

ZEN MIND SYLLABUS

MLS 484 / REL 342
Dr. Charles Strain
DePaul University
Autumn, 2001

INSTRUCTOR'S DISCLAIMER

This course comes with a disclaimer. The instructor professes to no insider's knowledge of Zen mind, of enlightenment, or *satori*. Like any good student, the best he can do is approach Zen mind with a beginner's mind. To prepare ourselves mentally and personally for this course, I ask us to reflect on three koans: The Birds of Appetite, A Cup of Tea, and The Four Students.

A. The Birds of Appetite

Where there is carrion lying, meat-eating birds circle and descend. Life and Death are two. The living attack the dead, to their own profit. The dead lose nothing by it. They gain too, by being disposed of. Or they seem to, if you must think in terms of gain and loss. Do you then approach the study of Zen with the idea that there is something to be gained by it? This question is not intended as an implicit accusation. But it *is*, nevertheless, a serious question. Where there is a lot of fuss about "spirituality," "enlightenment," or just "turning on" it is often because there are buzzards hovering around a corpse. This hovering, this circling, this descending, this celebration of victory, are not what is meant by the Study of Zen -- even though they may be a highly useful exercise in other contexts. And they enrich the birds of appetite.

Zen enriches no one. There is no body to be found. The birds may come and circle for a while in the place where it is thought to be. But they soon go elsewhere. When they are gone, the "nothing" the "no-body" that was there, suddenly appears. That is Zen. It was there all the time but the scavengers missed it, because it was not their kind of prey.

--From Thomas Merton, Zen and the Birds of Appetite, ix

B. A Cup of Tea

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

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

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

"Like this cup," Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"

--From Shaseki-shu in Paul Reps, Zen Flesh, Zen Bones, p.5

C. The Four Students

The Twenty-eighth Ancestor once said to his students, "The time has come. Can you express your understanding?"

Then one of the students, Daofu, said, "My present view is that we should neither be attached to letters nor be apart from letters, and allow the way to function freely."

The ancestor said, "You have attained my skin."

The nun Zongchi said, "My view is that it is like the joy of seeing Akshobhya Buddha's land just once and not again."

The ancestor said, "You have attained my flesh."

Daoyu said, "The four great elements are originally empty and the five skandhas do not exist. Therefore I see nothing to be attained."

The ancestor said, "You have attained my bones."

Finally Huike answered by bowing three times, stood up, and returned to where he was.

The ancestor said, "You have attained my marrow." Thus he confirmed Huike as the Second Ancestor and transmitted to him dharma and robe.

You should investigate these words of Bodhidharma: “You have attained my skin, flesh, bones, and marrow.” These are the ancestor’s words. All four students had attainment and understanding. Each one’s attainment and understanding is skin, flesh, bones, and marrow leaping out of body and mind: skin, flesh, bones, and marrow dropping away body and mind. You should not see or hear the ancestor with a limited understanding of those statements. Otherwise what was spoken and heard will not be fully grasped.

However, those who have not yet received correct transmission think that the ancestor’s words “skin, flesh, bones, and marrow” are not equal in shallowness and depth, and because the views of the four students vary, one may seem to be closer than the others. They think that skin and flesh are not as close as bones and marrow. They think that the Second Ancestor was acknowledged as attaining the marrow because his view was better than those of the others. People who speak in this way have not yet studied with Buddha ancestors and so do not have transmission of the ancestor way.

