" not to "take the Buddha to be some sort of ultimate goal. In my view he's more like the hole in a privy." [ZT 76] This (like the toilet paper remark) is a typical Zen comment, and should always be looked upon as is a form of highest praise. The hole in the donut may be relatively useless, but some holes serve a very important practical purpose. Lin-Chi is harsher with boddhisattvas and arhats, who are dismissed as "all so many cangues and chains, things for fettering people." [ZT 76] The point may beto emphasize the fact that only the free, awakened mind ("Buddha") is beyond being turned into a new source of subjection and bondage. The Buddha is just the hole through which all the old shit ("die alte Scheisse," as someone called it) passes when we relieve ourselves of it.

So where should we look as our source of authority. To ourselves, of course — and since there's no self, that means we should look nowhere. "Do you want to get to know the patriarchs and the Buddhas? They're none other than you, the people standing in front of me listening to this lecture on the

earth where we stand is the Pure Lotus Land,/ And this very body, the body of Buddha!" [ZW] And contemporary Buddhist poet Gary Snyder says that "the truly experienced person," by which he means the truly experiencing person, "delights in the ordinary." [PW 153]

In a similar spirit, Hui-neng asks how the legacy of great masters should be "demonstrated and transmitted?" This is pretty important, because Zen is defined as the school of "direct transmission outside the scriptures." Hui-neng replies that "there is no demonstration or transmission; it is only a matter of seeing nature, not a matter of meditation or liberation… these two things are not Buddhism; Buddhism is a non-dualistic teaching." Not "transmitting something," but seeing nature. If we allow ourselves to really experience nature we find that we are not just in it; we are it, though even to say that distorts what we see. That old Jewish lens-grinder who worked so diligently to clarify our sight expressed it accurately: "we" and "it" are both forms of natura naturans, "nature naturing."

Zen would add, "empty forms."

Please Identify Yourself

Hakuin says that "it is with great respect and deep reverence that I urge all of you superior seekers who investigate the secret depths to be as earnest in penetrating and clarifying the self as you would be in putting out a fire on top of your head." [ET 3] I'm sure we've all been in that situation and have probably not spent a lot of time weighing our options. Hakuin's urgent message about the self might really be phrased: "Liar, liar, brain's on fire!" It's hard for us to face self-non-knowledge.

Should we look for the true self, the real self, the authentic self? Good luck! If you do it you're in for a big (or more precisely, an infinitely small) surprise. Hakuin says that "if we turn directly, and prove our True Nature,/ That true Self is no-

self,/ Our own Self is no-self,/ We stand beyond ego and past clever words./ [ZW]

But if there is no self, why then does Buddhism, and even Zen itself, sometimes talk of a self? According to Hui-neng it's not because though there is no "little self" there is a "Big Self." It's not because though there is no "lower self," there is still a "Higher Self." He sticks with the basic Buddhist view, "No Self" (anatta), but points out that "in order to liberate people, the self is provisionally defined." [SH 125] We can give the self some slack for a while. In the end, though, we have to shoot it down. Dogen puts it as follows: "To study the Buddha is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things." [GK 36] This is from the "Genjo Koan," a brief text that is Dogen's most famous one. We find our self by forgetting the self.

Our enlightenment comes from everything we experience, the Ten Thousand Things. Hit the road!

II. Killing the Buddha: Zen's Assault on Authority

Some people think that the exalted place in Zen practice accorded to the teacher or master proves that Zen is "authoritarian." Not to mention that the poor student sometimes gets whacked with a stick. Sado-masochistic authorirtarianism, no less! No doubt Zen can decline into a cult of personality, but it to the extent that it follows its own path of the awakened mind, it is radically and uncompromisingly anti-authoritarian and anarchistic. Neither Shakyamuni Buddha nor any Buddha, Boddhisattva or arhat, much less any master, guru or teacher has the least authority over anyone. As Shakyamuni himself said, we have to "work out our own salvation with diligence" rather than relying on him or anyone else as an authority. No gurus, no saviors. Hui-neng points out that "scripture clearly says to take refuge in the Buddha in oneself, not to take refuge in another Buddha," [SH 40] and Hakuin echoes this, saying, "Outside us, no Buddhas./ How near the Truth, yet how far we seek!/ Like one in water crying, 'I thirst.'" [ZW]

Open Road

The most sustained and most notorious Zen assault on all forms of authority is found in Lin-Chi, the founder of Rinzai, the most overtly anarchic branch of Zen. For Lin-Chi, "things like the Three Vehicles and the twelve divisions of the scriptural teachings — they're all so much old toilet paper to wipe away filth. The Buddha is a phantom body, the patriarchs are nothing but old monks… If you seek the Buddha, you'll be seized by the Buddha devil. If you seek the patriarchs, you'll be fettered by the patriarch devil. As long as you seek something it can only lead to suffering. Better to do nothing." [ZT 47] Doing nothing [wu wei] is the famous Daoist concept for natural action, action in accord with Dao, action in which we freely follow our own way and allow other beings to do likewise. Zhuangzi, the great anarchic Daoist sage, compared it to "riding on the wind."

To do this, we have to free ourselves from our heavy load of karma, that is, the mental formations, habits, prejudices, filters of experience that are the poisonous legacy of our past egoistic strivings for domination. A lot of the burden consists of images of external authorities — gods and other higher beings, leaders and experts, teachers and gurus, sacred scriptures and other revered documents — that we use as panaceas to avoid confronting our own experience and solving our own problems. Lin-Chi says "Get rid of all of them!" As Laozi (the great donothingist) said, the wise person can travel very far without taking along any baggage! (Maybe just a roll of old toilet paper!)