

**ZEN.** In Zen enlightenment is achieved by contemplation of one's essence. Zen has neither god nor ceremonies. Zen is free of religious encumbrances. Zen rejects authority. **Zen** is the spirit of man ... man's inner purity and integrity.

*“Before a man studies Zen, mountains are mountains to him. When he obtains a glimpse of the truth through Zen, mountains no longer are mountains. When he later reaches satori (enlightenment), mountains are again mountains.”* Once a Zen master was asked: *“With what frame of mind should one discipline oneself in the truth?”* Said the master: *“There is no mind to be framed, nor any truth in which to be disciplined.”* When this dialogue took place between student and master, the student said: *“I cannot follow your reasoning.”* Said the master: *“Neither do I understand myself.”* Another Zen master pointed to a pitcher and asked his students, *“do not call it a pitcher but tell me what it is.”* One student came forward, lightly pushed the pitcher and just left the room. In Zen there is no place for time-wasting philosophical discussions. Zen often appears to be nonsensical and contradictory, but Zen recognises facts as facts, while words are words and nothing else. So what does Zen teach? Zen teaches nothing - whatever teachings there are in Zen, they come out of one's own mind; personal experience is everything in Zen. What is the Tao (the truth) of Zen? Your everyday life. A monk asked his master, *“it is some time since I came to you to be instructed in the holy path of the Buddha, but you have never given me even an inkling of it. I pray for you to be more sympathetic.”* This was the answer given: *“What do you mean, my son. Every morning you salute me - do I not return it? When you bring me a cup of tea - do I not accept it and enjoy drinking it? Besides this, what more lessons do you desire of me?”* Zen catches life as it flows, in Zen there is no distinction between ordinary life and religious life; besides, Zen is against all religious conventionalism. Zen does not want to exclude anything from your life - Zen is all-inclusive. Zen is not a path of renouncing the world. Zen emphasises the attainment of freedom - freedom from unnatural constraints.

*So what does it all mean - what does Zen mean to me on a daily basis? Zen is not a religion, but a spiritual practice, a philosophy and a way of life. To me, Zen is not going to a one-hundred-dollar concert, but to stop and listen to a busker in the street. Zen is not to strive for perfection, but to see perfection in what occurs naturally. Zen is not travelling halfway around the world to see the Great Pyramids, but to observe a building detail here. Zen is not to believe the hype, but to be real. With Zen one may well aspire to riches, but one knows their true value. Zen is not to give presents, but to give presence. Zen is not to adore celebrity, but to celebrate humanity. Zen is not to judge, but to feel compassion. Zen is not to react, but to reflect, accept, detach and let go. Zen is to walk and be on the way, rather than rushing to get there (OK, I admit this is easy for a street-photographer). Zen is to use the brakes rather than the horn. Zen is not the big buzz, but quiet contentment. Zen is now, rather than yesterday or tomorrow. Zen is not to talk but to listen. Zen is clarity, not conjecture or truthiness; living in Zen one aspires to the truth. Zen looks past perception and recognizes reality. Zen is simplicity rather than convolution. Zen is genuine as opposed to pretence. Zen is the way things are - the truth of Zen lies in the reality of our daily lives; Zen is man's everyday thought. You still ask what Zen is? Actually, language fails to convey the meaning of Zen. Says D. T. Suzuki: *“How hard and how easy it is to understand Zen. Hard, because to understand Zen is not to understand it; easy, because not to understand Zen is to understand it.”* Can we ever understand Zen? A master was asked, *“do you ever exercise yourself in the truth?”* *“Yes, I do.”* *“How do you exercise yourself?”* *“When I am hungry, I eat - when I am tired, I sleep.”* *“Well, that is what everybody does.”* *“No, when people eat, they think of other things, and when they sleep, they dream of other things.”**

*After (and with quotes from): An Introduction to Zen Buddhism, by D. T. Suzuki (1870 - 1966). Zen students may well argue none of my principles are traditional Zen. I would like to think their Zen is their life, my Zen is my life and your Zen is your life.*

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