

Since so many Zen temples have karesansui (dry landscape gardens), so perhaps a note of explanation should be given here.

The sand and stone seen in these gardens represent the eternal aspects of nature. The streams symbolize the course of life beginning with birth and ending in death. This course is pre-determined –nothing can stop the flow of the water (life). Sometimes there are rocks in the ponds to represent turtles and cranes, animals which symbolize eternity or long life. Because the turtle probes the bottom of the ocean, it also symbolizes the depths which the human mind can sound. The crane flies high, guiding the mind to the nothingness of the sky.

In this garden, Horai-san, a legendary island in the eastern sea inhabited by immortal sages, towers in the northeastern corner between the turtle and crane islands to symbolize the unification of heaven and earth, happiness and suffering, yin and yang. The stream of life flows from the rock of Horai-san. Like a child whom nothing can stop, the water falls swiftly over the rocky path of the future in a predetermined direction. Early in its course, the water, like impulsive youth, branches its way over the rocks. Soon various cliffs present obstacles. One of the, the tigerhead stone, represents the tragic aspects of life. The stream of life is stopped and whirls but must continue. The last rapids suggest human helplessness in life. The question of the meaning of existence emerges when the water is dammed up against a rocky wall. This is the wall of contradiction and doubt. The stream seems to stop here but flows over and continues. Beyond, the river is quicker and broader, presenting the wealth the mind has acquired from experience. In the midst of the stream there is a rock representing a boat loaded with treasures of experience. Next to it is a turtle trying to swim upstream, illustrating the futility of any attempt to return to the past. The stream continues. The southern end of the garden is empty. There are no more rocks. It is a world without form, void of passion, thoughts and emotions which only distract. The white sand of purity and complete freedom makes this garden a fit object of meditation. Ikkyu said, "All things inevitably turn to nothingness, and this 'turning to nothingness' means a return to original being."