

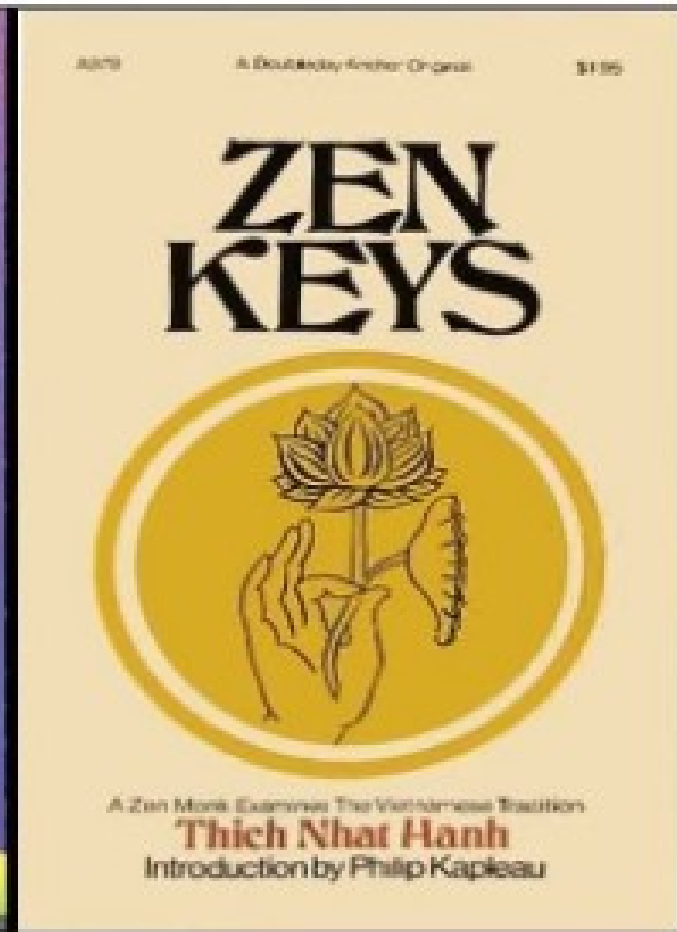
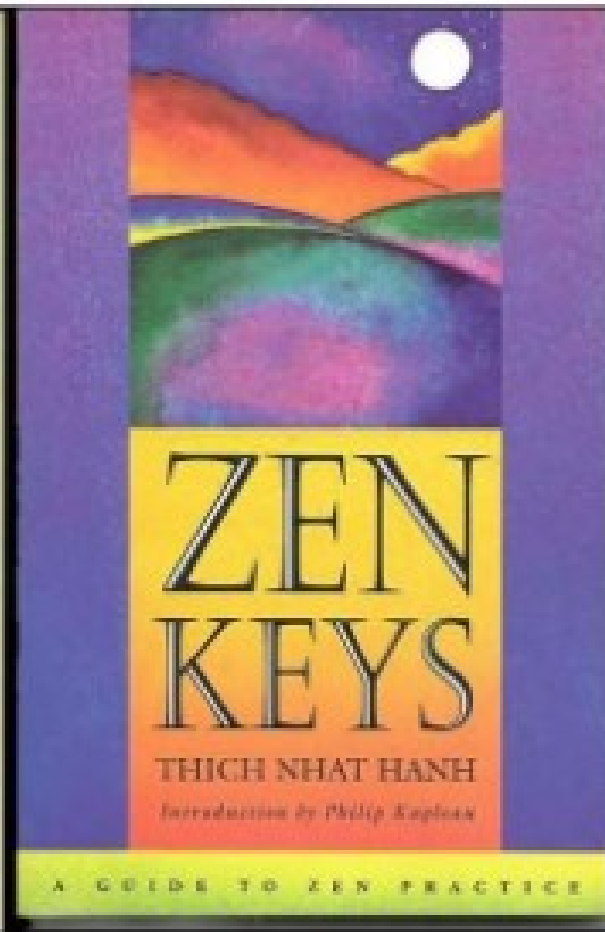
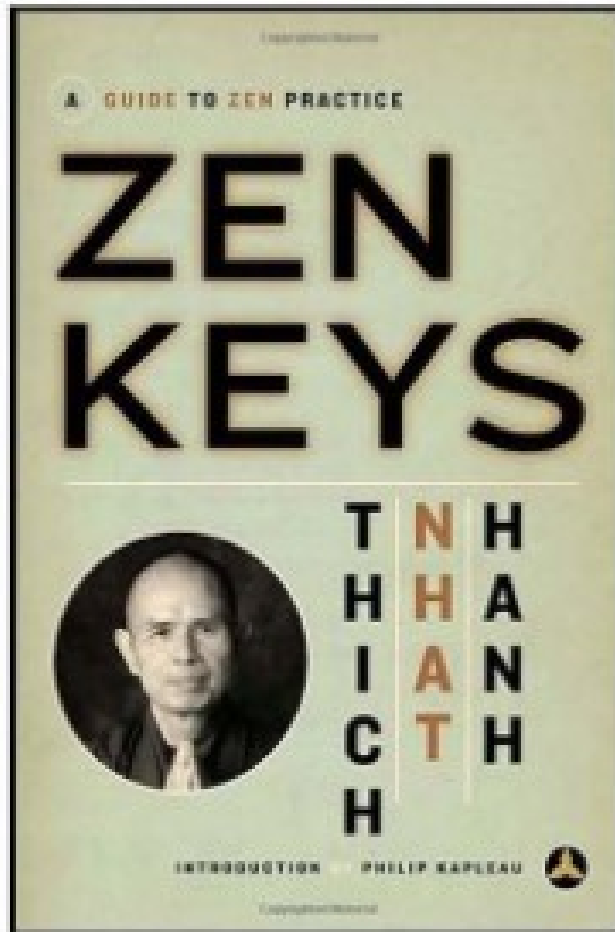
# Zen Keys: A Guide to Zen Practice