--From Dogen, “Twining Vines,” in Moon in a Dewdrop, pp 169-70

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course studies the thought and practice of Zen Buddhism in two cultures: Japan and America. Primary emphasis is placed on Zen as a form of transformative religious practice, using primary sources from Zen teachers and practitioners. We will examine Zen philosophy through a study of a classic Mahayana text, the Heart Sutra, through the examination of Zen koans and through a study of the ideas of Dogen, the founder of Soto Zen. We will also look at the religious and philosophical underpinnings of Zen-influenced, Engaged Buddhism. Although the course is not primarily an examination of the historical development of Zen, students will come to appreciate the way in which religious practices embed themselves within and shape cultural practices through a study of the impact of Zen on Japanese and American cultures. Beyond engaging in classroom discussions, students will be asked to involve themselves in some form of Zen practice for a limited number of sessions. Zen practice will mean Zazen (Zen meditation), or one of the arts (e.g. flower arrangement) influenced by Zen. So participation in a Haiku workshop would meet this course requirement. Throughout the class we will examine the relationship of Zen mind and Zen practice.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- 1) To understand Zen as a form of religious practice rooted in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition.
- 2) To grasp how Zen practice and Zen’s understanding of the self transform various person’s spiritual journeys.

- 3) To grasp the distinctive doctrines of dependent co-arising, the no-self, satori and emptiness as they inform Zen practice.
- 4) To gain a critical awareness of Zen's understanding of these key teachings in relationship to forms of contemporary Western thought.
- 5) To examine how religious traditions migrate to different cultures, embed themselves, and shape cultural practices.
- 6) To examine the distinctive understanding of a liberating political practice that arises in contemporary communities of socially engaged Buddhists influenced by the Zen tradition.
- 7) To explore Zen mind with a beginner's mind.

REQUIRED TEXTS

B. Glassman, Bearing Witness

G. Snyder, Practice of the Wild

C. Strand, Seeds from a Birch Tree

S. Suzuki, Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind

K. Tanahashi, ed., Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen

In addition I will provide students with a packet of xeroxed handouts. There will be a small fee for this packet.

COURSE OUTLINE

Sept 10

A. Introduction: What is Zen?

The introduction focuses on three different approaches to understanding Zen thought and practice.

1. Classic Parables of Zen Mind
Readings: Three parables (see above)
2. Following the Zen Path
Readings: "The Ten Oxherding Pictures" (handout)
3. What is a Spiritual Practice?
4. The Life of a Zen Monk
Video: "The Principles and Practice of Zen, Part I"

Background Readings: P. Kapleau, The Three Pillars of Zen; L. Stryk, The Awakened Self; Thich Nhat Hanh, Zen Keys. If you need to acquire background on Buddhism, see one of the following: W. LaFleur, Buddhism; R. Corless, The Vision of Buddhism; Robinson and Johnson, The Buddhist

Experience; The World of Buddhism.

Sept 17

B. Cultivating a Beginner's Mind

In order to get a basic understanding of Zen practice we will receive basic training in Zazen. Looking at the dharma talks of a Zen master, we will explore the meaning of beginner's mind.

1. Basic Instruction in Zen Meditation
Presenter: Ron Kidd, University Ministry
2. A Zen Master's Dharma Talks
Readings: Shunryu Suzuki, Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind

Background Readings: Thich Nhat Hanh, The Miracle of Mindfulness; S. Sahn, The Compass of Zen; S. Sahn, Dropping Ashes on the Buddha; P. Matthiesson, Nine-Headed Dragon River

Sept 24

C. The Historical Roots of Zen

A discussion of the roots of Chan/Zen in Buddhist teachings and practice in the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism. Emphasis on understanding the concepts of emptiness and Buddha Nature. We will also look at examples of the Chan/Zen Koan tradition focusing on the language of the koan and the koan "as art and as act."

1. The Four Bodhisattvic Vows
Readings: The Four Bodhisattvic Vows in P. Kapleau, Zen: Dawn in the West (handout)
2. Emptiness
Readings: The Heart Sutra in Kapleau (handout)
3. Buddha Nature
Readings: Hakuin's Chant in Praise of Zazen in Kapleau; S. King, Selection from Buddha Nature (handouts)
4. The Chan/Zen Koan Tradition
Readings: Selections from T. Cleary, No Barrier: Unlocking the Zen Koan (handout)

Background Readings: B. Faure, The Rhetoric of Immediacy; S. King, Buddha Nature; F. Streng, Emptiness; Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness; D.T.

