

# ZEN NOTES



## MEMOIR OF A MODERN ZEN MASTER

By *RUTH FULLER SASAKI*

### **SHAKU SOKATSU**

1869-1954

Sokatsu Roshi's family name I do not remember ever having heard. He began his Zen studies under Kosen Osho at Engaku-ji in Kamakura. At that time he was known as Sekibutsu (Stone Buddha) Koji. After Kosen's death he continued his study under Kosen's heir, Shaku Soyen. After Sekibutsu became a monk, Shaku Soyen adopted him and gave him the name Sokatsu (Energetic), and his own family name of Shaku. Sokatsu's teaching name was Ryomo-an Roshi, a name which corresponds to our teacher's Sokei-an name.

Sokatsu finished his Zen study at the remarkable age of twenty-nine. After that he went on a long pilgrimage throughout Japan, wearing his monk's traveling clothes, then on to Burma where he spent three years. On his return to Japan he declared himself disinterested in becoming a temple priest and spending his days saying sutras and conducting ceremonies for the departed relatives of temple adherents. Shaku Soyen then suggested that he revive the Ryomo-kyokai, a layman's society for the study of Zen, originally founded at the beginning of the Meiji Era by Kosen Osho, but which had since ceased to function. This Sokatsu did, establishing his small teaching hermitage in the vicinity of the Tokyo Imperial University and drawing many of its students for his Zen disciples. It was here that Sokei-an, then Sasaki Shigetsu, began his Zen discipline, and here also that my present Zen teacher, Goto Zuigan Roshi, who had entered temple life as a child, lived with Sokatsu as his attendant for ten years.

In 1906, accompanied by fourteen of his disciples, including Goto Zuigan and Sasaki Shigetsu, Sokatsu came to California and attempted to establish an American Zen group, first at Hayward, a village some distance from Berkeley, and then in San Francisco. His attempts were unsuccessful, and four years later he returned with his disciples to Japan, leaving only Sasaki Shigetsu behind. He re-established his teaching center near Tokyo Imperial University and resumed his work. Later he moved further into the country, to Ichikawa in Chiba-ken. The en-

croachments of growing Tokyo made the former location unsuitable for Zen practice.

In the course of the years that followed he developed four heirs: Goto Zuigan Roshi, Tatsuta Eizan Roshi, Sokei-an Roshi, and Ohasama Chikudo Roshi. Goto Zuigan Roshi, a priest, worked in Korea, establishing a branch of the great Myoshin-ji in Seoul. Sokei-an Roshi, of course, established our own First Zen Institute of America. On his retirement at the age of seventy, Sokatsu handed the Ryomo-kyokai to Tatsuta Eizan and Chikudo Ohasama. These two teachers developed fourteen branches of the Ryomo-kyokai in various cities in Japan, traveling constantly from one to the other holding *o-seshin* meetings for the members. With the war the activities of these groups were seriously curtailed, and that of the general group as well. On May 17th, 1946, just a year to the day after Sokei-an Roshi had died, Ohasama Chikudo died, leaving all the responsibilities of re-establishing the Ryomo-kyokai to Eizan Roshi. This group, now called the Ningenzonkyokai (roughly translated "The Society for Humanbeings' Zen") has its headquarters at Ichikawa in the old zendo built by Sokatsu Roshi and has reopened some of its former branches. Eizan Roshi carries on the work at Ichikawa, and two or three of his older students, as yet not formally declared Roshis, travel from time to time among the branch groups. All are laymen with families, as is Eizan Roshi. It had been Sokatsu Roshi's dream to establish a line of lay-roshis. Whether this dream will be fulfilled or not is still uncertain. Goto Roshi's one living Dharma-heir is Oda Roshi, now the Sodo Roshi at Daitoku-ji.

Sokei-an, against his teacher's objections, became a priest, as he believed it impossible to depend upon lay-students to form an unbreakable line of teaching transmission in Zen. From time to time in the history of Zen such attempts have been made. All have eventually come to naught. It was Sokei-an's instruction that we have for our American Zen a Roshi whose transmission is in an historical Zen line.

After his retirement Sokatsu Roshi made his home with a former disciple, Mr. Oki, in the country not far from Kobe. Later, when Mr. Oki moved to Higata

The life of a man from  
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Don't hurry.

If one thinks that to live  
usual, one is not dissatisfied.  
When one feels dissatisfied,  
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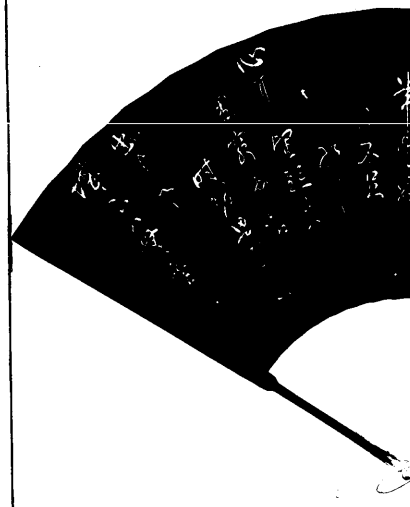
Patience is the foundation of  
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If a man knows only how to  
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the risk of being harmed

Blame yourself; do not blame

Too little is better than

Translation by  
Somei Tsuji



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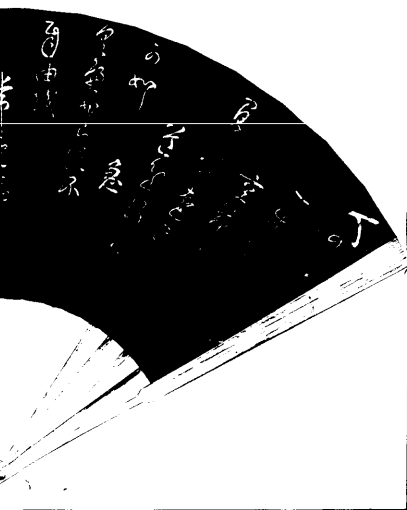
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Written on a fan  
by Sokatsu  
at age 81



in Chiba prefecture, about sixty miles north of Tokyo, Sokatsu Roshi accompanied him and spent his last years in a small *inryo* (apartment for a retired priest) attached to Mr. Oki's house. It was there that I had the good fortune to be able to visit him three or four times after my return to Japan at the conclusion of the war.