by Thich Nhat Hanh

**A Dharma talk given 1/4/2020 covering chapters 4 – 6**

**Created by Craig Hannah**

**Given to the CT sangha of the DTO**



# Material to be covered

## **Chapter 4 - Mountains Are Mountains and Rivers Are Rivers**

The Mind Seal

True Mind and False Mind

Reality in Itself

The Lamp and Lampshade

A Non-Conceptual Experience

The Principle of Non-Duality

Interbeing

# Material to be covered

## **Chapter 5 - Footprints of Emptiness**

The Birth of Zen Buddhism

Zen and the West

Zen and China

The Notion of Emptiness

Complementary Notions

Anti-Scholastic Reactions

Return to the Source

The A Which Is Not A Is Truly A

Penetrating the Tathata

Subject and Object

The Three Gates of Liberation

The Eight Negations of Nagarjuna

The Middle Way

The Vijnanavada School

Classification of the Dharmas

Conscious Knowledge

Method of Vijnanavada

Alaya as the Basis

The Process of Enlightenment

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## **Chapter 6 - The Regeneration of Man**

Monastic Life

The Retreats

The Encounter

The Role of the Laity

The Zen Man and the World of Today

Future Perspectives

Is an Awakening Possible?

Spirituality versus Technology

# Chapter 4

## Mountains Are Mountains and Rivers Are Rivers

### **The Mind Seal**

- The Mind Seal is traditionally thought of as “a mind-to-mind recognition between a master and disciple that the disciple has realized the ‘true Dharma eye.’” (e.g. When Buddha holding a flower transmitted it to Mahakashyapa).
- In truth:
  - The authentic mind seal is transmitted in every moment.
  - It is not transmitted from a master. The master’s role is to help the student realize the awakening already present in them.
  - It is simply Reality-in-itself (tathata), aka “Thusness” or “Suchness”
- All of these words – nirvana, tathata, or prajna, are not nirvana, tathata, or prajna. They are simply words used as ‘skillful means’ to get beyond the concept to the actual experience of the thing.

# Chapter 4

## Mountains Are Mountains and Rivers Are Rivers

### **The Mind Seal**

“I have said nothing” A teacher may say this meaning that anything they have said is simply a ‘skillful means’ and should not be held on to.

- Transmission from another may, or may not, occur. It’s better to understand that awakening arises from within oneself.
- “The idea of true nature can be an obstacle for the practitioner, even if realization of our true nature is the very aim of Zen.”



# Chapter 4

## Mountains Are Mountains and Rivers Are Rivers

### **True Mind and False Mind**

“True mind is the radiant nature of being, while false mind is the faculty of conceiving and discriminating.”

- Huang Po, a 9th century Zen master focused on the idea of mind. He wrote that by conceiving of true mind, one loses true mind. This means that we must use another way to realize it.



# Chapter 4

## Mountains Are Mountains and Rivers Are Rivers

### **Reality in Itself**

- Reality in itself is not a concept. It is the experience of reality.
- “Reality in itself is the base of everything. It is not conditioned by production or destruction, by gain or loss.”
- Dualisms such as subject and object are all dependent on conditions. They disappear in the direct experience of reality.
- To avoid being trapped by the words, only speak of true mind through skillful means.
- Our world of birth and death is our world. It is not different from reality in itself – there is no other reality.

