

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI - AN SAYS

THE TRANSCENDENTAL WORLD People ask me sometimes: "Sokei-an, you have experienced the transcendental world and you are still there. How do you feel?" I say, "I feel just like this. I got into it in my twenties and I have been there ever since, so I haven't much experience of the other world."

How did I get into it? Well, I shall tell you the truth. One day I wiped out all notions from my mind. I gave up all desire. I discarded all the words with which I thought and stayed in quietude. I felt a little queer--as if I were being carried into something, or as if I were touching some power unknown to me. I had been near it before; I had experienced it several times, but each time I had shaken my head and run away from it. This time I decided not to run away, and Ztt! I entered. I lost the boundary of my physical body. I had my skin, of course, but I felt I was standing in the center of the cosmos. I spoke, but my words had lost their meaning. I saw people coming toward me, but all were the same man. All were myself! I had never known this world. I had believed that I was created, but now I must change my opinion: I was never created; I was the cosmos; no individual Mr. Sasaki existed.

I came to my teacher. He looked at me and said: "Tell me about your new experience, your entering the transcendental world."

Did I answer him? If I spoke, I would come back into the old world. If I said one word, I would step out of the new world I had entered. I looked at his face. He smiled at me. He also did not say a word.

From a lecture November 20, 1940

WHEN I WAS A CHILD

When you give a toy to a baby--there are many interesting toys in Japan, such as a toy tiger--the baby has a tendency to do something about it, so he pulls its neck off and looks inside. Some men cannot do anything until they understand the mechanics of the mind--a big job! As a philosopher or as a scientist or as an artist, a man may start from one corner and analyze to all corners--and in his old age he becomes a monk and dies. Not everyone does this, but if unfortunately he has this nature he must do it this way. I was one who had the tendency when I was a child to pull off the tiger's neck, and now I am peeping inside. If you desire to do this, do it thoroughly!

A VISIT TO HEISAN After a winter trip to Heisan, the mountain where Tendai Buddhism flourishes, Walter Nowick had been dreaming of doing meditation, far from the noise of the city, in one of the temples in the cryptomeria forest which crowns the mountain. He made various inquiries, and finally word came he might go up there to stay for a short time.

Early one fine Sunday morning he, Takemura San, and myself started out, armed only with a card of introduction to the Chief Secretary of Enryaku-ji, the Tendai headquarters. First a tram, then another tram through the foothills of the mountain, then the cable-car up the mountain itself. The cherries were not yet out, but the entire country and mountainside were singing with spring.

From the cable-car terminus we had a long walk, mostly upgrade, through the forest to the temple itself. Many papas and mamas and their children were already out, and the road was thronged with *onodorisans*, country people who travel in large companies to visit famous shrines and temples or viewing-places. Many of the children had bought little bamboo whistles to imitate the call of the *uguisu*, the Japanese nightingale, which abounds on the mountain. The children would whistle, and the birds, deceived by the naturalness of the call, would reply from their hiding places in the trees. One never seems to be able to see an *uguisu*. I had one in my garden whose song I cherished for weeks. There we heard the birds singing in chorus.

When we arrived at Enryaku-ji, it was to find the Chief Secretary absent for the day and a ceremony going on in the main temple building to which visitors, even believers, are not admitted. In a few minutes the Kancho (chief priest) came out from the temple, followed by a procession of priests. He was wearing white under-ropes with a great canary *kesa* over them, and a kind of large white shawl over his head. An attendant held a large red-lacquered parasol above him. The ten or fifteen priests who followed were dressed in bright purple *koromos* (ropes) and all wore identical bright scarlet *rakusas* of huge size. We were told by an old man at the Secretary's office to follow the procession and inquire of one of the priests in it what to do in the absence of the person we wanted to see. So we tagged along to a nearby temple into which they had all disappeared. Takemura San inquired of the gate-keeper and presently a big priest came out. Their discussion lasted at least a half-hour. The priest was not at all averse to Walter's staying somewhere there. He just wanted to know his entire history from beginning to end.

