

## Article

# Spiritual Exercises in the Rinzai Zen Tradition: Imminence and Disruption in Ikkyū Sōjun and Hakuin Ekaku

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**Abstract:** In this paper, we will present Rinzai practices from Zen Masters Ikkyū Sōjun (一休宗純, 1394–1481) and Hakuin Ekaku (白隠 慧鶴, 1686–1769) as offering a distinctive kind of spiritual exercise: disruptive reorientation to transcendence (enlightenment) through immanence (a return to the world in all its ugly distractions, beauty, and insight). This paper seeks to explore Hadot's philosophy as a way of life (PWL) through Rinzai Zen's unique and often bizarre spiritual exercises. In so doing, this paper hopes to explore new grounds for PWL spiritual exercises in the eccentricities of Japanese Rinzai Zen masters whose approaches wander and diverge yet remain distinctively Rinzai in nature. In the first section, we provide some background on treating spiritual exercises in an intercultural context and explore the exemplarily disruptive spiritual exercises that Rinzai Zen offers PWL practice, especially through poetry, kōans, and meditation in the midst of everyday activity. We then turn to particular examples found in the lives and spiritual practices of Ikkyū and Hakuin. We conclude with reflections on how Rinzai Zen and PWL inform one another through the exploration of "spiritual exercise" and disruption not only as scholarly pursuits but also in terms of our own arts of mindful living today.

**Keywords:** spiritual exercise; philosophy as a way of life; Rinzai Zen



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## 1. Introduction: Disruptive Spiritual Exercises in Rinzai Zen

Pierre Hadot's conception of philosophy as a way of life (PWL) describes how ancient philosophers practiced and prescribed education via the category of "spiritual exercises" to enable a kind of existential transformation. Such "exercises" were not intended to be limited to the "spiritual" in the colloquial English sense of the term. Rather, they were meant to express that these philosophers aimed at transforming all dimensions of themselves, not merely the intellect. Aiming "to capture the full range of the 'exercises' at stake in the ancient philosophical writings... all of these exercises aimed at transforming the inner life of philosophers" (Sharpe 2023). Yet not all these exercises lead to harmony and integration. There are spiritual exercises that have a disruptive role in our practice and development. These tend to put more emphasis on the metanoic (reorientation in light of one's comic condition) dimension of PWL practice.<sup>1</sup> We draw this insight from the kōan and poetry "exercises" found in the Rinzai Zen tradition. Scholars of Japanese philosophy and religion have interpreted the complex role of Zen kōans and poetry differently. We argue that one important guiding dimension for both, as spiritual exercises, is the way that they exhort the kōan/poetry practitioner to break out of everyday ways of thinking and living by shockingly disrupting deeply instilled habits that inhibit living a good life. These sorts of disruptive approaches can be found in many different kinds of spiritual exercises and traditions, but in Rinzai Zen kōan/poetry practice, they are utilized with exemplary sophistication and depth. Heinrich Dumoulin points to this disruptive spiritual exercise when he writes:

“Their main concern was to bring their disciples to a genuine experience, and that experience necessarily implied a break with the student’s ordinary state of consciousness. The masters knew only too well that their students were imprisoned by the world of things around them, rendering homage to a naïve realism and convinced that the knowing subject perceives and knows the world of objects. The jolt produced by the koan can shake students from this state of consciousness and propel them into a sudden awakening that will help them move from a world of multiplicity to a world of oneness. In their essence, therefore, the koan are grounded in Mahayana’s unitive vision of reality”. (Dumoulin 2006, p. 30, emphasis added)

This paper focuses on Zen Masters Ikkyū Sōjun (一休宗純, 1394–1481) and Hakuin Ekaku (白隠 慧鶴, 1686–1769) as characterized by their respective atopic disruptions,<sup>2</sup> whether manifest in Hakuin’s kōan practice as a method for meditation in-the-midst-of-activity (*dōchū-no-kufū* 動中の工夫) or Ikkyū’s distinctively “crazy Zen” (informed by Linji Yixuan (d. 866 CE), from whom the Rinzai Zen tradition takes its name), coupled with an embodied wandering approach, following in the footsteps of Bodhidharma (fifth or sixth century CE), Saigyō Hōshi (西行法師, 1118–1190), and Matsuo Bashō (松尾 芭蕉, 1644–1694).<sup>3</sup> Ikkyū’s bawdy and bodily poetry and Hakuin’s kōan practice are both exemplary of disruptive spiritual exercise that additionally disinclined both Zen masters from accepting administrative roles in the Rinzai institution, disrupting the precedent of institutional authority through their commitment to the precedent of spiritual exercise that led to earnest dharma devotees. In so doing, the Rinzai Zen paradox of spiritual direction comes to the foreground as a deeply personal practice that resists both philosophical essentialism and administrative codification.

In this paper, we will present Rinzai practices from Ikkyū and Hakuin as offering exemplary cases of a kind of spiritual exercise and an approach that is an element of many other spiritual exercises: disruptive reorientation to transcendence (enlightenment) through immanence (a return to the world in all its ugly distractions, beauty, and insight). This paper seeks to explore Hadot’s PWL through Rinzai Zen’s unique and often bizarre spiritual exercises. In so doing, with this paper, we hope to explore new grounds for PWL spiritual exercises in the eccentricities of Japanese Rinzai Zen masters whose approaches wander and diverge yet remain distinctively Rinzai in nature.

In the first section, we begin with a brief explanation of Hadot’s PWL, paying particular attention to his concept of spiritual exercise, understood as an effort to change or transform the self. Matthew Sharpe and Michael Ure identify at least nine different non-exclusive kinds or emphases of spiritual exercises to which we propose to add a tenth: practices of disruptive reorientation. This tenth category illuminates both a dominant emphasis in certain kinds of spiritual exercises and a dimension to many others. After establishing a brief background on spiritual exercises, in section three, we turn our attention to disruptive spiritual exercises in Rinzai Zen Buddhism.

Buddhism, broadly understood, is concerned with the problem of suffering brought about via unwholesome attachment to fundamentally impermanent phenomena. The eight-fold path teaches that Right View is the recognition that all things are inherently impermanent, subject to change, and that attachment leads to suffering. It is, thus, a philosophy concerned with an epistemological understanding of the fundamental nature of reality to transform suffering into loving kindness. As a result, Buddhism offers the possibility for a psychological/spiritual reorientation away from essentialism and towards impermanence and nonattachment. Rinzai Zen practices following Linji are widely considered to be disruptive insofar as Rinzai spiritual exercises are meant to break practitioners out of ordinary, everyday ways of thinking. While we will explore a handful of examples of disruptive Rinzai practices, the most obvious is the kōan.

