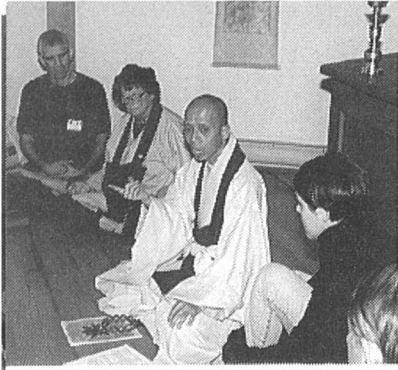


## the birth of zen

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excerpted from a workshop at the Whole World is a Single Flower Conference*



One day, 2500 years ago, the Buddha sat on the peak of Vulture Mountain with a vast assembly of more than 1200 monks who were waiting for Buddha to give his dharma speech.

A long time passed but the Buddha did not open his mouth to say a single word. He then reached down, picked up a flower and, without a word, held the flower aloft. Nobody in the assembly understood what the Buddha meant by this action. Only Mahakasyapa, sitting at the far back, smiled. The Buddha then said, "I have the eye of the true law, the secret essence of Nirvana, the formless form and the ineffable dharma which is not dependent on speech or words. A special transmission beyond all the other teachings. All this, I pass to Mahakasyapa." Thus, Zen was born.

The picking up of a flower, wordless, smiling, the ineffable dharma and the essence of the great Nirvana formed a beautiful picture. What is the essence of this picture? This is a question which will be asked by those who want to attain liberation from this samsara realm.

All of us have questions about our life. That is the reason why we need to practice. "What is Buddha? What is mind? What is consciousness? What is life and death?" If you want to understand the realms of Buddhas, you must first keep your mind as clear as space. Meaning that you should have a mind which is like a clear mirror... only reflect. When red appears, it only reflects red. White appears, only white. We give this mind a name, "reflect mind." You have to reflect the universe exactly as it is. That is the truth. So, picking up a flower, wordless, smiling... all point to one point. This is very important.

Zen does not explain or analyze anything. It merely points back directly to our mind, so that we can all wake up, see our true self and become Buddha.

Many years ago, someone asked a great Zen master, "Is attaining our true self very difficult?" The Zen master replied, "Yes, very difficult." Later, someone else asked the same Zen master, "Is attaining our true self very easy?" The Zen master said, "Yes, it's very easy." Other people asked him, "Is attaining our true self very easy or very difficult?" The Zen master told them, "It is very easy but also very difficult." Someone asked him again, "What about Zen practice, is it very difficult or very easy?" The Zen master explained, "When you drink water, you yourself will know whether it's hot or cold." This means that everything is made by your mind. If you think that it's difficult, it will be difficult. Likewise, when you think that it's easy, it will be easy. If you think that it is not easy but also not difficult, then it will not be easy or difficult.

Then what is it really like? Go drink water, then you will attain whether it's hot or cold. But don't make it difficult or easy. Just do it. That is Zen.

One day, a monk asked Zen Master Joju, "Does a dog have Buddha nature?" Joju answered, "Mu"(no). The monk was dumb-founded because Buddha said that everything has Buddha nature, but Joju said that a dog has no Buddha nature. Who is correct? What is "Mu"? What is a dog's Buddha nature?

Do you understand why Joju answered "Mu"? If you don't know, just only don't know. You must attain this. This is a very important point. Moment to moment keep this big question. What is "Mu?" One day you will attain it. You can then understand what is your correct job, know your correct situation, correct function and correct relationship. And finally, you will take the same path as the Buddhas, bodhisattvas and patriarchs and use the same mouth to breathe.

Two thousand five hundred years ago, Buddha picked up a flower. Today, this conference is named "The Whole World is a Single Flower." Are they the same or different?

If you say "same," this stick will hit you thirty times.

If you say "different," this stick will also hit you thirty times.

KATZ!

The whole world is a single flower. The flower still lives today and is emitting its fragrance all the time. It has never left us. Because human beings are all attached and have too much thinking, they cannot attain the original fragrance. You can only attain it through Zen meditation practice, through correct effort and just doing it without stopping. Finally one day, you will realize, "Oh, just like this; it is wonderful. All sentient beings have Buddha nature."