Suzuki, The Zen Doctrine of No Mind, and H. Dumoulin, Zen Buddhism: A History

Oct 1, 8

D. Zen: The Classical Expression in Japanese Culture

A study of Zen philosophy as it developed in Japan with particular attention to the writings of Dogen.

Readings: Selections from Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen.

Group Presentations: Zen and Japanese Poetry

Background Readings: M. Abe, A Study of Dogen; Zen and Western Thought; J. Stambaugh, Impermanence Is Buddha Nature, and The Formless Self; Kim, Dogen: Mystical Realist.; W. LaFleur, Dogen Studies; S. Heine, Dogen and the Koan Tradition.

Oct 8, 15

E. Zen and Japanese Culture

An exploration of Zen's impact on classical Japanese Arts.

Readings: Selections from D.T. Suzuki, Zen and Japanese Culture (handout)

Video: "The Principles and Practice of Zen, Part II" (reserve)

Group Presentations: Zen and Japanese Culture

Background Readings: Basho, Narrow Road to the Far North; Triumph of the Sparrow: Zen Poems of Shinkichi Takahashi; selections from Stryk; W. LaFleur, The Karma of Words.

Oct 22

F. Between Two Worlds: Zen's Journey to the West

The migration of Zen to the West. The search for an American Buddha. Zen's interaction with Western thought and Western individuals.

Readings: C. Strand, Seeds From a Birch Tree.

Group Presentations: History of Zen in America

Background Readings: C. Prebish, American Buddhism; C. Prebish, Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America; R.

Fields, How the Swans Came to the Lake; P. Kapleau, Zen: Dawn in the West; T. Merton, Zen and the Birds of Appetite; J. Van de Wetering, A Glimpse of Nothingness; S. Boucher, Turning the Wheel; M. Abe, Zen and Western Thought; H. Tworikov, Zen in America; C. Prebish and K. Tanaka (eds.) The Faces of Buddhism in America.

Oct 29

G. Creating a Zen Ethic: Socially Engaged Buddhism

A study of the ethics and politics of Zen as a form of engaged Buddhism. The formation of socially engaged Buddhism in the West.

Readings: Bernie Glassman, Bearing Witness

Video: “Zen on the Street”

Group Presentations: Socially Engaged Buddhism

Background Readings: K. Jones, The Social Face of Buddhism; C. Ives, Zen Awakening and Society; R. Aitken, Mind of Clover; F. Eppsteiner, The Path of Compassion; C. Queen and S. King, Engaged Buddhism; C. Queen, Engaged Buddhism in the West; Thich Nhat Hanh, Being Peace and Peace Is Every Step

Nov 5, 12

H. Zen and American Culture

A study of the way in which Zen has influenced the thought and practice of Western poets and artists. Particular attention will be paid to the work of Gary Snyder.

Readings: Gary Snyder, The Practice of the Wild.

Group Presentations: Zen in American Culture

Background Readings: The “Beats.” Gary Snyder, Earth Household and Turtle Island; Mountains and Rivers Without End; Lucien Stryk; F. Eppsteiner, The Path of Compassion; J. Kerouac, Dharma Bums; L. Shainberg, Ambivalent Zen; J. Van de Wetering, After Zen.

Nov. 19

I. Ongoing Beginner’s Mind

Student Presentations

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Reading and Participation in Class Discussions

Participation in the classroom process is vital to the success of our discussions and to your growth. It is critical that each of us come to class prepared by prior reading and reflection to share insights and judgments, questions and problems with the rest of the class. Participation in the classroom process will constitute **15%** of the grade for the course.