In sections four and five, following Hadot’s call for more comparative philosophy, we turn to two case studies. Whereas Steven Collins took up this call to use Theravada Buddhism and the *Jataka Tales* as his case study, we have elected to focus on Zen masters

Ikkyū and Hakuin for their importance in modern Rinzai Zen and their approaches to disruptive spiritual exercises. Philip Yampolsky states:

“Both Ikkyū and Hakuin played pivotal roles in the formation of modern Rinzai Zen. Ikkyū, despite his early disregard for the stilted atmosphere of the institutionalized Zen of his day, oversaw the initial rebuilding of Daitokuji, which had been almost totally destroyed during the violent Onin War, and helped pave the way for the ascendance of the Myōshinji/Daitokuji line of Rinzai Zen. Hakuin revitalized the system of koan study in accordance with the Myōshinji/Daitokuji tradition and reemphasized the importance of zazen, close study under a teacher, and meditation in action”. (Yampolsky 1971, pp. 9–10)

Ikkyū’s poetry is emblematic of Zen poetry, and Hakuin’s creation of the *Sound of One Hand* kōan and the kōan curriculum that followed are, in their own respects, characteristic of Zen literary traditions. Furthermore, the spiritual biographies of both figures serve as instructive and entertaining narrative accounts, informing the audience of how disruptive practices contributed to their own spiritual progression. Beginning with the *Platform Sutra*, individual episodes of kōans are often found intermingled with records of the life and teachings of Zen masters. Dahui Zonggao (大慧宗杲, 1089–1163) taught students to just keep the kōan with them at all times. This is mostly plainly apparent in Hakuin’s own *Wild Ivy: The Spiritual Autobiography of Zen Master Hakuin* when he recounts his own successes and failures with kōan practices. Ikkyū’s poetry, occasionally introduced with a kōan case, is similarly expository. Kabanoff writes, “Hardly anyone before or after Ikkyū used poetry to such an extent as an expression of the most intimate feelings, spiritual turmoil, or reflections on the meaning of life” (Kabanoff 2000, p. 213). Because kōan practice is frequently intertwined in the stories of lives, sections four and five will, therefore, pay attention to the biographies of Ikkyū and Hakuin, in addition to their teachings.

We conclude with a brief reflection on how demarcating and studying disruptive spiritual exercises provides an illuminating way to compare the Stoics, Cynics, and other ancient Greek philosophical schools with Buddhist schools, and in particular Rinzai Zen. Here, we find that all spiritual exercises are disruptive of our usual habits and ways of perceiving to some extent, although we may not always appreciate the radicalness of that disruption. Rinzai Zen, in contrast, brings the disruptive dimension to the fore very explicitly.

## 2. Toward an Intercultural Account of Spiritual Exercises

Matthew Sharpe and Michael Ure describe Hadot’s account of spiritual exercises (*askēsis* in the ancient Greek context) as “cognitive, mnemonic, imaginative, rhetorical or physical exercise consciously chosen and undertaken by an agent with a view to the transformative effects the undertaking of this exercise will have upon the practitioner’s way of experiencing, desiring, emoting, or thinking” (Sharpe and Ure 2021, p. 5). These are often done in communities to mutually reinforce and deepen practices of growth and cultivation (Kramer 2021, pp. 196–206). The point is not merely to read about the good life but to seek to develop it.

This is one of the key hermeneutic insights of Hadot. As he saw it, there is a dangerous tendency toward an anachronistic reading of the works and activity of ancient philosophy as merely propositional discourses seeking to uncover the nature of reality in some epistemological, ontological, logical, or aesthetic aspect. Many professional philosophers read the works of the ancients as if they were a journal article of a colleague in a modern academic discipline. This can lead to gross misunderstandings, assuming the authors of the ancient world were more “primitive, undeveloped thinkers,” since they did not write the sort of essay line of argument we are used to today. Rather, if one puts the texts of ancient philosophy and authors in the context of their societies, schools, and metaphysical orientations and goals, Hadot famously argued, one sees them in a new light:

“In their view, philosophy did not consist in teaching an abstract theory—much less in the exegesis of texts—but rather in the art of living. It is a concrete attitude and determinate lifestyle, which engages the whole of existence. The philosophical act is not situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that of the self and of being. It is a progress which causes us to be more fully, and makes us better. It is a conversion which turns our entire life upside down, changing the life of the person who goes through it. It raises the individual from an inauthentic condition of life, darkened by unconsciousness and harassed by worry, to an authentic state of life, in which he attains self-consciousness, an exact vision of the world, inner peace, and freedom”. (Hadot 1995, p. 83)

Spiritual exercises were the disciplinary means to cultivating such a life. Works of the ancient world, then, are seen in a new light, as spiritual exercises themselves, or at least in service to them and the progress of a person in developing their full philosophical way of life.

Respected scholars of Buddhist philosophy have found, in Hadot’s hermeneutics and account of spiritual exercises in the history of Western philosophy, a familiar resonance, seeing potential for comparative study with many Buddhist spiritual practices (Kaptein 2013; Fiordalis 2018a, 2018b; Collins 2018, 2020). Buddhist philosophy has undoubtedly been characterized as therapeutic insofar as the four noble truths are understood as diagnostic. One’s orientation toward things in the world may lead to developing unhealthy attachments, resulting in suffering. These attachments are unhealthy insofar as our attachments presuppose satisfaction, but Buddhist views of reality teach that all things are fundamentally impermanent, and thus, attachment to impermanent things will result in inevitable loss and suffering. What is needed is a recognition of the impermanence of all things and a psychological reorientation that accepts this fundamental truth. In short, Buddhism, like Hadot’s articulation of ancient Greek philosophy, is therapeutic in teaching how to live in such a way as to bring about happiness or contentment. Buddhism offers a variety of spiritual exercises to break away from the cycles of suffering and re-engage with the world with attentiveness, clearer perception, and a systematic engagement with the cosmos. These “exercises” vary from one sect to another. Zen Buddhism is known for seated meditation (*zazen* 座禪) and *kōan* practices by way of what is known as a self-power (*jiriki* 自力) exercise to attain enlightenment through “one’s own strength.” By contrast, Pure Land Buddhism teaches *nembutsu* recitation, generally the recitation of the name Amida (*Namu Amida Butsu*), in what is known as other power (*tariki* 他力) exercises to attain enlightenment with the outside help of Amida Buddha. A similar *nembutsu* practice is found in Nichiren Buddhism with the recitation of the Lotus Sutra (*Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō*). Central to Shingon Buddhism are various esoteric practices utilizing a range of mandala, mudra, and mantra practices (Buddhist images, hand gestures, and sacred syllabic utterances). Through this variety of techniques, Buddhism has much to contribute to expanding our understanding of the kinds of global spiritual exercise practices.

Sharpe and Ure (2021) draw attention to at least nine different kinds, or rather emphases, in global PWL spiritual exercises. These spiritual exercises may include but are not limited to the following (paraphrased from Sharpe and Ure 2021, pp. 5–7):<sup>4</sup>

1. Practices of meditation;
2. Practices of attention to the present moment;
3. Practices of contemplation;
4. Practices of premeditation;
5. Practices of a retrospective examination of the conscious;
6. Practices of recontextualization in the context of the larger cosmos (the whole, spatially and/or temporally);
7. Practices of taming the passions;
8. Practices of fortitude;
9. Practices of spiritual guidance/direction.

These are not meant to be exhaustive or exclusive classes. For example, Western spiritual exercises of retrospectively examining one's consciousness (#5) often happen in the context of spiritual guidance or the direction of a teacher (as in the case of Seneca's spiritual direction of Lucilius) (#9). Or, in the Neo-Platonic School, one may be required to meditate (read carefully and commentate on with full attention) on Plato's *Timaeus* in order to also practice the spiritual exercise of the recontextualization of oneself in the context of the broader cosmos (#6). Thus, these are rather dominant emphases of particular spiritual exercise practices that may include other dimensions from the aforementioned list.

