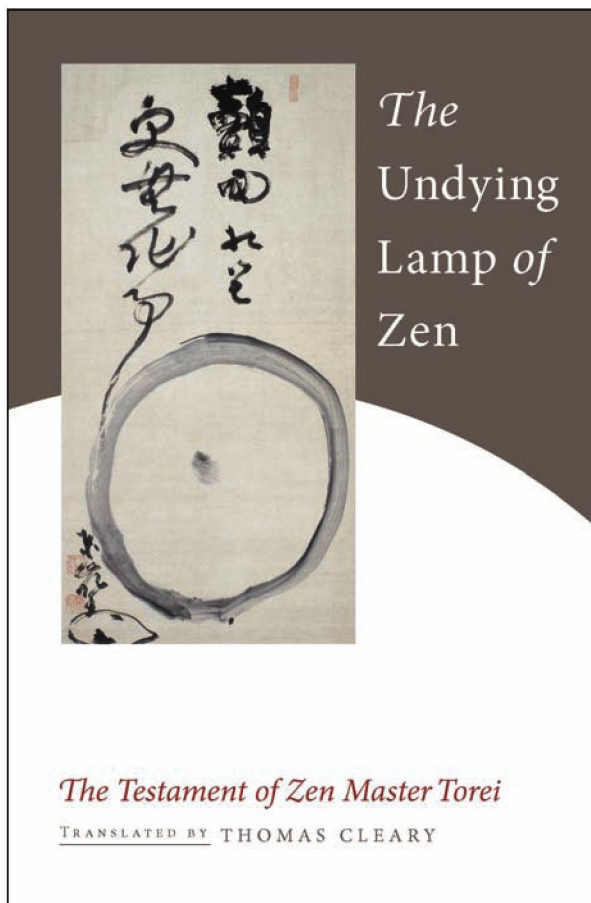


Book Review



The Undying Lamp of Zen: The Testament of Zen Master Torei, translated by Thomas Cleary, is a pre-modern Japanese guidebook to Zen practice from the Rinzai perspective. The author, Zen Master Torei Enji (1721–1792) was a direct successor of Hakuin Ekaku. Hakuin was responsible for the reformation of Rinzai Zen and for the creation of the kong-an (Japanese: koan) system that is still used in Japan today. Torei helped systematize Hakuin's teachings.

The tone of the teaching in this book is energetic to say the least. It has the spirit of "rousing the troops to battle", that is, being extremely serious, sincere and diligent in one's efforts to practice the Zen way. There is a particular teaching style in the Zen tradition that makes use of admonishing the student and railing against what is considered as misguided or inauthentic teaching approaches. This approach goes back at least as far as the Tang-Dynasty Chinese Zen Master Huang Po, addressing his monks as "You are all eaters of dregs." Zen Master Dahui frequently made reference to what he considered the misguided approach of "silent

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Translated and edited by Thomas Cleary

Shambhala Publications, 2010

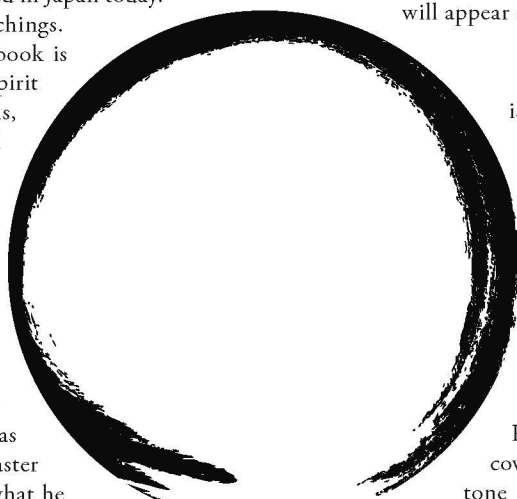
Review by Zen Master Wu Kwang
(Richard Shrobe)

illumination" among the Chinese Soto practitioners of his time, and Hakuin frequently admonished students for what he considered lukewarm efforts. He railed against a particular Chinese master who had attempted to integrate Pure Land practice and Zen. We find some of the same in this book and, relevant as it might have been in its time, it can be redundant as you read through the teaching.

Torei begins his preface with these remarks "If you want to read this treatise, do so from start to finish thoroughly penetrating each point. Don't just pick out a saying or a chapter that conforms to your own liking and consider that right." He then lays out a tenfold schema of practice, which he elaborates on in each chapter. The chapters include teachings on faith and practice, true realization, progressive transcendence, and working application, to name a few.

Here is an example of Torei's approach to having a big question, what he calls "congealing a mass of wonder."

Right now, what is this? What is it that sees?
What is it that hears? What is it that moves?
What is it that sits? At all times, in all places,
focus your mind and see how it is. Without
conceiving of being or non being, without
thinking of affirmation or negation, without
discriminating, without rationalizing, just
observe in this way. When the time comes, it
will appear of itself.



One of the points emphasized by Torei is that after the realization of one's true nature, one must continue to practice to refine one's perception and application to the various situations of one's life. Torei sees this as being the purpose of working through the many kong-ans that facilitate the expression of compassion and clarity.

In Japan the book is considered an indispensable aid to the practice of Rinzai Zen. As the remarks on the back cover say, "Torei is a compelling guide; his tone is energetic, no-nonsense, and full of personality." 