

Matsuo Basho

Buddhism relies on **radical non-dualism**: everything is equal. On Basho's journey, the sun, the moon, the water are equal to the people he meets. Human beings are simply an impermanent, interconnected, changing part of the natural world. Zen Buddhists try to leave behind self-centeredness and human-centeredness to become part of the whole. Harmony between all elements of existence is key. We become fully human via harmonious interaction with the broader natural world. Go to the pine tree if you want to learn about the pine tree, go to the bamboo if you want to learn about bamboo. And in doing so, abandon your subjective preoccupation with yourself. Otherwise you impose yourself on the object and do not learn.

- 1) In Zen, the focus is on concrete specifics, not generalities or ideologies. The focus is on the mundane (the everyday) for within the mundane one finds the flamboyant and the infinite.
 - a) Look at Basho's haiku on p. 625. How do these poems reveal the flamboyant in the mundane? Explain.
- 2) In Haiku, poems and prose are meant to augment each other. The prose gives the poetry context and the poetry gives the prose religious and aesthetic luminescence. A haiku, like a good photograph, should capture the essence of the moment, before it passes. It should not cling to the moment: it should appreciate it and then journey to the next moment.
 - a) In what ways do the prose passages, on p. 607, and the haiku, top of p. 608, augment each other to reveal both facts about Basho's journey and how he feels about those facts? What do the prose and the haiku reveal about the essence of this particular moment? Does Basho "move on" after appreciating the moment or not?
- 3) Respect is central to Zen Buddhism. If everything is Buddha-nature, you must respect everything (water, tea, other people, trees, etc.). You manifest respect by your compassionate treatment of all things. True compassion keeps self-reliance at the centre of its expression.
 - a) How does this thought connect with Basho's statement on p. 616 that "men must strive to walk in the Way and uphold the right"? Does he succeed or not? How should we understand his encounter with two prostitutes on p. 624?
- 4) All life is a journey into the mysterious, the ambiguous, the unpredictable—the point is to experience each moment with a deep sense of aesthetic and religious awe, to experience the ultimate in the mundane things of everyday life. Impermanence and change are central to this idea. Change is positive and beautiful, like cherry blossoms in spring. When one learns to accept impermanence, one will learn to experience tranquility in each transitory moment. Consequently, the theme of pilgrimage or journey is often central in Zen writings. Consider how Basho depicts the transitory nature of the human journey through history on p. 615.
 - a) Now, as a group, write a Renga (a series of related haiku) about the transitory journey of your lives. One haiku for each student and each haiku must link in thought from the first haiku.