1. Evaluation of Class Participation

I will evaluate your participation periodically on the basis of the following criteria:

- a. Attentive listening. (Are you alert and actively engaged in thinking about the material under discussion? Are you respectful of the ideas of your fellow students and as prepared to learn from them as from the instructor?)
- b. Frequency and clarity of your oral contributions. (Are you adequately prepared for each class discussion? Do you make a consistent effort to contribute to the class discussion?)
- c. Knowledge of the reading matter under discussion and the ability to grasp its central themes. (Have you read the material carefully and critically? Have you used the questions for discussion?)
- d. The ability to take an independent stance towards the ideas under discussion and to develop the position reflectively. (Have you thought through the issues and come to your own conclusions?)
- e. The overall development of your power of oral expression during the course of the quarter. (Has your ability to contribute to the class grown during the quarter?)

2. Class Attendance Policy

Clearly it is impossible to meet the objectives and requirements of the course if students do not attend class regularly. Consequently **one** unexcused absence will lower the student's final grade by one letter. **Two** unexcused absences will be considered excessive and lead to failure of the course. Excused absences will be granted only for serious reasons.

B. Seminar Leadership

All students are expected to play a role in leading the seminar. This will take two forms: a) a group presentation and b) contributions to Blackboard Discussion forums.

1. **Group Presentation.** Students in groups of two or three will take the responsibility for leading the seminar for 15-20 minutes. Topics of the presentation will vary depending on the date chosen for a presentation. In some cases students will make use of background readings to elaborate on the week's topic. In other cases students may develop a topic related to their research papers. Please save at least five minutes for group discussion.

Seminar Group Presentations: Topics and Schedule

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Number of Groups</u>	<u>Topic</u>
Oct 8	Two	Zen and Japanese Poetry
Oct 15	Two	Zen and Japanese Culture
Oct 22	Two	History of Zen in America
Oct 29	Two	Engaged Buddhism
Nov 5	Two	Zen and American Culture

Groups should coordinate their efforts and then discuss their plans with me prior to the seminar session. Post any materials that you want other students to look at before your presentation on Blackboard. If you want to be linked with particular colleagues, please hand in your names on **Sept 24**. Also on Sept 24th hand in a first and second choice of topics. Assignments will be made on **Oct 1**. You should focus upon some limited aspect of the broad topics suggested above.

2. BlackBoard Discussion Forum

I have set up a Blackboard discussion forum for this class. The purpose of the forum is to extend the discussions that occur in class. Student contributions to Blackboard can raise questions about the material about to be discussed, pick up a loose thread left dangling from a previous class, add ideas that did not arise in the class discussions but that you would like feedback on, share your experiences with research and Zen practice. Don't worry that your ideas might not be completely worked out or that your articulation of them may not be perfect. The Blackboard discussion forum is a place to try out thoughts and to seek the response of others.

Further suggestions: 1) Share some of your reflections on Zen Practice with the class

through Blackboard; 2) state the issues or theses that you wish to explore in your reflection papers and invite comments; 3) post comments on the readings or follow up on points of discussion in class that you wish to take further. Seek clarification of confusing ideas. *Engage your fellow students*; 4) apply theories developed in class to your own social context; 5) post questions, quotes or comments that will prepare the class for your group presentation; 6) seek help from other students as well as from me regarding any confusions about the course material. **All students are required to make at least four substantive contributions to the Blackboard discussion forum, two of which will be before midterm. Information about gaining access to Blackboard is attached to this syllabus. The group presentation and Blackboard entries together will count for 20% of your grade for the course.**

C. Response Papers

During the quarter, you will write five (two full pages to three full pages) response papers that will serve as markers or reference points in your own journey through this course. **These papers are due on the day assigned for the text you are considering.** Each of the five papers will be returned to you with comments and with a hypothetical letter grade. You may revise these papers, according to a schedule to be worked out in class. At the end of the term you will present an introductory statement explaining what the group of papers reveals about your own journey in this course (I will say more about that introductory statement towards the end of the course).

