

ZEN NOTES



THE FOUR VOWS

Now that you have done so much in inviting me to come here despite the long distance, I should like to speak to you about something instructive. But, as you all know, I am only a practicing Zen monk. I have no scholarly learning and no oratorical eloquence. To ask me to lecture to you is to ask an almost impossible thing of me, and I am very much afraid you will find my talks unsatisfactory. Of course Zen is "without words, without explanations, without instruction, without knowledge." It is self-awakening only. Nevertheless, we must still depend upon words if and when we wish to explain it to others. In the future, therefore, I shall try to tell you something about my own zendo practice, about the course I have followed. But now, when I am having the pleasure of meeting you for the first time, I should like to ask a favor of you. It is this: Will you please memorize the Four Vows? It is these Four Vows that Buddhists not only recite every morning and evening but wish to remember and realize throughout their entire lifetime. For Zen monks, especially, these are the most important of all vows. I am sure the older members of this Institute must know them by heart. Such members I want to ask to recite them once more with a fresh feeling. And the younger members I want to ask to memorize them above everything else.

(Below is a translation of the Four Vows made by Sokei-an in 1939. Chinese characters are on the inside pages.)

Shujo muhen seigando

Sentient beings are numberless. I take a vow to enlighten them all.

Bonno mujin seigandan

Worldly desires are endless. I take a vow to uproot them all.

Homon muryo seingangaku

The gates of Dharma are manifold. I take a vow to enter them all.

Butsудо mujo seiganjo

The goal of Wisdom is ever beyond. I take a vow to attain it.

This is *the* vow. It is true that my being here is largely because of various karmic relations, but fundamentally it is due to this vow that I am here. Therefore, if you will be good enough to establish this particular vow firmly in your hearts, my purpose in coming will be more than fulfilled.

MIURA ISSHU ROSHI

THE SIXTH PATRIARCH SAYS

Virtuous scholars! When we have made our confession, we shall take the Four Great Vows. Listen to me carefully.

Sentient beings, those which abide in my mind, are numberless: I take a vow to enlighten them.

Worldly desires, those which disquiet my mind, are endless: I take a vow to bring them to an end.

The gates of Dharma, the doors of which open within my own nature, are manifold. I take a vow to enter them all.

The goal of wisdom, through which my mind will awake to its own nature, is ever beyond. I take a vow to attain it.

Virtuous scholars! Have you realized that you have said: "Sentient beings are numberless. I take a vow to enlighten them?" Thus I, Eno, speak: but it is not I who makes them enlightened, but you, virtuous scholars, who must enlighten those sentient beings that abide within your mind. These are delusion, arrogance, jealousy, malice and the like. You, every one of you, must convert those sentient beings which are your own nature to enlightenment by your own mind. This is called true conversion.

What is that which is called the conversion of one's own nature to enlightenment? It is that you convert the sentient beings--the wrong view, the affliction and the ignorance within your mind--by your own true view to the true law. When you attain the true view, you, every one of you, convert these beings--the wrong view, the affliction and the ignorance within your mind--by destroying them with your *prajna*. Wrong view to true view, delusion to enlightenment, ignorance to knowledge and evil to virtue: these you must convert. This is called true conversion.

"Worldly desires are endless; I take a vow to bring them to an end" is that you abolish your erroneous thoughts and useless imagination with your innate *prajna*.

衆生無邊誓願度
煩惱無盡誓願斷
法門無量誓願學
佛道無上誓願成

“The gates of Dharma are manifold: I take a vow to enter them all” is that you must recognize your own original nature and must always perform your deeds in accordance with the law of true Dharma. This is called true learning.

“The Wisdom of Buddha is ever beyond; I take a vow to attain it” is that when you become humble you can perform true deeds; delivering yourself from delusion and freeing yourself from awakening you will find *prajna* growing within you. Giving up your conviction as to what is true and what is false, you will at once find your Buddha-nature, and upon this word you will accomplish the Dharma of Buddha. The ceaseless desire of your heart to perform this deed is the force of your prayer.

Virtuous scholars! Now we have made the Four Vows.

SOKEI - AN SAYS

The Sixth Patriarch turned the Four Great Vows into his own terms and expressed them as his own, inserting more words between the lines.

“The sentient beings which abide within your mind” mean the beings which have desire, those which live from morning to evening to accomplish their own desire. In the Buddhist way of thinking there is no particular ego in you. You yourself are an aggregation of the elements of the beings within you. In you are elements of insects and fishes and pigeons and all kinds of animals: they are the sentient beings which abide in you. Thus each individual being possesses a whole city of sentient beings within himself.

How can one bring the disturbing qualities in his mind to an end? The Buddhist thinks it can be done by meditation. In meditation you aim that all desires shall cease and pure *prajna* appear in your mind.

“The gates of Dharma are endless.” Gates means divisions. Dharma means Buddha’s teachings. The meaning of Dharma was originally more limited, but in the Mahayana its meaning becomes quite broad. Dharma means the law of the universe or world. From the Zen standpoint this entrance to all gates is simple. You must recognize your own original nature. The first step to recognize

this is to meditate. So to enter the gate does not mean to step forward, but to retreat into your own consciousness. By meditation you will break through the dam of the original nature of all being. Then you must perform all deeds according to your own original nature. Returning to this field which you can see and hear, you perform your daily life from the true Dharma viewpoint. Buddhism does not take a symbolical or mythological view of this world; Buddhism takes a radical view. So the Buddhist thinks our daily life from morning to evening is service to God; his joys and his tears and his sighs and his songs are a hymn offered to God. But the Buddhist does not speak in such terms. He says: "I put on my clothes; I eat my food; I carry water; I plough the field." Weeping, laughing, eating--these are hymns. Your house is a church. Your physical body is a shrine. Your consciousness is a priest, and your Buddha-nature is God. So, to feed your physical body is a festival; to nourish your mental body is a sermon; to meditate is the ritual of your consciousness. There is no other religion. This attitude is religion. Every joy is true joy, every tear is a true tear in accordance with the law of true Dharma. Many times I heard my teacher speak thus, but I did not understand him because I was then abiding in the Trayastrimsa Heaven. I am not there now. I am on the ground.

"The Wisdom of Buddha is ever beyond." The Wisdom of Buddha is Buddha-knowledge. When you are living in Buddhism, it is very mysterious. I am here for a little while. A lotus flower blooms... the chords of consciousness interplay. You think you will live forever, have love forever, have wealth forever, but this is only your dream. From the eternal view there is nothing to keep permanently. A moment, I and you--this life--then back to the infinite. It is like a silhouette reflected in lightning.

"I take a vow to attain." On the true stage of daily life you must be humble. Then you can perform great deeds. Free yourself from the idea of awakening to eternal life. Awake in *this* life. In true life there is no contradiction, nor is there any in eternal life. With *prajna* you will see what cannot be seen with your eye. With it you will attain Buddhahood.

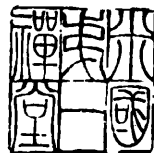
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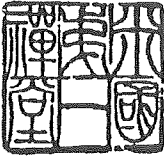
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First Zen Institute of America
113 E30 Street
New York, New York 10016
(212-686-2520)

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