After one or two goings and comings he announced that arrangements had been made by telephone for Walter to stay at a temple part-way down the mountain on the opposite side from Kyoto, named Mudo-ji, the Temple of Immovability. The priest there was a graduate of Tokyo University, who had taught at Taisho University and perhaps knew a little English.

At last we reached Mudo-ji. A tall monk in a lanky soiled black robe was waiting for us near the head of the staircase which led from one to

行 坐
到 看
水 雲
窮 起
處 時

ZENRIN KUSHU

*Yuite wa itaru mizu no kiwamaru tokoro.
Zashite wa miru kumo no okuru toki.*

Walking, I come to where the waters end.
Sitting, I see the moment of the clouds' arising.

Wang Wei

the other of the temple buildings perched on the side of the mountain. The view over Lake Biwa and on to the still snow-covered mountains beyond was magnificent. The monk led us down one staircase and into the reception room of the temple. There the priest we had come to see was entertaining a guest, but he quickly dispatched him and offered us seats and tea. He was a very good looking man of perhaps fifty, bright and energetic. When everything was explained again to him, he appeared delighted to have Walter come.

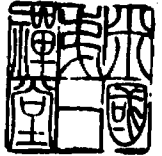
At that point Takemura San and I left Walter and went on our way. On the advice of two woodcutters we followed a narrow mountain path, steep and rocky, sometimes going down to the bottom of a narrow valley and sometimes up to the top of the opposite cliff. I had on my good walling shoes, and the woodcutters had cut a stick for me, but we had already walked more than two hours on mountain roads, so I picked my way down carefully. I kept thinking of the line in the *Rinzai*: "You are like timid donkeys tremblingly picking their way along an icy path, their mouths closed and breath steaming from their nostrils." At the end of two hours and a little more of such "picking" we came out onto level land again from where we could take a tram to Otsu, and then another back to Kyoto. Except for a few bruises, I was no worse for the experience, and I had had the privilege of following a true pilgrim path, one walked over for over a thousand years by thousands of pious people who had gone up and down the holy mountain. Here and there along the way we saw stone monuments commemorating men dead over a thousand years who had lived or been buried at those spots. And still, after all this passage of time, the woods were practically virgin, and the paths only woodcutters' trails.

(To be continued) RUTH FULLER SASAKI

IN MEMORIAM The third Sunday in May members of the Institute journey for the ninth time to Woodlawn Cemetery in commemoration of the death of the Founder May 17, 1945. A simple stone on a hill marks the burial place of the only Zen Master who chose to give his life to America. When asked the question, "What was your purpose in coming from Japan?" Sokei-an more than once answered: "I came to bury my bones in America." A soldier's grave might bear the legend, "Mission Accomplished." His gravestone bears only the name SOKEI-AN. The years of his life were 1882-1945.

TRANSLATIONS OF POEMS The English translations of the Zenrin poems in current issues are by Mrs. Sasaki and Lindley Hubbell. Mr. Hubbell, well-known American poet, is now assisting Mrs. Sasaki at the Kyoto branch of The First Zen Institute of America. In recent years Mr. Hubbell has headed the literature department of The School for Creative Work in Hartford, Connecticut. From April first he has been giving courses on Shakespeare and English poetry at The Graduate School of Doshisha University, Kyoto. He is presently devoting himself to a study of the theatre arts of Japan.

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*Modern
Form*

CHINESE CHARACTERS

*Old
Form*

行

The left foot takes a step, suggested by its footprint 𠂔. The right foot takes a step up to it, suggested by its footprint 𠂔. By extension, this character signifies:
Walk, go; do, perform, act.

𠂔

土
坐

Earth, ground, dust. A picture of 二 the stratified ground, from which things 丨 grow.
To sit, to rest. Pictures two men on the ground.

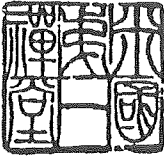
土
坐

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