We propose that Rinzai Zen Buddhism offers exemplary cases of a tenth kind of emphasis in spiritual exercise practice: "Practices of Disruptive Reorientation." Practices of disruptive reorientation seek to break us away from our reified and isolated ways of perceiving reality concerning its impermanence and relationality, and they exhort us to practice spontaneity, given such a situation, without getting attached to formulaic answers and habits. We will focus particularly on Rinzai kōans and poetry as exemplar cases of spiritual exercises with this dominant emphasis.

### 3. Disruptive Rinzai Spiritual Exercises

Zen Buddhism is well known for a handful of select Buddhist practices, some more jarring than others. The more typical practices include *zazen* and kōan practice. Nestled within these practices are additional practices, such as striking a meditating monk with a stick (*keisaku*) or shouting (*katsu*). "Master Yunmen's (Dried) Shit Stick" is one prime example of shocking language employed as Buddhist skillful means (*upaya*), which appears as a kōan in *The Gateless Gate* (*Mumomkan*).

A monk asked Yün-men, "What is Buddha?" [雲門因僧問如何是佛]

Yün-men said, "Dried shitstick." [門云乾屎橛]. (Addiss 2008, p. 100)

This sort of jarring language is more typical of Rinzai Zen than other sects. That said, it would be wrong to suggest that any one practice belongs to one sect and not the other. For instance, it is common to teach students that Sōtō Zen practices seated meditation, whereas Rinzai Zen practices kōan study, but the reality is that Sōtō Zen also studies kōans, and Rinzai also practices seated meditation. Rinzai Zen takes its name from Linji, who became famous for his iconoclastic teaching methods, which have been characteristic of later Japanese Rinzai Zen masters, including Ikkyū and Hakuin. As a result, Rinzai Zen is frequently known for its divergent pedagogical/spiritual practices that strike outsiders as at odds with the orderly monastic life. To be sure, the daily monastic activities within Rinzai temples are indeed carefully regimented, but Zen spiritual practice is deeply personal to the individual (ideally rigid at any rate since, as Hakuin himself observed, the decline in standards of his day). Put another way, a rigid monastic exterior conceals a disruptive spiritual journey within. For example, Hakuin often encouraged Pure Land *nembutsu* recitation for some of his followers despite the fact that *nembutsu* recitation was in many ways antithetical to Zen practice (Pure Land being characteristically "other power," with prayers to Amida Buddhas, whereas Zen is "self-power," with an emphasis on meditation and kōan introspection). Ikkyū is particularly known for his "crazy Zen," which can be observed both in his personal lifestyle and in his poetry with its disruptive rhetorical devices that were simultaneously instructive and expressive of his own *kenshō* moments.

But how do kōans "work" as spiritual exercises? Dumoulin writes, "The usual way to answer the question of what a kōan is to offer a few typical examples" (Dumoulin 2006, p. 27). Hakuin's relationship with kōans may be characterized by his creation of the kōan "what is the sound of one hand clapping?" as a kōan to supplant Joshu's Mu:

A monk asked Jōshū, "Has a dog the Buddha Nature?"

Jōshū answered, "Mu."

Hakuin states that he created his "sound of one hand" kōan because students were having a difficult time passing Joshu's Mu kōan.

“I have always urged people... by all means to once obtain the power to penetrate to the Great Matter. Some I have caused to doubt their ‘self,’ some I have required to study the Mu koan. I have used a variety of expedients, including teaching with admonitions and instructions... Five or six years ago I made up my mind to instruct everyone by saying, ‘Listen to the Sound of the Single Hand.’ I have come to realize that this koan is infinitely more effective in instructing people than any of the methods I had used before. It seems to raise the ball of doubt in people much more easily and the readiness with which progress in meditation is made has been as different as the clouds are from the earth. Thus I have come to encourage the meditation on the Single Hand exclusively”. (Yampolsky 1971, pp. 163–64)

But there are hundreds of kōans, many used at different stages of a monk’s spiritual training. The “sound of one hand” and “Mu” kōans are the first kōans many students encounter in Hakuin’s Rinzai curriculum. Indeed, Hakuin’s descendants were the ones who created a fivefold classification system for kōans as spiritual exercises: (Hori 2006b, p. 135)

1. Dharma–body kōans (*hosshin*) are used to awaken the first insight or *kenshō*.
2. Dynamic-action kōans (*kikan*) help understand the phenomenal world as seen from the awakened point of view.
3. The explication of word kōans (*gonsen*) aids in the understanding of the recorded sayings of the old masters.
4. Eight “difficult to pass” kōans (*hachi nanto*).
5. The Five Ranks of Tozan and the Ten Grave Precepts (*goi jujukin*).

While these kōans from Joshu’s Mu and Hakuin would qualify as dharma–body kōans, they did not begin that way (more on this later). And not all kōans are as short as the two mentioned here. Dumoulin describes the practice in the following passage:

“The procedure is more or less as follows: The master gives the student a koan to think about, resolve, and then report back on to the master. Concentration intensifies as the student first tries to solve the koan intellectually. This initial effort proves impossible, however, for a koan cannot be solved rationally.” (Dumoulin 2006, p. 28)

The student meditates on the kōan and returns to the master, often many times, until they have a revealed insight (*kenshō*). However, this insight does not signify final enlightenment but, rather, merely a gradual step on the path towards great awakening. A student, therefore, meditates on many kōans, gradually deepening their spiritual enlightenment until they ultimately attain “final enlightenment.” Evidence that a student has attained insight in their kōan practice is not quantifiable. Oftentimes, the answers to a kōan that are recorded give precious little insight to outsiders as to what the student has understood. Rather, the Zen master “recognizes” in the mind of the student that some spiritual progress has been accomplished. This has origins in the notion of Zen as direct, mind-to-mind transmission from the earliest encounters between the Buddha Gautama and “Mahākāśyapa’s smile” (Zen’s direct, mind-to-mind transmission traces its origins to this encounter).

“Two thousand students had gathered on Vulture Peak to hear the Buddha give a discourse. When the Buddha appeared, he held up a flower and without saying a word twirled it in his fingers. Of all the students listening, only Mahakashyapa smiled and blinked his eyes. The Buddha said, ‘I have the all-pervading true dharma, incomparable nirvana, the exquisite teaching of formless form. It does not rely on letters and is transmitted outside the scriptures. I now hand it to Mahakashyapa.’ As with the Buddha’s birth, Zen takes up this event as a koan; the full case appears in *The Gateless Gate* with commentary and verse by Master Wumen”. (Loori 2006, pp. 4–5)

A great deal of scholarship has been written, and continues to be written, on kōan research (Heine and Wright 2000; Looi 2006; Heine 2014). Victor Hori outlines how scholars have conceptualized this pedagogical tool to understand what a kōan does. He notes and dismisses the long-held notion of the kōan as a riddle or paradox to be solved. Other trends in interpretation include the tendency to see kōans as language games (in the vein of Wittgenstein), as concepts manufactured to serve a particular kind of cultural politics, as a kind of “scriptural exegesis,” as enhancing spontaneity, and as a religious experience meant to awaken wisdom and selfless compassion (Hori 2006a, pp. 117–18). One might say that a kōan often displays one or more of these interpretations, but few kōans work under every interpretation. Hori himself notes that the interpretations above “may certainly be involved, but they are always subservient to the traditional Buddhist goals of awakened wisdom and selfless compassion” (Hori 2006a, p. 118).

