



History of Ch'an Buddhism Dwight Goddard

The traffic between India and China in very early times was very considerable in spite of the tremendous difficulties and dangers of the passes over the high Himalayas, the Tibetan deserts and the appalling wastes and tempests of the Southern seas. But in spite of the difficulties intimations of Buddhism began to percolate into China certainly as early as the First Century before the Christian Era and by the First Century after eminent Indian scholars were finding it worth their trouble to make the arduous journey for the sake of the welcome and the honor they received at the Imperial Court and by the literati, so that by the Second Century Buddhist scriptures were being rapidly translated into Chinese.

The Chinese while being notably intellectual were not especially philosophical or religiously minded. They were a practical people and their culture was largely given up to ethics, history, poetry and art. The exuberant imagery, subtle symbolism, erudite philosophy, and deep psychological insight of the Mahayana Buddhist Scriptures came as an intellectual revelation to Chinese scholars and was everywhere received with scholarly enthusiasm. For five hundred years this went on with increasing momentum but, with very little adaptation and change to make it more in line with Chinese mentality and racial habits of thought and national customs. To be sure it had found a certain affinity with Confucian scholarship and ethical idealism, and with Taoist mysticism and naturalistic iconoclasm. All the outstanding Buddhist leaders were Indian born and educated and it was an Indian type of Buddhism that was being pressed upon the Chinese converts; it was Indian philosophy that was being studied and Indian ways of meditation that were being practiced; Buddhism was still a foreign cult. It was not until the Fourth Century that signs of the birth and development of a Chinese type of Buddhism began to be apparent.

When Buddhism reached China it found two main currents of cultural conditions with which it had to contend and make terms, namely, Confucianism and Taoism, neither of which, strictly speaking, were religions. The teachings of Confucius were intellectual and were almost wholly devoted to inculcating habits of ethical idealism among all classes of people. By its presentation of an ideal "superior man" and its emphasis on "propriety" and "obedience" it appealed principally to the educated and official classes and tended to conservatism and the perpetuation of ancient customs and intellectual ideas. It was an admirable culture that resulted in a high type of social ethics and customs second to none even today. It was no mean protagonist for Buddhism to meet, but it had little in common with the rationalistic and disciplinary and self-less ideals of Buddhism. It tended to individual pride of intellect and avarice for position and power, while effecting at the same time ideals of a noble and courteous social structure. Buddhism tended toward mind-control; Confucianism tended toward mind culture; Buddhism was revolutionary and iconoclastic; Confucianism was conservative and inert.

As we have said, at first Confucianists welcomed the amazing and abounding philosophy

and metaphysics and psychology of Indian Buddhism, but later they came to realise that ultimately it would undermine the foundations of Confucianism. In its distrust of Buddhism during the centuries from the Sixth to the Ninth it inspired wave after wave of nationalistic persecution. It was not until the Eighth and Ninth centuries that it came to appreciate the good qualities of Buddhism and learned not only to tolerate it but also to accept it as supplying those mystical elements which the human heart craves and which in its own teachings were entirely lacking.

The teachings of Taoism on the other hand had many things in common with Buddhism; it can be truly said that Laotsu by his doctrines of Tao and Wu-wei had prepared the way and made ready a welcome for the coming of Buddhism. Nevertheless, there was something in the easy-going laissez-faire naturalism of Laotsu that was diametrically opposed to the austere restraint and discipline of Buddhism. They both loved the quiet of solitude, but the Taoist sage wanted a little congenial company with whom to play checkers and drink wine and quote poetry; while the Buddhist saint sought real solitude that he might be less hindered in his strenuous concentration of mind in the attainment of a self-realisation of ultimate truth.

The doctrines of Tao and Buddha could be harmonised without strain in both their active aspect and their essence of mingled wisdom and beneficence. As the Sanskrit terms of Indian Buddhism slowly gave way to Chinese, the term Tao was freely used for Buddhahood both by itself and in many compounds; in fact at one time it looked as though the term Tao would almost entirely displace the Sanskrit term of Buddha. If a distinction is made in the meaning content of the two terms perhaps the term Buddha came to have a more static significance colored as it was by the conception of the Buddha in samadhi with all its realisation of blissful peace and equanimity; while Tao always carried a significance of dynamic activity. The words Tao and Buddha are often used almost synonymously, but still there remains a shade of distinction between the active and passive sides of reality. One of the early Ch'an Masters said: "Buddha is Tao, Tao is dhyana." The common use of Tao in Buddhist names is also very significant.

