Zen Meditation: Not One, Not Two

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I. Introduction
Professor Youru Wang kindly extended to me an invitation to give a lecture and so I would like to thank Professor Youru Wang and those people who have endeavored to make this occasion possible. When I accepted his invitation, I wanted to talk about Zen Meditation. The title I have chosen for this morning’s lecture is “Zen Meditation: Not One, Not Two.”

- As this title consists of two parts, let me explain each part to tell you what I plan to talk about this morning.

- The first part of the title, “Zen Meditation,” deals with what Zen Meditation is primarily in reference to the three-step procedure prescribed by this tradition.

- The second part of the title, “not one, not two,” designates a practical ideal Zen would like to see everybody embodies, that is, a freedom of both mind and body.
  
  - I would be happy if some of you here can see a merit of this freedom, so that you can incorporate it in your daily life.

- Before I proceed to talk about Zen meditation, let me first start with a scheme which depicts clearly how we are situated in our everyday life.

  - To do so, I will employ a model proposed by a Swiss psychologist, C.G.Jung.

  - According to Jung, we are situated between two gigantic spheres, with our ego-consciousness positioned in the tangential point between them.

  - To portray this picture, the following diagram is helpful.

**Figure 5: External World and Internal World**
- We can call the standpoint where ego-consciousness is situated in this diagram, “everyday standpoint.”

- This standpoint is provisionally **dualistic** in nature, that is to say, it recognizes two things and claims that they are real.

  - For example, there are two gigantic spheres; one is outer and the other is inner.

  - Once we accept this outer-inner distinction, we also notice that there are many two things that are affirmed to be real.

  - They may be mind and body, I and others, I and nature, and good and evil.

  - In the everyday standpoint, two things arise, logically speaking, by relying on either-or logic.

    - When this logic is applied to the whole, it divides it into two parts.

    - It prioritizes one of them as being real or true.

    - Either-or logic thinks it is reasonable to divide the whole in two.

    - For example, man is either good or evil.

- Epistemologically, two things in the everyday standpoint are the subject which knows and the object that is known.

  - Take an example of the dualistic relationship applied in knowing others, for example, my colleague.

  - When I attempt to know her, I rely on the language she speaks and her body language.

  - Here I cannot know her mind *in toto*, and so I infer what she has in mind.
Zen thinks that the situations created by assuming the dualistic standpoint is not ideal, or that they are real.

- And hence, Zen says “not two.”
- This is a recommendation for practically achieving oneness by the practice of meditation.
- When Zen makes this recommendation, it is saying that I and others, mind and body, I and nature ought to be one, if one were to have a correct understanding of the nature of things.
- Accordingly, you will understand that the phrase “not two” appearing in the title of this morning talk is a denial of the dualistic standpoint.
- Zen thinks one cannot achieve this denial simply by following either-or logic, or simply by following an intellectual process of reasoning.
  - This is because an intellectual process of reasoning gives rise to the dualism between the thinker and the thought.
  - Moreover, Zen tells us that it is abstract, that is, it becomes divorced from the day-to-day actual reality.
  - Instead, Zen prefers a concrete, straightforward action.
- How then does Zen recommend to avoid dualism and to achieve oneness?
  - This is where an importance of Zen meditation lies.
  - So, let me briefly explain what Zen meditation is.
    - The practice of Zen meditation involves three consecutive steps:
      - The first is the adjustment of the body.
      - The second is the adjustment of the breathing.
      - The third is the adjustment of the mind.

II. Posture:
- I will now briefly explain these three steps one by one.
  - The first, the adjustment of the body, means to prepare one’s own body in such a way that it can yield an optimum state of being free.
To do so, you need to have a proper diet and physical exercise, and avoid forming a habit contrary to nurturing a healthy mind-body condition.

Specifically, however, when Zen mentions the adjustment of the body, it has in mind seated meditation posture.

There are two postures which Zen recognizes; one is called the lotus-position and the other, the half-lotus position.

- These positions are known through a long Zen tradition to be effective for stilling the mind, along with dissolving various psychological conditions and psychosomatic disorders.
- This is where one learns practical benefits of doing meditation.

### III. Breathing

- Since these benefits have to do with the breathing exercise, let me move on to the second step, namely, the adjustment of breathing.

- Generally speaking, Zen doesn’t recommend any complicated breathing exercise as is recommended in yoga’s breathing methods.

- Zen’s breathing exercise is called “observation of breath count.”
  - In this exercise, you just breathe in and out.
  - When you breathe in, you bring air all the way down to the lower abdomen.
  - And when you breathe out, you bring all the contaminated air out of your body system.
  - As you breathe in, you count one.
  - When you breathe out, you also count one.
  - You just repeat this process.
  - I say that you just breathe in and out in, and in so doing, you observe your incoming breath and out-going breath.
    - If you actually try it, you will find that it is initially rather difficult to “just breathe in and out.”
• I would recommend that you try it after this talk.

• The reason that it is difficult is because you will be entertaining all kinds of thing, and consequently you will not be just breathing.

• This is an instance of dualism Zen recommends one must overcome.

• In Zen terminology, you have not become one with the act of breathing.

• Now, let me briefly mention a psycho-physiological meaning of breathing.

• Ordinarily, we breathe sixteen to seventeen times a minute.

• And we do this unconsciously or involuntarily.

• This is because under normal circumstances, breathing is controlled by autonomic nervous system.

• Neurophysiologically, the center where breathing is controlled is the region called hypothalamus in the mid-brain.