# Chapter 4

## Mountains Are Mountains and Rivers Are Rivers

### **Reality in Itself**

- Zen thought derives from all the Mahayana Buddhist schools.
  - Tathagata Dhyana is derived from the Lankavatara.
  - True Mind, radiant and miraculous, comes from the Surangama.
  - The merits of Dhyana comes from the Mahavaipulyapurnabuddha (The Perfect Awakening Sutra).
  - The universe as a harmonious whole comes from Avatamsaka.
  - Emptiness is derived from the Prajnaparamita.

# Chapter 4

## Mountains Are Mountains and Rivers Are Rivers

### **The Lamp and Lampshade**

- The following Soto Zen meditation principles can be used with Linji techniques to help us not discriminate between ends and means.
  - 1) Sitting meditation, even without a subject of meditation is enough.
  - 2) Sitting meditation and awakening are not two different things.
  - 3) One must not wait for awakening.
  - 4) There is no awakening to attain.
  - 5) Mind and body are one.

# Chapter 4

## Mountains Are Mountains and Rivers Are Rivers

### **The Lamp and Lampshade**

- “In our usual state of forgetfulness, we lose ourselves and we lose our life.”
- The significance of the Koan [kung-an]:
  - Koans (Described in chapter 3) are training subjects in Zen and are a skillful means to help a practitioner break through conceptual obstructions to awakening.
  - Koans are carefully selected by a master for a given practitioner.
  - “Sitting meditation is not just to reflect on a kung-on, but to light the lamp of awareness in ourselves.”
  - “The kung-on is the lampshade, and Zen is the lamp itself.”

# Chapter 4

## Mountains Are Mountains and Rivers Are Rivers

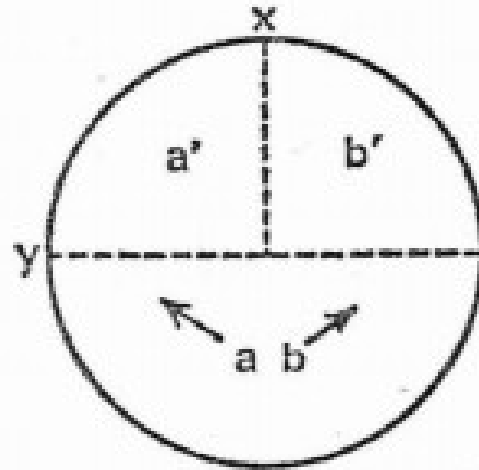
### **A Non-Conceptual Experience**

- How do we avoid being caught by the extreme of conceptualization?
  - By direct experience, i.e. by being the experience.
  - The idea of drinking tea is not the experience of drinking tea.
- How do we avoid being caught by the extreme of inertia (Ignoring the dynamic nature of things)?
  - By being fully mindful of the direct experience.
  - The tea and the tea drinker still exist.
  - The Zen practitioner and the reality lived by them still exist.
  - The wave and the ocean are one, but the wave still exists.
- The idea of non-conceptual is still a concept.
- “Reality in itself transcends all descriptions and ideas.”
- “Life is not a representation of life”

# Chapter 4

## Mountains Are Mountains and Rivers Are Rivers

### The Principle of Non-Duality



The book has a series of diagrams leading up to this picture of integrated reality.

- The circle represents the totality, or Dharmakaya.
- The vertical line, x, separates subject and object.
- The horizontal line, y, separates the conditioned from the unconditioned.
- (a) is mind (Subject). (b) is matter (object).
- (ab) is non-discriminative reality, but in this case the arrows indicate that this reality is aware of the conventional interplay of how its subject (a) and object (b) components remanifest in conventional reality (a') and (b').



# Chapter 4

## Mountains Are Mountains and Rivers Are Rivers

### **The Principle of Non-Duality**

“The awakened person lives in the world of things like everyone else. 'When she sees a rose she knows that it is a rose, like everyone else. But the difference is that he is neither conditioned nor imprisoned by concepts. Concepts now become marvelous 'skillful means' in her possession. The awakened person looks, listens, and distinguishes things, all the while being perfectly aware of the presence (a-b) that is the perfect and nondiscriminative nature of everything. She sees things perfectly in their interdependent relational nature.”