To illustrate this free use of Tao by the Ch'an Masters, let me quote a strictly Buddhist production written by Rinsai which is much admired even down to today. It was given to me by my own Master as part of his instruction.

Buddha-nature is the symbol of purity;
Dharma-mind is the symbol of enlightenment;
The Tao is the Way of unobstructed truth.
In essence these three are truly One,
But by themselves they are merely words.
The mind of the Tao-man should be pure, enlightened and free.

Originally Laotsu had a conception of the value of mind-concentration as an intuitive method of arriving at a self-realisation of reality, but in Taoism it had become buried under a burden of self-induced trance and vision and revelation as a guide for the attainment of success and good luck. Nevertheless, there was an underlying similarity or affinity between the conceptions of the value of concentration of mind in both Buddhism and Taoism.

When Buddhism came to China it most decidedly had to make terms with Taoism, for while Confucianism was the cult of the literati, Taoism was the faith of the common people.

Taoism was indigenous and while the teachings of Laotsu had been atheistic and sensible, in the course of a thousand years Taoism had taken up into itself the crude animism of a great racial inheritance to make it most decidedly spiritistic and superstitious and geomantic.

Moreover there was the Taoist doctrine of Wu-wei. Wu-wei can be translated, “non-assertion.” In Taoism it generally carries the meaning of the acceptance of Tao as being infinitely wise and beneficent and powerful, and therefore Taoism emphasises the futility of Interfering with the cosmic currents, and the wisdom of falling in with the natural unfoldment of the Tao in both nature and human affairs. To Taoists, the human interference either by force or legislation or culture with the course of nature is looked upon as the height of foolishness. To take things as they are and as they come is the teaching of Taoist wisdom. In one sense this is what Buddhism by its doctrine of “patient acceptance” teaches, but in another sense, Buddhism is quite opposed to any lazy inertness in meeting the difficulties of life. While Buddhism teaches the patient acceptance of the results of old karma, it also teaches that good karma is to be attained by the disciplined restraint of desire, habits of clear thinking, the extinction of egoism, and concentrated meditation, thus making a rational interference with the course of nature which if yielded to would result in suffering, the course of wisdom.

Another circumstance that tended undoubtedly to the yielding of Buddhism to Taoist influences in these early days was to escape the virulence of the nationalistic persecutions which were fomented by Confucianists and which for two hundred years were directed against all forms of Buddhism as being a foreign religion prejudicial to the welfare of the state. This persecution was largely escaped as Buddhism became disguised as a form of Taoism. And often it was not so much a disguise as it was the real thing. For instance, in the case of Hsuanchien who is usually reckoned as a Ch’an Buddhist of a rather extreme type, he is reported to have said to his disciples:

Here there is no Buddha, nor Patriarch. Bodhidharma was only an old bearded barbarian. The Bodhisattvas are only dung-heap coolies. Nirvana and bodhi are dead stumps to tie your donkey to. The twelve divisions of the Tripitika are only lists of ghosts and sheets of paper fit only to wipe the puss from your skin. And all your four merits and ten stages are mere ghosts lingering in their decaying graves. Can these have any thing to do with your salvation?

Of course such words as these must not be taken too literally for the literature of Ch’an Buddhism abounds with the most extravagant and seemingly foolish remarks of the Masters that to be understood and make sense of must be considered intuitively rather than logically. But they all go to show how serious and deep was the reaction between Buddhism and Taoism in those early centuries. At this distance of time it is hard to realise how difficult was the process toward adjustment between these two cults that had so much that was similar. For a century it was a question whether the result would be Taoism as modified by Buddhism, or Buddhism modified by Taoism. Most fortunately it proved to be the latter. Even down to day Taoist temples and Taoist monks are often indistinguishable from Buddhist temples. In 1927 the writer visited a Taoist friend at his hermitage-temple just outside of Nanking; it was arranged and decorated precisely like a Buddhist temple, had a Buddhist image of Amida, but when we left, the Taoist monk gave us as a parting gift, a copy of Laotsu’s Tao Teh King. In Henri Borel’s well known essays [1](#) dealing with

Laotzu's philosophy, his Taoist monk gives to his parting guest a beautiful image of Kwanon and in the essays themselves it is hard to say whether they are more Taoist or Buddhist.