The challenge of interpretation has led to many romanticized interpretations of kōans or Zen in general. Eugen Herrigel’s *Zen in the Art of Archery* is an example of how Zen became inserted into Awa Kenzō’s archery instruction. “[A] circular translation process that rendered Awa’s original Japanese words into German and, then, from German back into Japanese, has altered Awa’s words to such an extent that it is impossible to ascertain his original expressions” (Yamada 2001, p. 28). Yamada Shōji notes that it “is practically impossible to detect any Zen elements in Awa’s teaching. Surprisingly, it appears that Awa never practiced Zen even once in his life” (Yamada 2001, p. 11). D. T. Suzuki was similarly responsible for romanticized notions of Zen both in and out of Japan despite his own limited Zen training. Robert Sharf writes:

“Suzuki’s exegetical agenda—his strategy for presenting Zen to lay audiences in Japan and the West—was influenced as much by the Western currents of thought, to which he was exposed as a philosophy student in Tokyo and as assistant to Cams, as it was by his *necessarily limited involvement in Zen training* as a lay practitioner at Engakuji”. (Sharf 1995, p. 121, emphasis added)

Within the Zen tradition, what counts as an authentic Zen practitioner, let alone what counts as authentic Zen practice, has changed over time. Morten Schlütter expertly draws out these tensions when he observes how opponents of silent illumination themselves practiced meditation despite arguments against its efficacy (Schlütter 2008, pp. 144–74). There is necessarily a tension within the Zen tradition itself, and this can similarly be observed in Hakuin’s teachings, which are themselves, in the opinion of the authors, occasionally unreliable narratives. While we, therefore, rely on the primary source materials when analyzing Hakuin’s interpretations of what kōans are and what they do, we must be mindful of the tensions and developments within the tradition.

What can be said about kōans is that they serve as a form of skillful means (*upaya*). The word kōan literally means “precedent,” as the Chinese characters for the word, 公案, literally translate as “public case” or precedent (Dumoulin 2006, p. 17; Hori 2006a, pp. 117–18; Sasaki 2006, p. 13). Perhaps this is because a kōan is often an anecdote of a Buddhist monk who attained some degree of spiritual progress: if this worked for someone else, it may work for you. But again, not all kōans meet these criteria. Ninian Smart stated that, in trying to describe religion broadly understood, we often offer a definition that leaves out one or more other religious traditions (Smart 1998, pp. 10–25). Similarly, in trying to describe kōans broadly, even if we capture some important aspects, we inevitably miss others if we seek out a narrow definition.

Insofar as kōans are language games (an interpretation influenced by the Zen mistrust of language), they break one’s mind out of ordinary, everyday thinking. Insofar as kōans are scriptural exegesis, they are teaching tools that are instructive of impermanence, nonattachment, nonduality, or even Buddha-nature. Insofar as kōans enhance spontaneity, they are said to discourage attachment to formulaic answers, preferring that one “live in the moment,” akin to Zhuangzian or Daoist natural spontaneity; Zhuangzi’s Daoism had a profound impact on the development of Chan Buddhism in China (Van Norden 2011, p. 160). Hori’s interpretation keys into Sharpes and Ure’s Hadotian account of “Prac-

tices of Spiritual Guidance” (Sharpe and Ure 2021, pp. 6–7). For kōans are used within an intimate student–teacher dynamic and as the utilization of skillful means to guide the student toward a transformation of their representation of the world, inner psyche, and outer behavior.

Ikkyū’s poems are often instructive, expressive, and shaped by the tradition of kōan practice. He advocated for kōans (and poetry) being practiced every day, in the world; for him, they should not be done in seclusion like a world-renouncer but, rather, in the midst of life in villages, cities, and towns (the world). As Bryan van Norden writes, “Chan can be seen as a fusion of Buddhist and Zhuangzian ideas. For example, Chan accepts the belief that even mundane and unexalted activities, if done through selfless nonaction, can put one in touch with the Way” (Van Norden 2011, p. 160). In Ikkyū, we see elements of Linji and Zhuangzi, whether in their humor, their absurdity, or their shocking spontaneity. “Because his behavioral antics have frequently been the focus of attention in popular stories since the Edo period, there has been a tendency to overlook his profound knowledge of the written Buddhist tradition” (Heine and Wright 2000, p. 9). Ikkyū, “not by chance he often called himself Kyoun, the ‘Crazy Cloud’” (Kabanoff 2000, p. 213), is only “crazy” to those of us who do not understand his selfless nonattachment in his poetry and lifestyle. For further clarity on his approach to disruptive spiritual exercise, we need to better understand it in the context of his life and work.

#### 4. Ikkyū and Poetry

Ikkyū was born in the year 1394 on New Year’s Day in the town of Saga, a suburb of Kyōto. As the illegitimate son of Emperor Go-Komatsu (後小松天皇, 1377–1433) his life was not secure. He was born into a tremendously unstable period in Japanese history that was, broadly put, a centuries-long power struggle between the north and south of the country, barely held together by the Shōguns, and with rampant corruption, intrigue, and abiding suffering. At the age of five, he was sent to live at Ankoku-ji, a nearby Rinzaï Buddhist monastery, to escape the risk of assassination. Thus, from the very beginning, he was houseless, out of step with the world, and on the move for his own security as much as anyone else’s.

In 1407, at thirteen years old, he was sent to Kennen-ji, the oldest Zen Temple in Kyōto. There, he studied under the renowned scholar and poet Botetsu Ryūhan (慕哲龍攀, dates unknown). He soon, however, tired of his mentor and his temple, and in particular of what he deemed as their triteness:

“Soon his teenage poetry stocked with plum blossoms and waning moons gave way to biting criticism of the Kennin-ji hierarchy, attacking the temple for its worldly pursuits, its lack of spiritual training, its snobbish class distinctions among monks, its emphasis on politics over enlightenment. On his own, Ikkyū doggedly sat zazen until he could no longer endure the Kennin-ji environment”. (Besserman and Steger 1991, p. 65)

Throughout his long career, Ikkyū would continue to tirelessly critique a temple system he saw as formalistic and empty of significant practice. He saw these institutions as pleasuring the elite and trapped in reifications that blinded them from meaningful Rinzaï Zen practice in and of service to the world.

Desperate for an alternative mentor, in 1410, he moved north to Mibu to become a disciple of the abbot Seiso at his temple (a Confucian specialist and chanting master). Yet again dissatisfied with his teacher, he then wandered southwards until he finally found himself at a remote, shabby, and disregarded temple, Saikin-ji, run by Kenō (d. 1414), a Zen master, on Lake Biwa. Kenō was the first Zen teacher he had met who practiced the form of stringent, worldly Zen he had so long been searching for. For this reason, it was especially tragic that, in 1414, Kenō passed away. Ikkyū was despondent and performed fasting and funeral rights for his teacher for seven days, as there was no one else who could give the honors he deserved upon death. Afterward, Ikkyū attempted suicide by trying to

drown himself in Lake Biwa and was only saved by his mother's messenger, who asked him to live, if not for himself, then at least for her sake (Besserman and Steger 1991, p. 66).

