

Zen – past present future essay sample

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In the Dalai Lama's words - ' The basic thing that everyone wants is happiness, no one wants suffering.' Happiness, he concluded, mainly comes from our own attitude, rather than from external factors, if your (one's) own mental attitude is correct, even if you remain in a hostile atmosphere, you (one) feel(s) happy.' And happiness, as how Augustine of Hippo wrote in his book: Confessions - ' The ultimate goal of all human endeavors lies in the happiness. A lot of times, happiness comes from success in life. Also, happiness is for one who is contented . Contentment, in another translation is Zen or Inner Peace. Zen is the school of Mahayana Buddhism which originated in China and it has about 1500 years of history. It is often linked to the religion of Buddhism as the foundation of thinking and practice, however, Zen can be acquired not only through the practice of Buddhism. Zen is also known Chán. This entire school of thought originated from the monk Bodhidharma who ' faced a wall for nine years and did not speak for the entire time to meditate about life and inner peace.' His thoughts and ideas were passed on to other famous philosophers after him like Hanshan Deqing and Miyun Yuanwu.

More importantly, the philosophy also branched out to Japan during Ming Dynasty in China. This branching led to many famous Japanese philosophers like Hakuin Ekaku and Matsuo Basho who brought the Zen movement to a greater height with notable works like Oku no Hosomichi . In this book, the author wrote down his thoughts and experiences throughout his travel around Japan in search for enlightenment as part of his Zen meditation. The branching out to Japan heavily influenced the spread of Zen to the western world in recent years. After World War II, notable Zen philosophers like Philip

Kapleau and Janwillem van de Wetering studied with various Zen masters in Japan and many Japanese Zen philosophers also travelled to the West to share the practice and philosophy of Zen. So what is the main idea of Zen and what does it encompass?

Over the years, Zen divided into many different schools of thought and no one is exactly sure of what it truly meant back in the days of Bodhidharma. However, the main idea of Zen lies with the concept of emptiness. The search for this emptiness starts with the question of who you are and what you truly believe in. Everyone has the tendency to search for happiness through materialistic means but few understand that the search comes from within. Happiness is defined by the individual's true self from within. Once you find your inner belief, you will be able to have clear expectations and goals for yourself.

It is the ability to follow your beliefs that will bring you true inner happiness. As such, when happiness is not achieved through material or selfish means, inner emptiness is said to have been attained according to the definition of Zen. In the following part of the essay, I will look into the different ways to achieve inner happiness and emptiness, and hence attain Zen. Happiness comes with achieving. It comes from achieving one's wants and expectations and it also comes from gaining approval from others. Wants and expectations come from within an individual and the emptiness in mind and soul to some extent equates to not having a high expectation of things and not having too many wants in life. The higher the expectation in life, the more effort one will have to put in to achieve it and the harder it will be to find happiness. So letting go of expectations that are not in line with your

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inner beliefs, that is emptiness. Another way to achieve happiness is to appreciate life and everything in life. A famous saying in Zen is, ' everyday is a beautiful day.' Appreciation can help an individual accomplish goals and dissolve anxiety and worries. The ability to dissolve anxiety and worries links back to the idea of ultimate happiness. It is also about letting go; letting go at times can also mean gaining more. This idea is vividly illustrated in the story of ' The Parable of the Rope', where inner peace or Zen at many times is about letting go.

In this story, author Peter Russell talked about how many of us are like a person holding onto a piece of rope. This person holds onto the rope for life, knowing that if he were to let go, he would fall to his death. People around him all tell him this is so and when he looks around, he can see everyone else is doing the same. Nothing can make him let go of his rope. One day, a wise person appeared and she knows that holding on to the rope is unnecessary and the security it offers is illusory. It will only hold you where you are and hinder your progress in life. She then tries to dispel his illusions and set him free. She talks to him about real security, inner happiness and peace of the mind. She tells him to try this out by letting go of one finger first. The man agrees and finds greater joy and happiness in life. Slowly, he begins to let go of another finger and realises that he does not fall. Instead, he finds more happiness than he has ever felt before. When he reached his last finger, the wise lady tells him that she can no longer help him and that he has to find the courage to let go. She promises him that all his fears are groundless and that he will never fall to his death. Trusting her and his inner belief, the man released his last finger and nothing happens.