Dr. Hu-shih, the eminent Chinese philosopher and historian in a tentative and as yet unpublished study of this very subject and period, speaks of this reaction as "a revolt of Taoism against Buddhism"; while Dr. Daisetz Suzuki, the equally eminent authority of Zen Buddhism, speaks of it as the natural evolution of Buddhism under Taoist conditions. Of the two it would seem as though Dr. Suzuki was the nearer right, but in either case the result was the same: the development of a type of Buddhism that was free from the extravagancies of Indian philosophising and intellectual inertia and sentimental personalisations, and true to the original commonsense practicality of Shakyamuni.

By the Fourth Century most of the outstanding Mahayana scriptures had been translated into Chinese. Among them were many books about the Indian yoga practices of breathing and other methods for the attainment of mind-control and concentrated meditation, that made up the Indian practice of Dhyana. The Chinese were a practically minded people and had never cared very much for philosophy and metaphysics; being intellectual they were amazed and excited by the elaborate metaphysics and exuberant literature of the Mahayana, but they were more particularly attracted to the practical systems of dhyana that promised tangible results of enlightenment and ecstasy and blissful peace that could be tested and evaluated. It naturally came about, therefore, that the first serious popular acceptance of Buddhism was in the practice of Dhyana, and as the most popular subject for meditation and concentration was the Divine Name, with its promise of re-birth in the Pure Land, the later sects that go under that name, on the surface, appear to have a certain claim to priority. But it is a question whether this earliest acceptance can rightly be called a "salvation by faith" type of Buddhism, for its emphasis on dhyana practice would mark it as a "meditation" type. Much depends on whether the phrase, "Na-moo-mit-t'o-fu" was used in those early days as a subject for meditation and concentration, or as a mantra with magic working powers. Dr. Suzuki has discussed this question at length in his *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, Second Series, where it can be studied to advantage.

The first name that emerges in this connection is Tao-an (-385). He was a notable monk, learned in both Confucian and Taoist lore and books of his are still extant dealing with these yoga practices of dhyana and commenting upon them. It is easy to see from them that he looked upon these Indian practices as good working methods for attaining Taoist ideals of non-activity and non-desire.

Tao-an left a disciple, Hui-yuan (333-416), who was also a great scholar and learned in Taoist mysticism. He is most remembered as the founder of a Buddhist center or fraternity near Kuling, known as the White Lotus Society, whose characteristic was their concentration on the Divine Name, in consequence of which he is commonly looked upon as the founder of the Pure Land Sects of China and Japan. But history shows that he was more interested in the serious practise of dhyana and to him the repetition of the Divine Name was the best method for attaining concentration of mind. There was nothing new in the practice of dhyana; it had existed in India for a millennium and was taken over by Shakyamuni and given a new content of meaning as the Eighth Stage of his Noble Path. As it appeared in China it was at first largely a practise of Indian yoga methods as an aid to meditation but it had degenerated into a popular and easy going "still-sitting" and a lazy habit of thinking. The characteristic that now began to emerge in the teachings and interest of Tao-an and Hui-yuan was the more definite focussing of mind and its more energetic character.

After Hui-yuan there came into prominence one of his disciples, Tao-seng (-434), who with his disciple, Tao-you, developed the doctrine of “Sudden Awakening,” as against the almost universal belief in the “Gradual Attainment,” that thereafter entered into Chinese Buddhism to condition its distinctive characteristic. By this teaching the old conception of the gradual attainment of Buddhahood through myriads of kotis of re-births was challenged and in its place was offered, through the right concentration of dhyana, the possibility of sudden and perfect enlightenment. The Chinese Ch’an Buddhism that came to monopolise the religious field was the mingling of these two distinctively Chinese elements: A more strenuous dhyana, and the possibility of a sudden awakening and attainment of enlightenment, with the Indian philosophy of the Mahayana.

The next outstanding name, and the one to whom is usually given the chief credit for being the founder of Ch’an Buddhism in China, is Bodhidharma. He was an Indian monk of princely family who must have arrived in South China about 470 A.D., and who lived and travelled in China for fifty years until about 520. This length of stay in China is much longer than is usually given but it appears to be necessary to account for all that is recorded concerning him. He must have been a most extraordinary man, a great personality, stubborn, taciturn, gruff and positive, but withal, honest, straightforward and clear minded. There are two incidents in his life that will bear repeating. Emperor Wu of Liang was very favorably inclined toward Buddhism; he founded temples, supported monks, and translated scriptures, but when he asked Bodhidharma during an interview what credit he had earned, the gruff old monk replied, “None whatever, your majesty.” To the question, “What is the first principle of the holy doctrine?” Bodhidharma replied, “Vast emptiness, and there is nothing in it to be called ‘holy,’ Sire.”

