

Zensho W. Kopp

The Essence

Transcription of a talk by Zensho W. Kopp,
held at the Tao-Chan Zen Center in
Wiesbaden, Germany in May 2018

We recall Yung-Chia, whom I mentioned in my previous talk, with his wonderful saying, which is a most essential saying in Zen and which I wish to mention here once more. It was once that Yung-Chia went to pay a call on the sixth patriarch Hui-Neng in the eighth century in China. And the sixth patriarch is as much as the pope in Christianity, one could say. Consequently, certain rules of reverence had to be observed, like bowing, prostrating oneself, and so forth. Yet Yung-Chia entered the great Dharma-hall, all the monks were sitting there, the sixth patriarch Hui-Neng was sitting at the front on his elevated patriarch-seat – and Yung-Chia comes in, stands before Hui-Neng and looks at him.

Yung-Chia stands before the sixth patriarch Hui-Neng – he omits to bow and prostrate himself and just looks at him from top to bottom. Then he walks around him to the left, and then around him to the right, then he returns to a halt before him, tilts his head to one side, looks at him – and already a quiet murmuring has begun in the Dharma-hall: “Who does he think he is? What is going on? What impertinence! Such blatancy! He must be chased out.” And so on. “What does he want here anyway?”

Then Hui-Neng says, “So who are you then? And where do you come from that you should demonstrate such unreasonable manners? Do you not know the regulations on how you are to greet a patriarch and which rules you must follow?” Yung-Chia smiles and says, “The matter of life and death is immense and impermanence swiftly grasps hold. How can you still waste your time with such trivialities?” Hui-Neng says, “Well, if you believe that all things are trivial, so tell me, what is the essence?”

Yung-Chia’s lightning quick answer comes like a pistol shot, “Everything I could say about it would fall short of the essence!” That is an epic encounter between two tremendous masters.

And that is it. Everything you could say about it would fall short of the essence. So what is the essence? The question is now at hand. Everything you could say about it would fall short of the essence.

Some of you might say – “So why have I come here anyway? I am here to learn something about the essence, my true nature, my true being; about where I come from and where I am going to when I die, about what will happen to me after my death. That is why I have come here!”

Yet, I can only reply, “Everything I could say about it would fall short of the essence.” For this is where Zen practice begins since you can only experience it within yourself.

Contact address

ZEN-ZENTRUM
TAO 道 CHAN 禪

Tao Chan Zentrum e.V.
Non-profit society
Wiesbaden

The Tao-Chan Zen Center is directed personally by Zen Master Zensho W. Kopp. During his many years as an active spiritual master, a large community of students has gathered around him, whom he regularly instructs.

Twice a month, the Tao-Chan Zen Center in Wiesbaden organises an open Zen-day, directed by Zen Master Zensho W. Kopp.

Information und registration:

Tel. +49 (0)611 940 623-1 Fax -2

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