• As everyone knows, the autonomic nervous system functions independently of our will.

• Zen’s breathing is a shift from the unconscious, involuntary breathing to conscious, voluntary breathing.

• This means that Zen meditation is a way of regulating the unconscious-autonomic order of our being.

• Breath count is a training on the unconscious mind and the involuntary activity of the autonomic nerves which control the function of the various visceral organs.

• This point, for example, is very significant in learning to control emotion.

• Ordinarily, you are told to control your emotion by exercising your will.

• This is, for example, the philosopher Kant recommends we do.

• This method works to a certain extent.
• The problem with this is that you spend your energy unnecessarily in exercising one’s will.

• Think of a situation where you try to submerge a ball in water.
  • When the size of a ball is relatively small, there is no problem.
  • But if one keeps using this method, the size of a ball becomes larger and larger.
  • What this means is that one must exercises more psychic energy to suppress one’s emotion.
  • There comes a time then when one can no longer hold it down.
  • Consequently, one ends up exploding in various ways, ranging from a fit to a social crime.

• If you observe a person in an angry state, you will notice that such a person’s breathing pattern is shallow and rough.

• On the other hand, if you observe a person in a peaceful state, it is deep, smooth, and rhythmical.

• From these examples, you will understand that there is a strong correlation between the pattern and the rhythm of breathing and a person’s emotional state, or more generally a state of mind.

• Zen breathing has a way of naturally heightening the correlativity between the activity of the autonomic nervous system and emotion.

• Neurophysiologically, it just so happens that the center where breathing is regulated and the region where emotion is generated coincide with each other.

• This means that the conscious breathing psychologically affects the pattern of how one generates emotion, and at the same time it also has a neurophysiological effect of how the autonomous activity of the unconscious is regulated.

• There are more things I can say about this correlation, but now let us move on to the third step involved in meditation.

**IV. The Adjustment of the Mind**
• The third step is the adjustment of the mind.

  • Once the bodily posture, the breathing are adjusted, you next learn to adjust the mind.

  • This means that you consciously tell yourself that you are going into a meditation state.

  • When you do so, you disengage yourself from the concerns you have of your daily life.

  • That is to say, you try to stop the operation of conscious mind.

  • However, suppose you try to stop your mind by the mind, the mind which is trying to stop the mind is still operative.

  • This tells us that we cannot stop our mind by the mind.

  • Zen accomplishes it by the immobile bodily posture and the breathing exercise.

  • Meditation is a training to sit face-to-face with your self, while creating a psychological isolation from the external world.

• With this, you enter into your internal world of psyché.

  • As you attempt to enter the world of psyché, various things start surfacing in the field of your meditative awareness.

  • These are mostly things of your concern that have occupied you in the history of your life.

  • Or things you have consciously suppressed from various reasons.

  • Initially, you experience a recent desire, a recent concern, a recent idea, a recent image you have in your daily.

  • Your experience of these various things are due in part to the fact that you have lowered a level of conscious activity, by assuming the meditation posture, and doing the breathing exercise.

  • This mechanism is the same as when one has a dream at night.
• When the level of consciousness is lowered, the suppressive power of ego-consciousness becomes weakened, and consequently the autonomous activity of the unconscious starts surfacing.

• This is the reason you experience various ideas, desires, and images.

• However, these desires, images and ideas are distraction insofar as meditation is concerned.

• This is because in meditation you must learn to focus your awareness on one thing.

• One must learn to just observe them without getting involved in them.

• That is, one must learn to dis-identify them with oneself.

• As you repeat this process over a long period of time, you will come to experience a state in which no-thing appears.

• Zen uses the phrase “no-mind” to designate this state.

• No-mind does not mean a mindless state.

• Nor does it mean that there is no mind.

• It means that there is no conscious activity of the mind that is associated with ego-consciousness in the everyday standpoint.

• In other word, no-mind is a free mind that is not delimited by ideas, desires, and images.

• No-mind is a state of mind in which there is neither a superimposition of ideas nor a psychological projection.

• That is, no-mind is a practical transcendence from the everyday mind, without departing from the everydayness of the world

Conclusion:

• Although I need to say more about what this “no-mind” is, let me bring my lecture to a closure.

• In the state of no-mind, the meditator learns to become one with anything he/she chooses.
• Let me illustrate it by using an example.

• Suppose there is a mother and a baby, and the baby is becoming difficult.
  
  • The baby is crying because she may need a diaper change, she may be hungry, or she may need a sleep.

• The mother wants to help the baby.

• In this case, if the mother can become the baby, she will immediately know what it is that needs to be done.

• However, if she becomes the baby, she ends up crying like the baby, in which case, she will also need a help from someone else.

• What solution does Zen proposes to deal with this kind of situation?

• Zen’s response is “not one, not two.”

• Here, “not two” is a negation of the dualistic state, that is, it recommends people to become one with an object, that is to achieve a non-dualistic state.
  
  • In the example used here, Zen recommends that the mother becomes the baby.
  
  • This is because when the mother becomes one with the baby, she comes to know what the baby wants.

• On the other hand, “not one” is the negation of this non-dualistic state.
  
  • That is, if the mother remains one with the baby, she ends up crying like the baby.
  
  • This will not help the situation.

• This “not one” is not simply a logical negation, but is a practical negation one learns through meditation practice.

• Philosophically, one can say that this negation is a negation which goes beyond the polarity between dualism and non-dualism.
- Zen designates it as the experience of emptiness.
- The experience of emptiness is like becoming a place in which the mother and the baby both appear as they are.