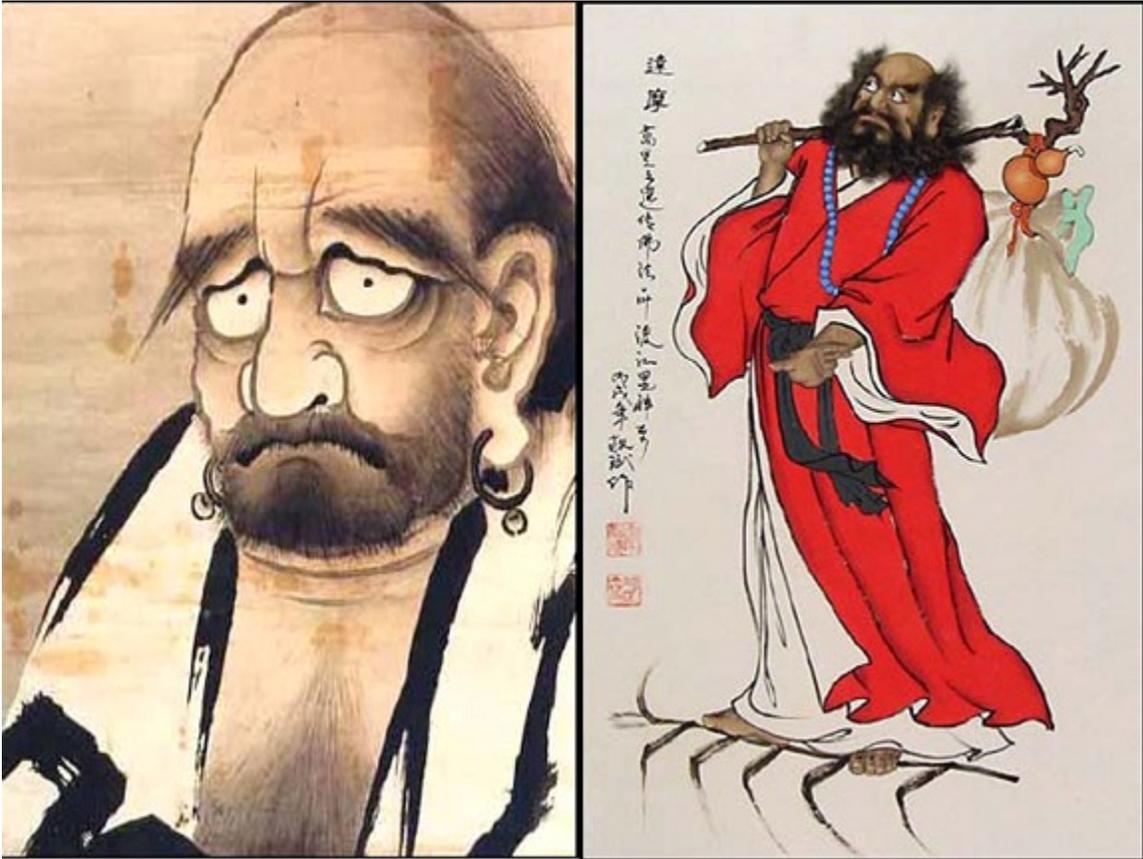


Zen, Great Doubt, & Carl Jung's Transcendent Function



"Great Doubt, Great Awakening. Small Doubt, Small Awakening. No Doubt, No Awakening."

"From Great Trust (Faith) arises Great Doubt. From Great Doubt arises Great Determination."

~Zen sayings

The heart of Zen koan practice is to invoke Great Doubt, not just ordinary doubt. If you have doubt in Zen, you are encouraged to really go with it and empower it. You need great Doubt to get stuck, and then to break through to awakening.

Ordinary Doubt will invoke the monkey mind's torpor and scattering. Great Doubt will cut through the monkey mind's torpor and scattering through the arising of Great Determination.