[TNH, with slight editing]



# Chapter 4

## Mountains Are Mountains and Rivers Are Rivers

### **Interbeing**

“Before practicing Zen, rivers were rivers and mountains were mountains. When I practiced Zen, I saw that rivers were no longer rivers and mountains no longer mountains. Now I see that rivers are once again rivers and mountains are mountains.” Qingyuan Weixin

Paraphrasing Cuu Chi, an 11th century Vietnamese monk:

- An awakened person looks at things and sees their true nature.
- When perceiving things, they penetrate their interdependent relational nature.
- Thus, while living in the world they possess the secret of the production and manifestation of phenomena.
- It is the only way to arrive at Awakening. There is no other. Once free of errors caused by concepts, you can live in peace and freedom, even in the world of karma.
- Using skillful means, you realize the call of Awakening in this conditioned world, without even thinking that the world is conditioned or unconditioned.

# Chapter 5

## Footprints of Emptiness

### **The Birth of Zen Buddhism**

[Giving short shrift to most of the details here]

The term 'Zen' started being used toward the end of the 8th century, although schools that put sitting meditation as the core of their practice, e.g. the Lankavatara school, had existed for 500 plus years at that point.

Out of the various branchings, e.g. Southern & Northern schools, kung-an use was started, and both the doctrines of sudden (Southern school) and gradual (Northern school) enlightenment were developed.

The Southern school gave birth to the five well known schools of Zen before spreading to Japan, Vietnam, and Korea:

- Lin Chi (Linji our DTO lineage)
- Ts'ao Tung (later Soto in Japan)
- Yun Men
- Kuei Yang
- Fa Yen

# Chapter 5

## Footprints of Emptiness

### **Zen and the West**

- A lot has happened regarding this topic since Zen Keys was written in 1973, but one observation stays true “If Zen is to take root in the west, it must acquire a western form, different from Oriental Zen.”

### **Zen and China**

- Buddhism was infused with practicality when it was assimilated by China. A result of this was more of an emphasis on its experiential aspects.

### **The Notion of Emptiness**

- This is emptiness of a separate self, but also implies fullness of everything.

### **Complementary Notions**

- Describes attempts to reconcile conflicting thoughts on identity and existence.

# Chapter 5

## Footprints of Emptiness

### **Anti-Scholastic Reactions**

- Describes reactions to those attempts.

### **Return to the Source**

- All of these contortions are simply skillful means.
- “The notions of impermanence, non-self, interbeing, and emptiness are means aimed at revealing the errors of knowledge rather than giving a description of the objects of knowledge.”

### **The A Which Is Not A Is Truly A**

- “Reality is only reality when it is not grasped conceptually”
- “true emptiness is identical to the tathata, which is non-discriminated and non-conceptualized reality”
- Any concept regarding emptiness or tathata is the enemy of emptiness or tathata.

# Chapter 5

## Footprints of Emptiness

### **Penetrating the Tathata**

- Tathata is “base reality and can be used to terminate the use of words”
- Empty = non-empty = tathata; None of these concepts are concepts.

### **Subject and Object**

- All error in both practice and knowledge is from discrimination between subject and object.
- From the Astasahasrika Sutra:
  - “The realization of wisdom is therefore a non-realization in which all speculation is useless.”

### **The Three Gates of Liberation**

- Emptiness (sunyata) - The absence of permanent identity
- No-trace (animitta) – [aka Signlessness) The nature of non-conceptualization of things.
- Non-pursuit (apranihita) – (aka Aimlessness) Not needing to run after an object

In Zen, these three are closely related: the lack of an absolute identity is manifested in the thing's non-conceptual knowledge where a subject and object aren't distinguished.



# Chapter 5

## Footprints of Emptiness

### **The Eight Negations of Nagarjuna**

Nagarjuna's work became the foundation of the Madhyamika School which sought to open the door to non-conceptual thought by demonstrating the absurdity of all views (Including the Madhyamakan ones).

The Eight Negations are:

- There is no generation;
- There is no destruction;
- There is no continuation;
- There is no interruption;
- There is no unity;
- There is no plurality;
- There is no arriving;
- There is no leaving.

# Chapter 5

## Footprints of Emptiness

### **The Eight Negations of Nagarjuna**

Using generation as an example:

- Before the effect E is produced by the cause C, does E already exist in C?
  - No – Then generation is impossible since it would be impossible for E to arise from C.
  - Yes – Then E has no need of generation since it already exists.
- Therefore generation is impossible. (The above case was one of becoming, not generation)



# Chapter 5

## Footprints of Emptiness

### **The Middle Way**

The middle way refers to the transcendence of opposing concepts, not their synthesis.

Dialectic is the art of investigating or discussing the truth of opinions. Nagarjuna's use of it was to counter non-truth (i.e. relative truth) rather than expounding a truth per se.