He was not lost forever, however, even if he continued to wander. He soon found another "authentic" Zen master grounded in everyday experience, Kasō Sōdon (華叟宗曇, 1352–1428), to follow. Kasō ran the Lake Biwa branch of the central Rinzai Zen temple Daitoku-ji. Under Kasō's tutelage, Ikkyū continued to follow stringent *zazen* practice, as well as *kōan* and *waka* poetry composition practices. In 1418, Ikkyū had the first of two perception-changing epiphanies (*satori* 悟り). After this first revelation, Kasō gave him the name "Ikkyū," literally meaning "one pause," to celebrate his achievement that came to him in a flash of near-instant insight. Ikkyū's great *satori* moment, however, came in 1420, at 24 years old, when even his sense of having a dynamic insight dropped away as he experienced the whole universe in the "cawing of a crow" (Besserman and Steger 1991, p. 68).

With this achievement, Kasō gave him an *inka* 印可 certificate, declaring him a Zen master of his lineage. Ikkyū, however, promptly destroyed the certificate. For Ikkyū, *inka* were trite and empty documents given to rich benefactors of temples to appease them. The whole idea of a certificate merely represented the worst of the culture of the temples that he rejected. It reduced Zen to reification, as if the goal of the path was to receive such a document. Kasō was furious about Ikkyū's decision and later, in 1423, gave an *inka* to his other main student, Yōsō Sōi (養叟宗頤, 1376–1458), a quintessential, respectful, and orderly Zen practitioner. After making such a decision, Ikkyū left for the road, no longer beholden to any master or to a temple practice that he found corrupt and vacuous.

Although there is much value to be found in Ikkyū's early reflections on Rinzai Zen, his mature works are both the best-known and best demonstrate his ever-deepening insight. These works were set against the backdrop of political instability in Japan. In 1425, the shōgun Yoshikaza (足利義量, 1407–1425) died of alcohol poisoning. The previous shōgun, Yoshimochi (足利義持, 1386–1428), returned to take control of the country. He was, unfortunately, also an alcoholic. He, in turn, abdicated to his successor, who also promptly died. Ikkyū, noting again the absurdity and instability of leadership (this time of the country) wrote his first major work, under his pen name "Crazy Cloud." It was entitled *The Crazy Cloud Anthology* (狂雲集 *Kyōunshū*). His pen name is "a pun on the 'cloud' prefix constituting the traditional word for monk, *unsui* 雲水, or 'cloud-water,' and pointing to his singularly 'crazy' form of Zen" (Besserman and Steger 1991, p. 70). Ikkyū's pen name symbolized a breaking away from stultified practice and toward a new, albeit "crazy," iconoclastic route.

His written reflections here did not, however, merely have value as a propositional criticism of the failures of Rinzai Zen and the Japanese elite but also fostered new modes of Japanese artistic practice.

"By encouraging such worldly varieties of Zen practice, Ikkyū developed an entirely new aesthetic in the process, creating new forms of calligraphy, poetry, Noh theater, tea ceremony, and ceramics. His "running" calligraphic style and *kyō* or 'crazy,' even sometimes pornographic poetry were expanded by his lay students, many of whom were leading painters, actors, and sculptors of the period. Among them was his son Jotei, who later became one of Japan's leading tea masters. Above all, Ikkyū cultivated a life of sparseness and poverty that resulted in the highly valued Japanese *wabi* ideal of stark simplicity, which characterizes that country's aesthetic even today". (Besserman and Steger 1991, pp. 72–73)

His unique *wabi-sabi* 侘寂-like aesthetic and philosophical style was drawn largely from his bold poetry, which we will now explore. These works are worthy of our attention because of their creative rhetorical style, meant to shock and disrupt readers from their own stultified practices and help them come to clearer perceptions of reality, which offer insights that can revitalize them to new authenticity.

For example, following the work of Andrew K. Whitehead, we can see how the following Ikkyū poem well exemplifies this sort of spiritual exercise:

**A Man of Righteous Skill in a Disturbed World (no. 292)** 乱世正工夫  
 The great one must possess the right view. 丈夫 具正  
 Various delusions and ideas comply with distinct actualities. 妄想 境現  
 About a horse, one asks: 'Is it a good horse or not?' 問良 無  
 Another answers, 'This blade is better' 人答此刀利劍  
 (Whitehead 2019, p. 494)

Whitehead cleverly unpacks the rhetorical structure of the poem by noting:

While seemingly nonsensical, this reply is entirely appropriate for its meaningful intended use... There is a multiplicity of persons engaged in different communications in the same situation. If we interpret the question as 'Is your horse worth stealing?' then it becomes clear that the response is appropriate. The fluid re-contextualization of the relation in which persons are found disrupts the initial situation and dissolves the persons who took part in it: it thereby becomes a different relation between different persons. (Whitehead 2019, p. 494)

We enter the poem with reified assumptions about the world, which Ikkyū warns us to be careful of and yet which most of us are unaware of within ourselves. We bring these assumptions into the third stanza, assuming the question has a natural and clear meaning about the value of a horse. Once the fourth stanza is properly understood, however, our situation radically reorients and transforms; we now see the questioner as a thief hoping to find an unaware victim to steal from. Our "great one" protagonist is not deceived and stops the thief and our own naivety in their tracks.

Ikkyū is particularly well known for his bawdy, highly sexualized love poems, the most important being to his consort in his old age, Lady Shin. Some even include scatological humor. These poems, of course, are not merely meant to incite shock and awe in the reader. Rather, like the previous poem, their purpose as disruptive spiritual exercise is to incite a pivotal reorientation to the world in the reader. Such poems teach us to be cautious about our inherited assumptions and to find authentic ways of attending to the world. For example:

**Making My Hand Mori's Hand (no. 536)** 喚我手作森手  
 My hand, how it becomes Mori's hand. 我手何似森手  
 In truth the lady has a masterful style; 信公 流主  
 Ill, her cure makes the jeweled stem sprout. 癸病治玉  
 The multitude rejoices amidst our meeting 且喜我会衆  
 (Whitehead 2019, p. 496)

We are given a question in the first stanza about how to escape our solipsism, and we are told in the second stanza that this question will be addressed through the masterful style of a woman. We are completely jolted in the third stanza by a love-making act as the answer. This act is not even directly about vaginal intercourse but something that might be perceived as baser to Japanese at this time. Ikkyū, however, gives us a new perspective in the fourth stanza, where we gain "the non-dualist's appreciation of the breakdown of difference in light of interdependence. To this extent, insofar as my body is like that of those with whom I stand in relation, I can understand my body as extending to theirs and theirs to mine. Bodily experiences of such a nature are able to allow for my body to be as though that of another" (Whitehead 2019, p. 496). Through the ecstasies of love-making, the reification of objects disappears, and "emptiness" (in the Mahayana sense of the term) is illuminated to us.

From 1423 to 1435, Ikkyū collected a devoted following of wandering adherents, including his disciple and biographer Bokusai. This philosophical community of committed Rinzaï practitioners sought to practice the values of a worldly, authentic, and rigorous Rinzaï Zen. Ikkyū certainly practiced what he preached, which is part of the reason he

developed such a serious following across Japanese society. In many ways, his practice was not so much an innovation in Rinzai Zen as a return to some of its essential values (Besserman and Steger 1991, p. 71).