Great Determination is what Jung refers to as "holding the tension of opposites." This tension of opposites refers to the conscious mind and the unconscious mind. Great determination borne from Great Doubt will cut through the monkey mind's torpor and scattering. This is what Jung calls the Transcendent Function. Notice how Jung's long and detailed description parallels Zen's simpler description of getting stuck and breaking through:

From the Jung Lexicon by Daryl Sharp:

Transcendent function. A psychic function that arises from the tension between consciousness and the unconscious and supports their union. (See also opposites and tertium non datur.)

When there is full parity of the opposites, attested by the ego's absolute participation in both, this necessarily leads to a suspension of the will, for the will can no longer operate when every motive has an equally strong countermotive. Since life cannot tolerate a standstill, a damming up of vital energy results, and this would lead to an insupportable condition did not the tension of opposites produce a new, uniting function that transcends them. This function arises quite naturally from the regression of libido caused by the blockage.[*Ibid.*, par. 824.]

The tendencies of the conscious and the unconscious are the two factors that together make up the transcendent function. It is called "transcendent" because it makes the transition from one attitude to another organically possible.[*The Transcendent Function*, "CW 8, par. 145.]

In a conflict situation, or a state of depression for which there is no apparent reason, the

development of the transcendent function depends on becoming aware of unconscious material. This is most readily available in dreams, but because they are so difficult to understand Jung considered the method of active imagination-giving "form" to dreams, fantasies, etc.--to be more useful.

Once the unconscious content has been given form and the meaning of the formulation is understood, the question arises as to how the ego will relate to this position, and how the ego and the unconscious are to come to terms. This is the second and more important stage of the procedure, the bringing together of opposites for the production of a third: the transcendent function. At this stage it is no longer the unconscious that takes the lead, but the ego.[Ibid., par. 181.]

This process requires an ego that can maintain its standpoint in face of the counterposition of the unconscious. Both are of equal value. The confrontation between the two generates a tension charged with energy and creates a living, third essence.

From the activity of the unconscious there now emerges a new content, constellated by thesis and antithesis in equal measure and standing in a compensatory relation to both. It thus forms the middle ground on which the opposites can be united. If, for instance, we conceive the opposition to be sensuality versus spirituality, then the mediatory content born out of the unconscious provides a welcome means of expression for the spiritual thesis, because of its rich spiritual associations, and also for the sensual antithesis, because of its sensuous imagery. The ego, however, torn between thesis and antithesis, finds in the middle ground its own counterpart, its sole and unique means of expression, and it eagerly seizes on this in order to be delivered from its division.["Definitions," CW 6, par. 825.]

The transcendent function is essentially an aspect of the self-regulation of the psyche. It typically manifests symbolically and is experienced as a new attitude toward oneself and life.

If the mediatory product remains intact, it forms the raw material for a process not of dissolution but of construction, in which thesis and antithesis both play their part. In this way it becomes a new content that governs the whole attitude, putting an end to the division and forcing the energy of the opposites into a common channel. The standstill is

overcome and life can flow on with renewed power towards new goals.[Ibid., par. 827.]

Both Zazen and Koan work are useful for invoking Great Doubt.

Anyone attempting Zazen for the first time can understand how difficult it can be to "just sit" for any length of time. The monkey mind kicks in and interferes with your "just sitting." How can something pure and simple be so difficult? Can I even do it? It can be frustrating--go with it, even if only for a few minutes at a time. Let the monkey mind scream and scream and finally tire out and collapse from exhaustion. Go with it. You'll see the monkey mind bringing you your engrained habitual thought patterns. Do any of these habitual patterns need dispelling? Are they keeping you stuck?

A koan can do the same thing--it can really get the monkey mind screaming, and get your mind racing. Go with it. Wrestle with it. Let the monkey mind play, get exercise, fetch all sorts of scattered thoughts (*wait a minute--the monkey mind is gathering scattered thoughts together? This could be useful.*) Next thing you know, the monkey mind becomes exhausted and collapses, with all of the scattered thoughts gathered together. Time for Quiet Mind and Monkey Mind to have a meal together of these once scattered but now collected together thoughts. Finally, after eating your fill of these thoughts, you break through into clarity. You invoke Jung's transcendent function.

~Stephanie Lovecs V° HH&D
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