“Who is it, then, that confronts me?” asked the Emperor.

“I do not know, Your Majesty.”

There is a famous poem that refers to the above incident, that has for these present times a deep significance:

“I don’t know,” replied Bodhidharma,
Baffled by the classical speech of the Imperial Court;
But if the Emperor had been a man of insight and spirit
He would have chased after Bodhidharma,
Over the desert sand to Tien-mu.”

Bodhidharma, finding in the North no interest in his presentation of Buddhism, returned to the South and shut himself in his own monastery of Shao-lin, to which few disciples ever came and where, tradition says, he practised for nine years a kind of concentrative dhyana that came to be called, “wall gazing.” It consisted in an honest and earnest effort to definitely realise the oneness of one’s true Buddha-nature with Universal Buddhahood, by the single method of mind-concentration on Mind-essence. To Bodhidharma, books, logical ideas, study, ritual, worship were useless; only simple but “seeking” and tireless “wall-gazing” was sufficient. All distinctions of self and not-self, comfort or discomfort, joy or suffering, desire or aversion, success or failure, and mental discrimination of all kinds must be ignored and left behind, in the sole effort to merge oneself with Mind-essence which alone is reality, Inasmuch as one’s own inner conscience is Mind-essence, why seek for it elsewhere? This “treasure of the heart” is the only Buddha there ever was,

or is, or ever will be. “There is no Buddha but your own. thoughts. Buddha is Tao. Tao is dhyana. Dhyana cannot be understood by the definitions of the wise. Dhyana is a man’s successful seeing into his own fundamental nature.” “I have come from India only to teach you that Buddha is thought. I have no interest in monastic rules, nor ascetic practises, nor miraculous powers, nor merely sitting in meditation.”

In Bodhidharma’s distrust of scriptures and intellectual knowledge, he made an exception of the Lankavatara Sutra. The reason for this exception was because that Sutra alone taught the doctrine of the Self-realisation of the Oneness of all things in Mind-essence. When at last after nine years of “wall-gazing” he gained one disciple who understood him, Hui-k’e (486-593). Bodhidharma gave him certain instruction that could only be transmitted from mind to mind, and gave him his begging-bowl and his robe and his copy of the Lankavatara Sutra, which afterward became the insignia of the Patriarchate, thus constituting Hui-k’e as the Second Patriarch. There is a tradition that Bodhidharma soon after returned to India, but the place and time of his death is unknown.

There is no doubt that at first and for a long time the “Sudden Awakening” Ch’an school was a hard one to attend. It was well over the border of asceticism and self-denial, with no marks of sympathy between Master and disciple to make it bearable, but from that hard school rose a succession of great Masters and deep experiences and an extraordinarily virulent social influence.

Concerning the teachings of Bodhidharma and the Ch’an sect, Dr. Suzuki quotes the following passage:

The Master (Bodhidharma) first stayed in Shao-lin Temple for nine years and when at last he taught the Second Patriarch it was in this manner. Externally keep yourself away from all relationships, and internally cherish no hankerings in your heart. When your mind becomes like an upright wall (that is, resistant to the entrance of discriminative ideas) you will enter into the path. At first Hui-k’e tried in various ways to explain (to himself) the reason of mind-only but failed to realise the truth itself. The Master would say: ‘No, no,’ but would do nothing to explain it or make clear what Mind-essence in its undifferentiated, no-thought, state might be. Later on Hui-k’e said to the Master, ‘Now I know how to keep myself away from all relationships.’

When the Master asked him to demonstrate it, Hui-k’e replied: ‘I know it always in a most convincing manner but to express it in words--that is impossible.’ Thereupon said the Master, ‘That is the Mind-essence itself that is transmitted by all the Buddhas. Have no doubt about it.’

The story runs that Hui-k’e before he was finally successful had tried again and again to gain Bodhidharma’s consent to become his Master, even waiting at his gate one cold winter’s night while the snow fell to his knees, and was finally successful only when he cut off his right arm to show the earnestness of his desire. Hui-k’e was very learned in the Chinese classics and also in the common lore of Buddhism; he seems to have come to Bodhidharma at first more to win his approval than with any great expectation of added instruction, but after he had attained his deep experience with Bodhidharma, he made light of his great learning, became very humble minded and earnestly sought for perfect enlightenment. After the passing of Bodhidharma, Hui-k’e did not at once assume

leadership as the Second Patriarch, but withdrew to a hermitage in the mountains and lived quite humbly with the lowest classes of society. He did not shun preaching but tried to do it quietly and inconspicuously. He was finally murdered by an envious Master whose disciples Hui-k'e had unintentionally drawn away.

