

# ZEN NOTES



## SOKEI - AN SAYS

**BUDDHA** Buddha is that even mind, even and calm, which radiates in multifold directions at once. The word Buddha came from the Sanskrit root "to know." Buddha is one who knows, the knower. So this present consciousness is the Buddha, the knower. We know we see, we hear, we smell, we taste, we touch. Legendarily, we say Buddha.

But we do not need to think Buddha and "I" are different existences in the universe. There is only one universe, one universal power in all the world, and one universal intrinsic wisdom throughout all sentient beings and all insentient beings.

This power of knowing actually performing within us is Buddha. This is our God. We worship this. We do not bow down to worship this Buddha. We meditate upon it. We do not call its name; we do not look up to the sky or peep down into the earth to find it. It is in us. We do not know where the Buddha-mind is. It is not in the brain, or in the stomach. But we know it exists. We rest in it and meditate.

Just sit down and meditate. Throw yourself into the great universe. Don't put a little tag "I" on yourself. Peel the label off and throw yourself into the great universe. You won't feel it at once. But do it every day and you will feel it. On a lovely spring day, go sit on a park bench by the Hudson and forget yourself. When your heart beats with the rhythm of the universe, there on a park bench you will find Buddha.

From a lecture April 19, 1939

*WHEN I WAS A CHILD* I didn't like to keep my bird in a cage. When my mother brought me any bird I always opened the cage and let it go. And when my father brought me another sparrow-- "It came back, father!" But today I think that all those sparrows were not the same sparrow.

The Sixth Patriarch told a monk that his way of practicing zazen was wrong; that instead of observing mind activity he tried to stop it. If you put your bird in a cage and cut its wing feathers and stop him from singing his beautiful song--it is not the way to keep your bird.

**O SESSHIN** The first week in December, we had Rohatsu O Sesshin at Daitoku-ji Sodo (monastery) and through most of the Sodos of Rinzai sect in Japan. Some Sodos celebrate Rohatsu the first part of January, as soon after the New Year as possible, as they follow the old calendar. But for the most part the new calendar is followed, and that brings this long and severe meditation the first week of the 12th month, December. The 8th of December is considered by Zennists to be the day Sakyamuni attained his Great Enlightenment. So this week is a kind of memorial week when all good monks and laymen try with especial zeal to make some strides along their path toward awakening.

This year I, too, could arrange things so as to have at least three days of absolute quiet, and to sit with the monks in the zendo (meditation hall) in the evening after supper for the entire week.

It was wonderful to get up at six in the morning and to sit for two hours before dressing and having breakfast. After breakfast I went for a long walk, two hours, in the country. One day I walked along the Kamo River. Workmen and workwomen--for here both men and women do the same work with practically no discrimination--who were piling stones for a new embankment, were taking their morning tea. It was a beautiful warm sunny day. They sat down on their piles of rocks, the men smoking, reading their newspapers, or talking, the women knitting and gossiping, and smoking, too. I sat on a bench on a high bank. The warm sun was shining, the river was running merrily, the distant mountains were quiet and saturated with repose, a soft breeze blew the withered grasses lightly. It was ideal for meditation. I sat there for nearly an hour, quite as quiet and alone as if I had been in my own room. When I finally returned home my tea was waiting for me. A little rest, then more meditation; then lunch, a little work on some Zen poems, tea, more meditation. Then dinner, then the meditation hall until ten, and a good hot bath, meditation until nearly twelve. What a good day!

The next day I walked far up the river to the Kamo Shrine. This was a day of mist and fog. Everything was seen almost as in a dream. The exquisite red lacquer and white shrine, its colors soft with age and lack of care, nestled in a nook in the pine forest. A rushing mountain stream poured from a nearby hillside, then obediently resigned itself to the skilled gardeners' hands and quietly wound through the shrine gardens, under old stone bridges and even under a large wooden pavilion, built evidently for summer pleasure. Two very smartly dressed young men, somewhat embarrassed by my presence, took off their overcoats and hats before they made their presence known to the Kami of the shrine by pulling the great gong and making their offerings of various gifts. Two or three old peasants were putting new trellis work under an ancient wisteria vine, not more gnarled and brown than themselves. I asked them how old it was. "No one knows," they said, "but at least three or four hundred years." Its trunk was the size of a man's body. Walking home through the mist along the river road, an ox, pulling a great tree roped on to a primitive



wagon, plodded along, his driver walking beside him. A "Rabbit" scooter swished by. Several women from O Hara, in their bright peasant dress, were dragging their carts piled high with fresh cabbages and great white turnips and radishes from the fields up the valley. And a "harikin" rolled by in his Cadillac, shiny and swank, sure sign of ill-gotten gains.