For Ikkyū's life, community, work, and practice, 1457 was a pivotal year. Civil war broke out (The Ōnin War, *ōnin no ran* 応仁の乱), and Kyōto was heavily damaged, with Ikkyū's "Hut of the Blind Donkey" (*katsuro-an* 瞎驢庵) destroyed. Worse, the Rinzai central temple of Daitoku-ji was also destroyed. Ikkyū himself suffered a bout of dysentery during this time. It nearly killed him. He survived, but others were not so lucky.

After experiencing dreadful violence and severe illness, Ikkyū created a new residence and named it the "Thank You Hermitage" in gratitude for the survival of his family, his students, and himself. It is during this period that he wrote perhaps his most famous work, *Skeletons* (*gaikotsu* 骸骨), a "macabre" and playful poem with woodblock images paired with it that Ikkyū supposedly created himself (Besserman and Steger 1991, pp. 76–77). The piece universalizes our deaths (now or later) by having skeletons carry out everyday life activities, revealing that we are those skeletons. One finds again in *Skeletons* that "Ikkyū uses a language that is far more accessible to laymen and disrupts their worldviews just as much as his poems would disrupt the views of the educated reader" (Whitehead 2019, p. 489). Blending his rhetorical eloquence with his commitment to engaging the broader public, *Skeletons* is a testament to the originality and depth of Ikkyū's Zen practice.

In the final phase of his life, as noted earlier, Ikkyū had an important romantic relationship with the very talented blind singer, composer, and musician Lady Shin. She joined his now largely settled community in the year 1471. He was in his late seventies, while she was in her thirties. It was in this period that he wrote his most famous poems of a sexual nature that continued to use the clever anti-dualistic rhetorical strategies previously described.

While in some ways being less hostile to institutions than Ikkyū, Hakuin too promoted disruptive spiritual practice. We now turn to Hakuin's life and work, using *kōans* and meditation in everyday life. He demonstrates yet other ways in which Rinzai Zen has promoted disruptively reorienting spiritual exercises.

## 5. Hakuin's Disruptions for Everyday Living

A monk asked, "Does a dog have Buddha-nature or not?"

The master said, "Mu!"

—Jōshū's *Mu kōan* (Addiss 2008, p. 76)

If you don't hear the sound of one hand, it's all rubbish!

—Hakuin on his Sound of One Hand *kōan* (Addiss and Seo 2010, p. 223)

Zen Master Hakuin is perhaps best known for his artwork and his *kōan* "the sound of one hand." This *kōan* tends to be translated as something like this: "You know the sound of two hands clapping, but what is the sound of one hand clapping?" While this is not a literal version of the *kōan* (in addition to translation questions, Hakuin himself restated it differently), it conveys the message. Hakuin created this *kōan* in his mid-sixties, during his teaching period in 1748. This *kōan* was created in part because of Hakuin's own difficulty with *kōan* practice but more immediately in reaction to the difficulty his students were having. This section of our exploration of "spiritual exercises of disruptive reorientation" is intended to highlight how Hakuin's Rinzai Zen *kōan* practice is meant to awaken the practitioner to deeper spiritual realization in immanence or while enmeshed in this lived world. Hakuin rejects the idea of the Buddhist world-renouncer and embraces meditation in the midst of activity; he suggests that meditation is often a meditation on *kōans*, beginning with Hakuin's own innovation, the *Sound of One Hand*.

### 5.1. Creating the Sound of One Hand

Hakuin personally struggled with the *Mu kōan*, and early in his writing career, he indicated that the *Mu kōan* had become too difficult for students to comprehend, that it

served as too difficult a barrier to *kenshō*. As a result, Hakuin created and began using the *Sound of One Hand* (*sekishu onjō*) in his own teaching as an alternative to the Mu kōan. According to Hakuin, the kōan was a success. In 1753, Hakuin composed *Yabukōji*, a letter to the lord of Okayama castle on the practice of Zen, extolling the successes he had with the kōan he developed as a corrective to the Mu kōan: “I have come to realize that this *kōan* is infinitely more effective in instructing people than any of the methods I had used before.... Thus I have come to encourage the meditation on the Single Hand exclusively” (Yampolsky 1971, pp. 163–64). The story of the creation of this kōan can, therefore, be found in earlier writings by Hakuin.

Hakuin writes that he began using the *Sound of One Hand* five or six years prior (Yampolsky 1971, p. 163). In 1748, in one of Hakuin’s many correspondences, we find perhaps the earliest written account of the *Sound of One Hand* kōan (Waddell 2012, pp. 61–77). In this story, he authenticates Yamanashi Heishirō’s *kenshō* after a very short period of practice; that is, after a mere two days! This account written by Hakuin is interesting not only because of the short period of time it takes Heishirō to have a *kenshō* experience and not only because it is one of the earliest written appearances of the *Sound of One Hand* kōan. Rather, it is noteworthy that the case of Heishirō gives no indication that he ever had a kōan to work with at all.

According to Hakuin’s writing of this account, Heishirō was listening in on a person reading from some Buddhist writings that insisted that some people could attain *kenshō* in a single day of *zazen* if their perseverance were strong enough. Heishirō became inspired and sequestered himself in his home in *zazen* meditation. “Contending thoughts one after another were soon crowding into my mind... I confronted the thoughts... I gave a loud shout to drive them back, hoping they would disperse” (Waddell 2012, p. 68). After two days of intense *zazen*, Heishirō was convinced that he had experienced some sort of breakthrough. He sought out Hakuin and asked him to examine and evaluate his experience. By Hakuin’s account, the second question he asked Heishirō in his evaluation was the *Sound of One Hand*. That is, the *Sound of One Hand* was employed as a checking question (*sassho*). Michel Mohr gives a helpful contemporary explanation, stating that kōans in Japanese Rinzai must be distinguished between “main cases” (*honsoku*) and “peripheral cases” (*sassho*).

Today most students begin their *kōan* practice by struggling either with “the word mu” (*muji*) or with “the sound of one hand” (*sekishu onjō*) kōan. Both are “main cases” that help condense existential doubts into one specific question, and months or years can be needed to solve the interrogation it implies, which is similar to a quest for one’s fundamental identity. Once the kernel of one of the “main cases” has been discovered, the teacher directs his student to examine “peripheral cases,” thus assisting them to apprehend their own comprehension from different angles without sticking to a single view. Then, when the complete range of peripheral cases associated with one main case has been exhausted, the student is instructed to work on a new main case. For example, Tōin alludes to 48 secondary cases associated with “the sound of one hand” kōan. (Mohr 2000, pp. 246–47)

Hakuin’s account of his interview with Heishirō suggests an early account of what Mohr describes above.

During the course of the evaluation, Hakuin eventually authenticated Heishirō’s “*kenshō* that was attained in just two nights of practice” (Waddell 2012, p. 72). Hakuin then compelled Heishirō to continue with post-enlightenment practice, assigning him (Zhàozhōu’s) “Seven-Pound Jacket” kōan. While Heishirō had not been given the *Sound of One Hand* kōan to attain his first *kenshō*, Hakuin used it as a checking question and eventually used it as the first kōan he would assign to his students.