### **The Vijñānavāda School**

The next four sections explore the Vijñānavāda school, building on the discussions of the Sarvāstivāda School and delving into a lot of the material we covered last year when we read "Understanding our Mind" by TNH. For brevity's sake, they are not discussed here.

### **Classification of the Dharmas**

### **Conscious Knowledge**

### **Method of Vijñānavāda**

# Chapter 5

## Footprints of Emptiness

### **Alaya as the Basis**

Buddhist psychology says that there are eight consciousnesses.

- Our five normal senses, plus our mind, each have one.
- The seventh is Manas, the consciousness that attaches to the result of thinking.
- The eighth is Alayavijnana or the "All-encompassing foundation consciousness", also called the Storehouse Consciousness.
  - The Alaya is the basis for being and non-being. In it live all the energies and essences (seeds) that are manifested in the world.
  - We are born with many seeds and many we plant anew.
  - These seeds may be beneficial or harmful.
  - Our actions and thoughts cause them to stay dormant or to manifest in our other consciousnesses.
- Our meditation practice can bring about changes at the base of Alaya and transform seeds that arise from errors. Enlightenment is the fruit of this transformation.

# Chapter 5

## Footprints of Emptiness

### The Process of Enlightenment



The round circle represents the world of True Nature, but the unenlightened can only see the world of discrimination (vikalpa). Through skillful means, we can come back to the world of the tathata. This doesn't mean that the world of phenomenon has disappeared. It is still there, but now can be revealed in true wisdom.

While Zen doesn't normally encourage its students to study Madhyamika and Vijnanavada, this isn't because these doctrines contradict Zen. Instead it is because:

“Zen is not the study of Zen, Zen is life.”

We need to be in direct contact with living reality.

# Chapter 6

## The Regeneration of Man

### **Monastic Life**

This section gave a quick overview of Zen monastic life which has changed little since the eighth century.

A small example is the chant used as a prelude to morning meditation:

“The fifth division of the night has already begun and the gateway to reality is open. I wish that the whole world were on the path of prajna wisdom, that each of us should penetrate deeply into the doctrine of the three vehicles and realize the harmony between the two truths, and that the sun of marvelous wisdom should rise and dispel all the clouds of darkness.”

# Chapter 6

## The Regeneration of Man

### **The Retreats**

The main retreat starts mid-April and lasts three months. It is a period of concentrated study and practice. There may also be a similar winter retreat for those that could not attend the one in the spring. There is also an option for a solo retreat that can last from three months to three years. During this time the practitioner rarely leaves the vicinity of their hut and is attended to by a novice.

Mindfulness is practiced not only during retreat, but also during normal day to day activities. “There is no enlightenment outside of daily life.”



# Chapter 6

## The Regeneration of Man

### **The Encounter**

- One-on-one encounters occur regularly between a disciple and their teacher.
- Impromptu ‘Small Encounters’ may also occur between a teacher and a group of students.
- Great Encounters are when the entire assembly participates and may include formidable confrontations as a student is tested.
  - Monks willing to do this are said to be “entering into combat”.

### **The Role of the Laity**

- Lay people have an important role in the monastery, providing material support, labor, or cultural activities.
- Some monasteries allow for 24 or 48 hour periods where a lay person can live in the monastery as if they were monks.
- The close interaction between the monks and the lay people allow the essence of the monastery to penetrate out into society.

# Chapter 6

## The Regeneration of Man

### **The Zen Man and the World of Today**

An enlightened practitioner is the most valuable gift that the Zen tradition can offer. Their presence in the world serves as a glowing example of how to be in the world.

### **Future Perspectives**

The world is faced with many difficult problems that do or will, threaten our existence.



# Chapter 6

## The Regeneration of Man

### **Is an Awakening Possible?**

What the world needs is for people to wake up and be mindful of what our situation really is. There is no shortage of things intent on keeping us unaware of true reality.

Buddhism is gaining acceptance in the west and is seen as something new, different, and promising. Ironically, while this is happening here, it is being seen as something old and irrelevant in the countries that were traditionally Buddhist.

The author cites the example of Gandhi as what we need more of. Gandhi's power didn't come from any doctrine or ideology; it came from his spiritual strength. This is what we need. This is the example that we need to set.

# Chapter 6

## The Regeneration of Man

### **Spirituality versus Technology**

The author restates the point here that Western Buddhism cannot simply be a transplant from another country.

The essence of Buddhism has to merge with, and take the take shape of western culture.

# The End

**To know and not to  
do is not yet to  
know.**

Laozi