

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI - AN SAYS

Buddha's Buddhism is based upon the state of complete annihilation which is called Nirvana. To attain the real state of Nirvana, and to prove its significance by one's own experience is the highest achievement of the Buddhist.

To celebrate the Buddha's lifework Buddhists observe the day of his death, February fifteenth. February 15, 1930 was the first day of our temple and my birthday is also this day, so we celebrate yearly, and we begin something from this day...

the zen

ON THE AGAMAS

One day as Ananda was taking a walk in the woods, he heard a novice reciting a sutra in a loud voice. Ananda listened and dis-teachings are in their decline. The real Dharma has not been kept. I shall correct this monk!" And he called the novice and told him that his recitation was wrong.

covered that the young monk's recital was entirely different from his own. Ananda sighed: "Alas! Even while I am still living my Lord's

teachings are in their decline. The real Dharma has not been kept. I shall correct this monk!" And he called the novice and told him that his recitation was wrong.

The novice answered that his own teacher, young and wise, had told him that the sutra should be recited so. "You, Ananda, are in the age of dotage! Keep a closed mouth!" Ananda thereupon abandoned his hope of correcting the sutra as recited by the novice.

This story of Ananda and the novice illustrates the change of Buddhist theories. Tracing back from today, from new to old, we can see how many times Buddhist theory has changed through 2500 years. But one thing must be emphasized. The attainment of the state of Nirvana, which is the real basis of Buddhism from Buddha's time to today, has not changed at all. And when we attain this through our own experience, every question of Buddhism is solved.

When the Buddha died, the Sangha of Buddhism lost its principal refuge. It had had three refuges, but now there were only two: Dharma and Sangha; its leader was lost. We still say: "We take refuge in Buddha." But this Buddha is Buddha in the state of Nirvana. Precisely speaking, it is



the state of Nirvana which we call Buddha today. So to meet Buddha today you must realize the state of Nirvana.

How to attain the state of Nirvana is of course a great problem. Some say it is attained after death. But without living wisdom as our intellectual power we cannot attain Nirvana, for after death consciousness will not be kept in this empirical state. Consciousness after death enters Nirvana but cannot cognize the state of Nirvana with our intellectual power. It is nothing to us if we cannot grasp this state of Nirvana with the intellect. Intellect is the only key with which we open the state of Nirvana. Of course in the fire of meditation key and door are annihilated, and we do not need to open the door for there is no room to enter; but if we wish the *experience* of realizing the state of Nirvana we must do it while we have this intellectual power, this consciousness.


There are many sutras which tell of the events of the day of the Buddha's death and of the cremation of his body. The oldest is a very short one, consisting of about twenty lines. In it a poem recited by Ananda gives his conception of Buddha and Nirvana.

*The body of Tathagata was wrapped in a
thousandfold shroud.*

*All burned into nothing except two layers,
The topmost and that nearest the body of
Tathagata.*

Without the experience of meditation no one can understand the meaning of this poem, so I shall give a short commentary on it.

"The body of Tathagata" here signifies the state of Nirvana, Emptiness, the original aspect, not the physical body of the Buddha. The thousand folds of the shroud are the shadows of consciousness (*skandhas*). The center of consciousness is the state of Reality, absolute nothingness. This nothingness is shrouded by the consecutive shadows of consciousness, the layers of all thoughts, all words, all conceptions in the thousands of different minds of human beings and lesser entities. All of these wrappings burn to nothing, are

 cremated in the pure fire of meditation, except two, the topmost and that nearest the body of Tathagata.

"The topmost" is this material existence (*rupa*); "that nearest the body of Tathagata" is everlasting (*alaya*) consciousness. Consciousness is not Nirvana; it comes between this outside material existence and Nirvana. Consciousness is the contact between the "inside" and the "outside"; if there is no contact there is no consciousness. Thus it is the key, the medium through which we contact no-consciousness.

That is all. Buddha is Nirvana now. As this poem indicates, Buddha's body is itself Nirvana.

A very interesting, a precious scripture. In it you can find the Buddhism of the Buddha.

A later and more complete version of Ananda's poem appears in Sokei-an's translation of the brief Parinirvana Sutra, *Zo-agon*, 44. 1197, CY, p. 29.