It is illuminating that Hadot refers to the transformation of the self through dialogue with a spiritual director as “combat, amicable but real” (Hadot 1995, p. 91), given that the Rinzai Zen tradition of kōan practice is also known as dharma combat. A kōan would be assigned, and the student would mull over the meaning of the kōan, returning to have

their progress assessed by their spiritual director. Only when the teacher believed that some insight had been achieved would they assign another kōan, repeating the process until they had learned all the master could impart upon the student. What is also worth noting here is that Hakuin identified that kōans may lose their efficacy over time or as culture changes. He and his students had difficulty with Joshu's *mu* kōan, and so Hakuin eventually replaced that kōan with his own "sound of one hand" kōan because it was more successful at helping students attain initial *kenshō* (Yampolsky 1971, pp. 163–64). This is arguably true of all kōans, as one practices with many different kōans throughout one's study; some result in smaller or larger *kenshō*, some are abandoned, and others may not be effective. Furthermore, there was also the practice of *kirigami* that we will not go into here but that included effectively cheating in answering a kōan; *kirigami* literally means cut paper or strips of paper with secret answers written on them (Rikizan 2000, pp. 233–43). By treating kōans as riddles with correct and incorrect answers, students run the risk of reifying kōans themselves, rather than engaging with them as a meaningful, disruptive spiritual exercise. Joshu's *Mu* kōan runs this risk insofar as there are genuine answers to the question posed by "does a dog have buddha nature?" In addition to a kōan's power to break "the student's ordinary state of consciousness," Hakuin used the *Sound of One Hand* as a corrective to the kōan curriculum, making it a spiritual exercise disruptive of established Rinzai teachings.

### 5.2. Meditation in the Midst of Activity

Hakuin's kōan practice was intended to be disruptive in much the same way as many kōans are meant to be disruptive, but he added a further element to his kōan curriculum: "meditation in the midst of activity." Meditation in the midst of activity, *dōchu-no-kufū*, is a phrase Hakuin attributed to Dahui (1089–1163) for his insistence that it is a superior approach to quiet sitting meditation, *seichu no kufū*, a practice Hakuin frequently criticized for its association with "do-nothing" Zen monks (see also Schlütter 2008, pp. 144–74). As was often the case, Hakuin was not against the practice of silent meditation per se. He often encouraged students to practice both, but he emphasized the superiority of *dōchu-no-kufū* to quiet sitting meditation.

Meditation in activity often seems to be assumed by Hakuin to entail kōan practice; he is rarely explicit about the exact manner of practice, but throughout his letters, he does reveal that this is his intended meaning: "... one must establish a mind that will continue a true *kōan* meditation without interruption, neither clinging to not rejecting the objects of the senses" (Yampolsky 1971, p. 35). In *Orategama I*, Hakuin frequently intertwines *dōchu-no-kufū* with Zen and Tendai metaphysics; the non-discriminating consciousness finds total identification of opposites. "If you suddenly awaken to the wisdom of the true reality of all things of the One Vehicle alone, the very objects of the senses will be Zen meditation, and the five desires themselves will be the One Vehicle. Thus, words and silence, motion and tranquility, are all present in the midst of Zen meditation" (Yampolsky 1971, p. 36). We find an example of this type of syncretism in Hakuin's painting *Hotei's Sound of One Hand* (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** *Hotei's Sound of One Hand* (late), Ink on paper, 42.6 × 57.6 cm. *Gubutsu-an*, image cited from: (Addiss and Seo, p. 224, plate 6.9).

In Hakuin's painting, we get a nod to Confucian social philosophy with the reference to filial piety, Buddhist impermanence with the floating world, the primacy of Zen mindfulness, and finally Hakuin's kōan about the sound of one hand. The painting depicts Hotei serenely seated with a smile on his face and his right hand held up. Behind him hang two calligraphic scrolls. On the right, Confucian filial piety is represented by the large character for "parents" with a more explicit reference found in a Japanese poem:

When they have filial piety,  
Children and grandchildren succeed  
To their parents' prosperity  
In this floating world. (Addiss and Seo 2010, p. 223)

The left scroll is a Chan poem from the *Blue Cliff Record*:

Three worlds, only one mind,  
Outside the mind, no other law;  
Mind-Buddha extends to all mankind  
Throughout the world without differentiation. (Addiss and Seo 2010, p. 223)

On the far left, Hotei states:

Young shop-clerks, no matter what you say,  
If you don't hear the sound of one hand, it's all rubbish!. (Addiss and Seo 2010,  
p. 223)

Stephen Addiss argues that Hotei is a reminder to Hakuin's followers that they must return to the world after their training is complete. Always portrayed as a monk and yet not human, Hotei is depicted by Hakuin as "compassionately returning to daily life" (Addiss and Seo 2010, p. 225).

For Hakuin, meditation in the midst of activity is a cornerstone of his teachings, and this painting of Hotei is in part a reminder to his students. Hakuin constantly argued against meditation in silence, emphasizing that one must bring the kind of awareness found in meditative practice into the everyday world. Hakuin painted Hotei in all manners of activities that reflected life on the Tōkaidō Road as he experienced it, but Hotei was always portrayed as a monk within the hustle and bustle of daily life. Hakuin elsewhere mentions the dismay he feels at qualified monks who become world-renouncers, failing in their duty to return to the world to instruct others (Waddell 1994, p. 13).

For his part, Hakuin can be read as often in doubt of his own spiritual attainment. Hakuin's description of the *kenshō* moment that he mistook for final enlightenment tells

of how he arrogantly sought out his teacher Shōju Rōjin for confirmation of his enlightenment only to be turned away. Hakuin's own words describe himself as arrogant, and he was unable to respond to Shōju Rōjin's test of his newfound acumen. Shōju Rōjin refused to approve Hakuin's enlightenment until he had another breakthrough after he was knocked unconscious by a villager with a broom (Waddell 1999, p. 120). Shōju Rōjin neither approved nor disapproved of this experience, but he did acknowledge that something had changed in Hakuin. Hakuin drew inspiration from this experience to teach his own students to always doubt their own *kenshō* and "never be satisfied with small victories."

Even after Hakuin claims to have achieved final enlightenment, he is recorded as doubting whether or not he has achieved decisive enlightenment. But he certainly criticized students who, after a single *kenshō*, mistake their small achievement for final enlightenment (Waddell 1999, p. 29). As such, Hakuin taught Great Doubt as part of his spiritual practice (Kasulis 1981, pp. 104–24). Not only did Hakuin believe the greater the doubt, the greater the awakening, but he also used this practice to help students avoid confusing small *kenshō* moments for true enlightenment. This in part comes from his own experience.

Hakuin's *kōan* curriculum, therefore, builds upon Buddhist beliefs concerning impermanence and non-attachment in cautioning students to not become overly attached to one particular *kōan*, much like the Buddhist parables of the raft (*Majjhima Nikāya* 22) and poison arrow (*Majjhima Nikāya* 63). One must avoid the reification of *kōan* practice and embrace the disruptive characteristics that jar the practitioner from everyday habits of thinking to return to attending to the flow of the present. This is coupled with a denial of the world-renouncer in favor of the efficacy of meditation in the midst of activity. Hakuin had observed that any achievement in silent meditation is all for naught if those accomplishments are lost when one returns to everyday life. That is, for Hakuin, spiritual exercise in the world (disruptive of it and by it) is "hundreds of thousands of times" superior to meditation in stillness. Whereas the Buddhist monk Saigyō found enlightenment in nature, Hakuin found enlightenment within the everyday world through the disruptive nature of *kōan* practice.