The next day I walked away up a narrow valley toward the hills to the north. The sun was shining when I left, but it was raining before I could reach the house again. I passed a new Nichiren Sect temple, which from a distance I had watched being built for the last two or three years. It is quite elaborate, as are all Nichiren temples, and must have cost the peasants who form the largest group of contributors, so I am told, a pretty penny to construct these days. The Nichiren people have their own kind of religious practices. One of them is to walk in small groups during the winter nights through the streets of the towns and the country roads, the leader of the group carrying a lighted lantern inscribed with the sacred text "*Myoho rengo kyo!*" ("Marvelous Teaching of the Lotus Sutra!") and the others in the band, each with a small hand drum beating out the rhythm and chanting the mantram in a loud voice. These nights we hear them, first far away and just the sound of the drums, then nearer and nearer when the voices become clear, then dying away as they go on into the night. On rainy or snowy nights this is one of the poetic sounds of the Old Capital.

I am always happy when I can sit again in the zendo. The first night I sat in Nanzen-ji zendo I knew that at last I had come home. That was many years ago, but the memory of that experience, perhaps the experience itself, is as vivid today as then. Unfortunately times have changed and no zendo is quite what it was in the "old days." But under any circumstances sitting in a zendo is wonderful. There is an atmosphere which no other place can quite duplicate. The big quiet room, the dim light, the faint smell of coarse incense, the cold fresh air, the sounds of the night coming in from a distance--passing voices, the throb of the Nichiren drum, the notes of a flute, the Chinese noodle man's whistle, all melt into you and you into them. You are not unaware of them, but they are not outside of you. You include them all. Some time I hope you may all know the experience.

The other day, when Father Dumoulin was visiting me I took him to meet Oda Roshi (title: Zen Master) at the Sodo. Roshi told Father Dumoulin that he thought the important thing was to sit every day without any intermission. That is, to sit an hour every day and let nothing come in to interfere. I said I thought that was very necessary, but what was equally necessary was every so often to have a long period of sitting, such as o sesshin, when over several days your mind is kept more or less in the meditative state. I know by long experience how much long periods of meditation can do. So try to have o sesshin as often as possible, that is, one every month or two. You will prove then to yourselves what the value is, if you have not already done so.

RUTH FULLER SASAKI

**OBITUARY** Edna Kenton, 78, long the Treasurer and Historian of The First Zen Institute, and a senior Sangha member, died at her home in Greenwich Village February 28 after an illness of several months. Miss Kenton was born in Springfield, Mo., and came to New York before World War I. She was an ardent feminist and often contributed articles on feminism and women's suffrage to newspapers and magazines. In the '20's and '30's she wrote many books on the Jesuits and early American history. "Simon Kenton, His Life and Period" was the story of an ancestor who lived from 1755 to 1836. Later her interest turned to Henry James. A recognized authority on James, Miss Kenton's last book, "Eight Uncollected Tales of Henry James," published in 1950, was received with critical acclaim. Her James library is considered the most complete collection of his works in America. It is greatly to be regretted that a long-contemplated biography of Sokei-an did not reach completion. The anecdotes appearing under the title "When I Was a Child" are taken from Miss Kenton's preparatory notes for this book.

*O Sesshin* It has been suggested by several out-of-town members  
*Schedule* that they might informally observe o sesshin in their own homes at the same time that observance is made at the Institute. For their information, this schedule is given. O sesshin is now regularly held the first weekend of each month.

Saturday	5:00 to 10:00
Sunday	5:00 to 10:00
Monday	7:45 to 10:30 (regular meeting time)

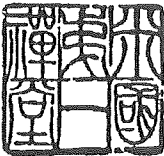
Members of the Institute in New York are invited to take whatever part they can. Those who list their names with the secretary will be reminded by postcard.

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