SOKEI-AN

Bringing Nirvana,
Over the great power-mass
Billowing, unto the phoenix-nest
He came; the bird was sleeping.
Worked in fields and factories,
Trapped, and spent the nights
On the steel mountain, waiting.
Found a few to listen,
Sowed the seeds of Bodhi here,
Preparing for luxurious
Dharma-bloom.

When the guns began to boom,
Carved wood in a camp,
And sat out the long gray days.
Left with peace, and faded,
Tiger-hearted, into the blue sky,
Nearly unknown in his new land.
But it was all his great body,
And the gold bird was stirring,
And will awaken.

WHEN I RECEIVED THE FIRST KOAN from my teacher it was February, the first of February. I went around the lake of Shinobazu. It was not large, but I took about one hour to go around. How many times I went around I don't know. I didn't think about anything but that one koan, pounding my mind, trying to squeeze it, squeezing it, boiling it down, analyzing it, making it smaller, smaller, until finally it disappeared. And then: "Oh." That way the answer comes to you.

As a young novice I thought of my koan always. When I lighted a cigarette my koan came to my mind; when I drank water my koan came to my mind. I was keeping my koan always in mind.

When we think of our koan we are not thinking of our koan with our brain, we are in it! When we think about the "Hand Koan" we must think first about Hakuin's mind. We get into Hakuin's mind, become Hakuin himself; Hakuin and I become one man. I am absolutely absorbed in Hakuin and Hakuin is absolutely absorbed in me. Thus we understand Hakuin's great bosom. It is like the vast ocean, empty as the sky. "Oh!" And suddenly we understand.

From a lecture Jan. 13, 1940

HAKUIN'S HAND The monk Hakuin showed his hand to his disciples and said: "Can you hear the sound of the hand?"

TIGER, TIGER, BURNING BRIGHT "Tigerheart" was the name selected for Sokei-an by Enen at his request after he had outlived the day he had predicted for his own death (it is customary for Zen Masters to take a new name in such circumstances). Enen's comment: The tiger, named for its swiftness, is the most fearless of creatures. It is capable of climbing trees and of devouring men, though it rarely does either. Having carefully nurtured its young, it does not fear to fling them over the edge of the cliff to advance their training for maturity. To be the tiger's child is to receive the kindest instruction.

MORE ROLY-POLIES
Floored 7 times--
Stand up 8!

Seven times rolled,
Eighth time, hold.

Teresina Havens

Anon.

PIONEERS, O PIONEERS!--- Dipping into the newly republished *JESUIT RELATIONS*, first printed in 1925, the work of our own Edna Kenton, who died in February of last year, one is tempted to speculate on a companion volume of "Zen Relations." This "noble and moving book" (the words of George N. Shuster, prominent Catholic layman), a selection from the seventy-odd volumes of reports sent back to their superiors by the first Jesuits in North America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, gives an amazingly vivid picture of their lives and times and of their impact on the existing population, composed of French colonists and native Indians. When the Zen pioneers first explored our still religiously naive West in the opening years of the twentieth century, their impressions must have been equally striking. Slowly we are gathering what we can of Sokei-an's early impressions repeated to Americans, but how much more revealing would be those to Japanese confreres, should they ever come to light. One of these days...! For an equally fascinating seventeenth and eighteenth century report on the religions, including Zen, of Japan of that day, see "The First English Account of the Zen Sect" in *CY*, pages 46-50, also the work of Miss Kenton.

ZEN IN THE ART OF ARCHERY---Having heard from a friend on a Metropolitan newspaper that the review copy of this engaging Pantheon book, a bestseller with our members, had been relegated to "Sports" and then disappeared from view, we questioned Kurt Wolff, its publisher, regarding its reception by the press in general. "I wish I had some anecdotes to tell," writes Mr. Wolff. "There have been some irate letters of bookdealers who took it to be a 'how to' book on archery, and returned it forthwith--or who had it returned to them by their clients. By and large, the little book has been ignored by the American press. The real miracle, in view of this, seems to be that the arrow seems to reach its target all the same--IT probably taking care of this. In more commercial terms--the little book has been selling quietly and steadily, and has won many private friends.

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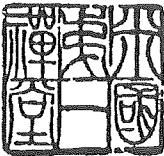
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