In his younger days Sokatsu Roshi had been a very handsome man. Always imperious, self-willed, stern and proud, he was the same when I saw him, though somewhat mellowed with the years. He was happy beyond expression to know of his "grandchildren" in America, for he knew little or nothing of Sokei-an's later work in New York. On one occasion I took Walter with me as an "exhibit." In spite of being wracked with arthritis he sat erect and immovable on his zabuton, in a tiny room surrounded by paintings, bronzes, sculptures, pieces of pottery, all relics of his great days, piled pell-mell almost to the ceiling, and ordered his attendant to bring tea and cakes, or dinner, with all the old authority of a great master. Inner power and immovability still shown out of his entire being. He was still a lion of a man, though an old lion.

He had been a famous calligrapher and a fine painter, a good potter and also a worker in lacquer -- an all-round fine artist as are so many Japanese priests. All these arts he practiced during his teaching days and devoted himself to during his retirement. The Institute has several of his fine paintings, gifts given to me on these various visits, as well as his powerful Bodhidharma, the gift of one of his former koji disciples.

But I shall never forget my last glimpse of him. He had insisted on walking to the railroad station about a quarter of a mile from his house, though every step must have been painful and a cruel and bitter dust-laden wind was thrashing over that little country village on the plain. He had put on a great fur cap such as aviators wear and around his neck was a single skinny and bedraggled red fox skin, such as farmers kill and cure at home and wear in the winter time. In his hand was a great bamboo staff on which he obviously depended as he took each step. As the train pulled out he stood leaning

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Don't hurry.

If one thinks that to live inconveniently is usual, one is not dissatisfied.

When one feels dissatisfied, recall to the memory the days when one was in distress.

Patience is the foundation of a safe and long life. Consider anger as your enemy.

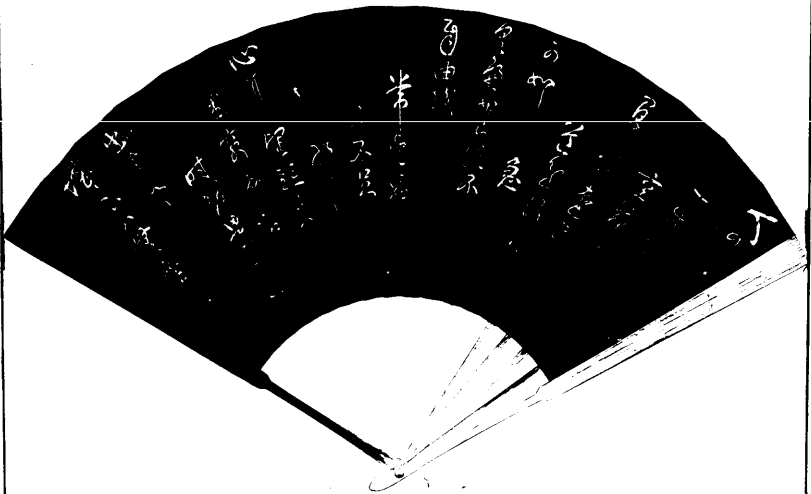
If a man knows only how to accept success and does not know how to accept defeat, he runs the risk of being harmed.

Blame yourself; do not blame the other.

Too little is better than too much.

Translation by  
Somei Tsuji

Written on a fan  
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against the picket fence bordering the train yard, waving his hand until the train was out of sight, the tears streaming down his face. I never saw him again.

For a photograph of Shaku Sokatsu see *CAT'S YAWN* page 19.

**NEWS FROM ABROAD** DR. GEORGE B. FOWLER, recently returned from an American Philosophical Society sponsored trip to Austria, reports keen interest in Asiatic studies there. An eminent and popular professor of psychology and philosophy in Graz and his loyal students and friends can hardly wait for the next publications of the Institute to come to them. Attendance of twenty or more at their weekly meditation (forty-five minute sessions) is usual. Dr. Fowler, asked to address this group, called to their attention significant portions of a German work now out of print of which he has made an English translation for the benefit of our non-German reading students: *Zen, der lebendige Buddhismus in Japan* by Ohasama Chikudo (mentioned earlier in this issue) and August Faust. Much appreciated was Dr. Fowler's retelling of Mrs. Sasaki's suggestions to our zazen kai on her return to New York after intensive Zen training with Goto Zuigan at Daitoku-ji. On the home front, Dr. Fowler tells us of a professor of psychology in Pittsburgh who begins each university lecture with a Zen story--unexplained! DR. SUZUKI, in New York for a few days on his way to Japan was in fine health and excellent spirits. He too reported ever-growing European enthusiasm for Zen. A Paris weekly sent to us by one of James Martin's art-students on tour features Dr. Suzuki and Zen with a full page spread. ZEN NOTES, it might interest our readers to know, is now read in 12 countries: The U. S., Canada, England, France, Denmark, Austria, Germany, Thailand, Malaya, Venezuela, Japan, and Australia. Of the continents, five are now embraced in our circulation; only Africa is unheard from.

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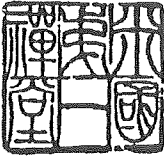
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