## 6. Conclusions

By demarcating and highlighting spiritual exercises of disruption as a distinct kind/emphasis, interesting new opportunities for comparison and insight emerge. Like the Cynics in the Western tradition, Rinzaï Zen can be seen as offering performative and disruptive "spiritual exercises" that help us reattend to the world. However, in the Cynic tradition, as for the Stoics whom they inspired, disruption was done through performative embodiment, rather than through poetic, literary, or meditative engagement.

"The great task for the Cynics was to build up the health, strength, resilience, and dexterity, needed for embodied (body and mind) self-mastery (*enkrateia*). Such self-mastery freed one from the immoral and unhappy rooted tribalism of decadent, "civilized life." One sought a state of uprooted wandering, free to roam the broader paths of existence. Diogenes thought that civilized Athenians had a sophisticated gait in the world, their very movement was narrow, restrictive, untrained, and was destroying their "becoming.... He performed his philosophy in how he errantly lived in the world.... For Diogenes, wandering was a way of embodied performance that lived alongside the duration of the general culture, just so it could disrupt it. Reflection through axioms, witticism, clever performance, sharp critique, habitus, and other activities, was used as a force to broaden the public's movement in and with the world. It opened them to new routes". (Kramer 2018, p. 59)

If there was a spiritual exercise of disruption here, it was a sort of spiritual guidance/direction (#9 in the Sharpe and Ure list) of the public through shocking performances, rather than for the growth of an individual adherent committed to a certain kind of philosophical life. Thus, while both the Cynic (and the later-inspired Stoics) share with the Rinzaï tradition admiration for certain kinds of disrupting shocks, and indeed all of these traditions have

a performative element to their visions of sage gadflies, the Rinzai School is distinctive in developing spiritual exercises meant to deepen its adherents and not just the broader world.

What we have outlined above adds a tenth kind of spiritual exercise to Sharpe and Ure's list: practices of disruptive reorientation. The kind of disruption in Rinzai Zen is a disruption in immanence, the everyday lived world, which leads to insight or *kenshō* moments with potential for transcendence through continued practice (and continued disruptions). With roots in Linji's teachings, Ikkyū and Hakuin demonstrate that sometimes we need a shock or jolt out of our deeply laden habitual patterns.

As we have outlined above, Ikkyū and Hakuin are committed to using poetry and *kōans* as spiritual exercises that are disruptive reorientations: they help us find our footing on the path toward enlightenment by breaking ordinary, everyday ways of thinking. Poetry pursued as a "way" (*dō* 道) of subjective, personal spiritual attainment is described as one "in which artistic form and aesthetic sensibility become synonymous with religious form and religious (or spiritual) sensibility" (Pilgrim 1977, p. 286; Heine 1997, p. 7). Zen monks have often written poetry with the aim at expressing their own *kenshō* moments: insights gained through practice have been expressed by Saigyō's poems extolling the virtues of nature as salvific in the quest for enlightenment (LaFleur 2003, p. 54). Bashō, in the *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, finds enlightenment in his cold and desolate journey in northern Japan. Bashō's frog haiku has been translated by dozens of scholars and includes many interpretations (Aitken 1978, pp. 3–7).

Furu ike ya	Old pond!
kawazu tobikomu	frogs jumped in
mizu no oto	water's sound (Aitken 1978, p. 3)

Poetry and *kōans*, especially as practices of immanence, lead us to return to see the everyday world in a new light. They reveal how, even in our most mundane or lewd behavior, we are able to get in touch with the world of flux and relation. It is a world that, if we are attentive to it, will alleviate us from our alienating forms of everyday existence.

In his own way, Ikkyū's irreverent poetry finds enlightenment in all phenomena (Messer and Smith 2015, p. 1). In one such poem, Ikkyū writes "Morning comes: *kōan*. Evening comes: repeating again and again" (Messer and Smith 2015, p. 63). This poem places the *kōan* within his daily practice, "repeating again and again." The *kōan*, like all Rinzai Zen practices, aims at transcendence through immanence. By being in the world, Ikkyū finds enlightenment in all phenomena and assures himself of the legitimacy and potency of what he has found. Temple practice can become reification itself. As he famously put it, "it is easy to enter the realm of the Buddhas. Much harder to enter the world of demons" (as quoted in Besserman and Steger 1991, p. 71). Here we find commonalities with Epictetus's Stoicism:

"A carpenter does not come up to you and say 'Listen to me discourse about the art of carpentry,'" but he makes a contract for a house and builds it ... Do the same thing yourself. Eat like a man, drink like a man ... get married, have children, take part in civic life, learn how to put up with insults, and tolerate other people ...".  
(as quoted in Hadot 1995, p. 27; from Epictetus's Discourses III, 21, 4–6)

Disruptive spiritual exercises remind us to shake off theoretical reifications of our philosophical ways of living.

Furthermore, while Hakuin is known for his artwork and his famous *Sound of One Hand* *kōan*, he also practiced meditation in the midst of activity, which was, in fact, frequently meditation on a *kōan* in everyday life, whether walking, eating, working, or being lost in a crowd. Hakuin, for example, recounts walking in a village with his begging bowl, totally absorbed in his *kōan* "never away from it for an instant" (Waddell 1999, p. 28) to the point that he did not notice a woman yelling at him to leave her property until she had struck him unconscious with a broom. "I was knocked over and ended heels up on the

ground, totally unconscious. I lay there like a dead man” (Waddell 1999, p. 28). When Hakuin regained consciousness, he had gained insight into the kōan that had so preoccupied him. “As I came to and my eyes opened, I found that the unsolvable and impenetrable koans I had been working on—all those venomous cat’s paws—were now penetrated completely” (Waddell 1999, p. 28). Sometimes, harmony, balance, and equanimity are not the way, but a playful whack of the Zen Master’s stick (or a woman’s broom) brings us back to attending to all the potential in our present to deepen our arts of living.

Disruptive insight in imminence, indeed!

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For more on the role of metanoia in PWL, see (Hadot 2020, pp. 93–104).
- <sup>2</sup> By atopic disruption, we intend to refer to disruptive spiritual exercises that resist essentializing tendencies. Such “exercises” are atopic (*a + topos*, without place or ground) in the sense that they are context-dependent as a form of skillful means or Upaya. Insofar as Buddhism is understood as a form of anti-essentialism, Buddhist spiritual exercises are based on skillful means and, therefore, seek to enlighten the practitioner in ways that are most efficacious to the student’s individual idiosyncrasies.
- <sup>3</sup> This article relies on translations of primary texts for Ikkyū from the excellent works of Kabanoff, Messer, Kidder, Whitehead, and Besserman and translations of Hakuin from Addiss, Seo, and Yampolsky and the many translations by Waddell.
- <sup>4</sup> Sharpe and Ure also note three kinds of intellectual exercises that are still used in philosophy classes today, but they are not discussed here.

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