He stays where he is and then he realises why. It is because he has been standing on the ground the whole time and so are many of the people around him. He knows he should never hold onto the rope again as he has found his peace of mind. This story illustrates why we should dissolve our anxieties and fears so that we can 'let go of our ropes' and appreciate our daily lives. In this way, we will be closer to achieving happiness. Psychologist Kathryn Gow (1999) said that letting go is a fundamental principle of life. Humans have the tendency to hold on when they fear the consequences of letting go - like changes and unpredictability ahead.

People only begin to treasure people and things around them when they are on the verge of losing these people and things. However, such holding on does not do one any good. Psychologically letting go of concerns and anxieties is the key to living without worries. It helps to free up the body and prevents blockages from occurring in one's neural pathways and physiological system. This is often done through meditation. Meditation can be said to be a tool for spiritual growth and healing. One of the major concepts behind Vipassana meditation in meditative healing is to detach oneself from one's thoughts and observe the erratic mind. Psychologist William James (1989) referred to this as "a stream of consciousness". As mentioned previously, one of the most influential Japanese Zen practitioners Matsuo Basho sought to attain Zen through meditation around Japan. It can be said that meditation can indeed calm an individual down and hence let go of his worries, thus achieving inner peace which will ultimately lead to the attainment of Zen. There are other ways to practice Zen besides meditation. They include bowing, chanting and Kong-An Practice. The first two methods

are self-explanatory. In bowing, Zen practitioners will bow one hundred and eight times every morning as they believe this can wake their body and soul for the day. Chanting, on the other hand, can be done anytime of the day and Zen practitioners will chant to Buddhism sutras so as to clear their minds and make their humanly desires go away. This is a way to achieve emptiness in the study of Zen. Kong-An Practice is more complicated than the first two methods.

This Practice is often done by a senior Zen master and his student together. Kong-An is known for its unique and illogical dialogues. It is not to be studied or analysed conceptually. Zen practitioners engage in this Practice so as to clear their minds and help them to perceive their lives clearly. An example of a Kong-An Practice is as follows. A Zen master asks his student: ' Does a dog has Buddha nature?'. His student replies: ' Mu.'. This may seem incomprehensible to non practitioners but this is how a Kong-An is done. It usually takes a number of practices before a student can fully master this Practice. All these methods are basically intended to calm one down and train towards the idea of emptiness. It teaches the importance of having peace of mind and being constant with the environment . The above mentioned methods are mostly for monks and people deeply interested in the training of Zen.

In everyday life, it can be helpful to just take a step back from one's lifestyle and synchronize with the environment. It means to observe the environment, appreciate the environment and be part of the environment . A lot of these can be achieved through training to have a positive mindset, the courage to give up on things in life and curb desires. Extending the discussion further, I <https://assignbuster.com/zen-past-present-future-essay-sample/>

will evaluate how the practice of Zen can influence people around us and the greater society. Studies have shown that Zen can help to foster closer relationships between individuals. In her study on family and relationships, Hoeberichts examined many couples and study objects and concluded that human interactions can be made stronger with them practicing and trying to acquire together and not as individuals. Her studies found that people who practice Zen together with their intimate partners often have better outcomes as compared to people who practice Zen in isolation. According to Hoeberichts, meditation lowers our defences and allows us to see and discover aspects of ourselves we might not have access to through other means. As such, when we meditate with our loved ones, we are often in our least pretentious state.

This is important when we seek to develop inner peace and find our inner beliefs. Meditation works best when we are most relaxed and most people are more relaxed when they are in the company of their families and loved ones. Also, it has been shown that Zen helps to foster better team work and allow individuals to work together better in teams. This can be seen in the example of Phil Jackson and his Zen practices with his basketball team and their eventual success. Jackson introduced the idea of Zen practices to his players and told them to meditate, do Tai Chi and practice yoga. All these practices aim to help the players concentrate better on the court.

Hence, it can be said that Zen practices are not only for those who are very serious about becoming Zen masters, but they can be practiced by people like you and me as well. Zen definitely has many positive effects in one's life, be it individually or as a group, it enhances performance and allow one to

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move closer towards one's ultimate goal - happiness in life. With simple actions like appreciation and a courageous gesture to let go of certain elements in life, Zen can be achieved. However, as with everything in this world, Zen does not come free. Practicing and practicing in the right way are needed in order to achieve it. The walk towards it is certainly not easy, but it is definitely worthwhile. ' When the mind is at peace, the world too, is at peace. Nothing real, nothing absent. Not holding on to reality, not getting stuck in the void, you are neither holy nor wise, just an ordinary fellow who has completed his work. '