The Third Patriarch was Seng-ts'an (-606) about whom very little is known. One tradition has it that he suffered from leprosy and therefore retired to a hermitage in the mountains. There is a record of his transmitting the begging-bowl and the robe to Tao-hsin (580-651). Tao-hsin was also a recluse and very little is known of him except that he left a composition which has always been highly valued by disciples of Ch'an Buddhism.

The Fifth Patriarch was Hung-jen (605-675). It is recorded of him that he was a near neighbor or relative of Seng-ts'an and came to be with him when quite young. With his assumption of the Patriarchate there was introduced a decided change in the character of the presentation of Ch'an Buddhism. Hitherto the Patriarchs had been of a retiring disposition, or else the times had changed making it possible for the Masters to work more publicly and assemble disciples. At any rate we find Hung-jen the head of a great establishment with hundreds of disciples and attaining imperial favor.

Among the disciples of Hung-jen were two who afterwards came into great public notice; Hui-neng whose Sutra we shall study in the following chapters and Shen-hsui, who was second only in rank in the great monastery to Hung-jen. Shen-hsui was a very learned man and a notable orator and teacher, but he was egoistic and deficient in the insight that marks the true Ch'an Master. Hung-jen was aware of this and so when the time came for him to appoint a successor, he passed by Shen-hsui and appointed Hun-neng. Having failed in securing the coveted rank of Sixth Patriarch, Shen-hsui returned to the North from whence he had originally come and there established a rival school that for a time was very successful and he came to be highly honored by the Emperor. His school differed from that of Hung-jen and came to be known as the "Gradual Attainment," or Northern School of Ch'an Buddhism, but at his death it was less successful and finally lost standing.

This brings us to the main interest of this book, the life and Sutra of Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch, but before we do so it is wise to say a few words about the general character of Ch'an Buddhism as it was in his day and show how it differed from the ordinary run of Buddhism throughout China. As we have already pointed out Buddhism as generally held was of the foreign type which had been presented by Indian monks and Indian scriptures. It was largely given up to a study of the various scriptures and an easy-going practice of dhyana. It was still a foreign religion, and only slightly affected by its Chinese environment. On the contrary Ch'an Buddhism was not at all intellectual, was far from being easy-going, and had become profoundly influenced by Chinese Taoism and Chinese customs.

In closing this introductory chapter it is well to sum up the characteristics of Ch'an Buddhism as they differed from the orthodox Buddhism of that early period. Negatively, it was more atheistic. Shakyamuni had been more agnostic concerning the nature of Reality, Nestorian Christianity was emphatically theistic, while Taoism was decidedly atheistic, looking upon Tao as being Ultimate Principle rather than personality. Mahayanistic Buddhism in contact with the great theistic religions of Central Asia had grown to be more philosophic, looking upon Reality in its three phases of essence, principle, and transitory appearances as existing in a state of undifferentiated Oneness.

In contact with the polytheism of India and the animistic spiritism of Tibet it had absorbed much of their love for differentiated images and ranks of divinities; but that was

for the accommodation of its more ignorant believers than for its elite. Under the influence of Taoism, Ch'anism became at first quite decidedly atheistic and iconoclastic, shading off later on into a more tolerant attitude, but even down to today, Ch'an in China and Zen in Japan make very little of their images which are used more for decoration than for worship. The deification of Shakyamuni Buddha that marked the Hinayana of Ceylon and Burma is almost entirely absent in Ch'an; in fact, the adoration shown Amitabha is much more apparent, and images of Kwan-yin, Manjushri and Kasyapa are just as frequently seen, while adoration to the image of the Founder of each particular temple and even for the Master of the Founder, seems to be more sentimentally sincere and earnest.

Further, under the influence of Taoism, Ch'an Buddhism had very little use for the Sutras that the Buddhism of those early days made so much of, the Lankavatara being the only exception. Ch'anists, intent in their strenuous practice of Dhyana, had found a more direct and immediate realisation of Reality and therein were satisfied. The same can be said of all the rest of the common paraphernalia of worship; they had no use for ritual, or public services, or prayer, or priests, or ranks of Dignity, or sentimentalism or emotionalism of any kind whatever. Every thing had to give way to the one thing of self-realisation of Oneness.