As I understand it, reflection and response grows out of understanding derived from careful analysis of the readings. So the first characteristic of a good response paper is that it will include lots of *detailed analysis of specific passages* that illuminate your understanding of the text and the issues of this course. Be careful not to use the readings as mere springboards for your own thoughts, touching all readings only lightly before leaping off into your own ideas. Engage the texts. The second trait of a good response paper is that it exhibits a beginner's mind. Find zest in exploring something new rather than rehashing what you already know. Push further. What is it about the reading that really puzzles you? How does the reading raise questions about your own mental framework? One way to get started is to write one sentence that states the issue or question that you are struggling with or the thesis you wish to argue for. (*Post your sentence on Blackboard for others to think about.*) The third trait of a good paper is that it responds. A response is much more than an emotional reaction. Bring your own experience and ideas, other readings and the insights of others in the seminar to bear in shaping your own response.

And because I want you to have a clear sense of your own response to the texts that you find most enlightening, it is very important that you write your first version of each paper before we discuss that portion of text in question. (Your revisions will very

likely incorporate ideas you developed more fully through class discussion, but the first version must be written before our class discussion.)

The set of papers will be graded according to the following criteria: thoroughness of explanation, depth of thought, clarity and creativity of expression, and evidence of movement along the way. **These papers will count for 45% of your grade for this course.**

The five reflective papers are due as follows:

First paper focusing on Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind: **Due Sept 17**

Second paper focusing on Moon in a Dew Drop: **Due Oct 1**

Revision of papers one and two: **Due Oct 15**

Third paper focusing on Seeds from a Birch Tree: **Due Oct 22**

Fourth paper focusing on Bearing Witness: **Due Oct 29**

Fifth paper focusing on Practice of the Wild: **Due Nov 5**

Your final revisions of reflective/response papers and your prefatory statement are due **Nov 19**.

If for some reason you cannot hand in your reflective paper on the due date, you must see me to receive an alternative assignment. Because we are writing these papers with a beginner's mind and, then, later revising them in light of what we have learned handing them in after class discussion misses the point of the exercise.

D. Research Paper

All students will complete a 8-10 page research paper. You may focus on any topic that you choose so long as it focuses upon some aspect of Zen. I am happy to discuss with you possible topics that are connected with your interests or major. Please select a topic and submit a one paragraph explanation of it by **Oct 29**. You should also include a short bibliography of the sources that you will rely upon. You are required to bring a draft of at least some portion of the paper (preferably a draft of the whole) to class on **Nov 12**. Final revised papers will be due **Nov 21**. The research paper will count for **20%** of your grade for the course. **As part of this project, we will briefly share the fruits of our work with the class on Nov 19th.**

Relating Practice to Theory: Research Paper Alternative

I am also open to creative suggestions for alternatives to the research paper. Alternatives proposed must be at least equally as demanding as a research paper in terms of time and effort. Check with me early in the course but no later than **Oct 15th** so that I can evaluate and approve your suggestion. Examples of alternatives would include: a) a collection of

your own Haiku poetry with commentary relating the poems to the course content, b) a journal of Zen practice (for someone who has been doing Zazen in a sangha for some period of time), c) a 8-10 page reflective paper relating work over time in a service context to the readings of the course; d) an interview with a Zen master (developed using ethnographic methods and procedures). These examples are not exhaustive. They each, however, demand previous engagement with Zen practice or some other practice requiring developed skills (e.g., poetry writing or experience with ethnographic research).

E. Time on Task

The amount of learning that you can expect from this course is directly dependent upon your own effort. You should expect to spend a *minimum* of *six* hours per week (2 hours for every hour spent in class) doing the readings, and written assignments and participating in the Blackboard discussion forum. Some weeks may require slightly more effort; others slightly less. There is a lot to be learned in this course; think about how you learn best and exert your best effort.

F. Academic Integrity

This course adheres to the University's policy on academic integrity. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are never permissible. For information about this policy please consult the Student Handbook. If you are not sure about how to cite quoted or paraphrased ideas, please consult with me *before* turning in written work.

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OFFICE HOURS: By arrangement. Given our various work schedules, it is best to make an appointment to see me to discuss your work in the course. I am always happy to do so.