The result of this contact of Indian Buddhism with Taoism, therefore, was to develop in Ch'an a type of Buddhism that was coldly rational, experiential, positive and iconoclastic, and that led to a life of extreme simplicity, strict discipline, humility, industry, sympathy with all animate life, and to an equitable and cheerful peace of mind. At first Ch'an Buddhists had no temples of their own, nor organisations of any kind; they were either isolated individuals living a solitary life, or were groups of disciples gathered about a Master. This later developed into the calling of Ch'an Masters to be the heads of monasteries belonging to other sects, and still later to the acquiring of their own monasteries and temples, with all their vested abbots of high degree, and ceremonial ritual and worldly pride. Nevertheless, as of old, the true Ch'an monk is more often to be found in some solitary hermitage, busy and cheerful at his manual work, humble and zealous at his practice of Dhyana, intent on the one goal of self-realisation of enlightenment, Nirvana and Buddhahood.

While Bodhidharma is usually credited with being the founder of Ch'an Buddhism and rightly so, it was Hui-neng the Sixth Patriarch who gave it more definite character and permanent form that time has tested and approved. Ch'an Buddhism seems to have discerned the essentials of Shakyamuni's teachings and spirit better than any other sect, and to have developed their deeper implications more faithfully. This development came through its contact with Chinese Taoism under the lead of Bodhidharma and Hui-neng, making it a virile and wholesome influence for all nations thereafter. Hui-yuan yielded to the seduction of the Divine Name and thereby gained the credit of being the founder of the Pure Land sects with all their glamour of "salvation by faith." Chih-chi (-597), one of China's greatest philosophic minds, grew up as an earnest Ch'an Buddhist but yielding to the lure of his profound study of the Scriptures became known as the founder of the Tien-T'ai school of philosophic Buddhism, Shen-shui, the learned Master of the very temple where Hui-neng worked as a laborer in the granary, yielded to the lure of egoism and popularity to become the founder of the passing school of "Gradual Attainment."

But Hui-neng more or less illiterate as he was said to be, had the force of personality, and insight and common-sense, to determine the essentials of the Dharma and the humble and patient zeal to work out and to apply them in the wisest way. The outstanding features of Hui-neng's Ch'an were as follows:

1. Distrust of all Scriptures and dogmatic teachings.
2. An enquiring mind and earnest search into the depths of one's own nature.
3. Humble but positive faith in the possibilities of such an enquiring search, in a sudden self-realisation of enlightenment, Nirvana and Buddhahood.
4. Loyal and patient acceptance of such self-realisation in a following life of simplicity, self-restraint, industry, and sympathy with all animate life.

In arriving at these convictions Hui-neng's inherited and experiential acquaintance with Taoism was very influential. He was said to be illiterate but this could have been only relatively true of one who had mastered the Diamond Sutra and frequently discoursed to his disciples about the other great Sutras of the Mahayana. His study of the Diamond Sutra had convinced him of the truth of "Emptiness" and prepared his mind for the later truth of "Self-realisation of Mind-essence" which the Lankavatara taught him. But it was the conception of the Tao, active, limitless, inscrutably wise and benevolent, universal, eternal, ineffable, that gave depth and substance to his convictions and brought sympathy and patience with himself and with all animate life. It was the blending of all these elements in the mind and spirit of Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch, that through him gave Chinese Ch'an, and Japanese Zen, Buddhism their characteristic form and spirit.

Hui-neng was deeply influenced by his inherited and personal acquaintance with Taoism. In his leadership and teachings he made little of the personal Buddha and very much of Prajna in which he saw the Ultimate Principle of Tao in both its irradiant and integrating forms, as both intellection and compassion. The term he used for Ultimate Reality, and made so much of, was Mind-essence. A self-realisation of this was all the Buddha he cared about. It was Dharmakaya and Buddhahood and Nirvana and Tathata and Prajna. It was universal, undifferentiated and inscrutable, but was clouded over and hidden by karma and discriminative thought and desire and grasping. If these clouds could be driven away, and they all might be, then it would shine forth in all its pristine purity and potency. To Hui-neng, perfect enlightenment and self-realisation of Mind-essence and Buddhahood were the same thing. This perfect culmination of life would come suddenly as the result of an earnest and sincere concentration of mind on the search for it with in one's own mind, and this was the only way it could come. In his mind all scripture and all teachings were subordinate to the self-realisation attained suddenly by earnest Dhyana and Samadhi.

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