

ZEN NOTES



Straight over the top of the world on the polar map or about halfway round longitudinally from New York is the city of Hongkong (pop. one million plus). For some months we have been hearing from its Buddhists, also from others in two cities of Taiwan, not far distant. We have been thinking you might be as interested as we in their viewpoints and activities, as expressed in their publications and letters. In this issue we bring you samples of these.

Recently, Miss Yau Wan Shan, whose home temple is in Hongkong, where she cordially invited us to visit next time we pass that way, came to

call upon us, as part of her world tour exhibiting her Buddhist paintings in Chinese classical style.

Miss Yau, for her message to us, spoke about the special quality of Chinese "feeling," or "spontaneity," introduced into the Chinese distillation of the Indian import of Buddhism by the Sixth Patriarch. Her touching on the Sixth Patriarch was particularly felicitous, for, as those of you who have been with us on current Wednesdays in New York know, we have for some time been trying to reconstruct Sokei-an's talks on *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, some 190 in number.

身如菩提樹
心如明鏡台
時常勤拂拭
莫使惹塵埃

善提
本無樹
明鏡亦非台
本無一物
何處惹塵埃

FROM THE CITY OF HONGKONG

ONE day Master Han-Shan wandered to Pang-Shan and climbed up until he reached its peak. By the side of the peak, there was a stone cave in which lived a hermit. His head was grey and his face was of the colour of the earth. Master Han-Shan saluted him but the latter did not reply and did not talk. Master Han-Shan knew that he was not an ordinary man and sat down near him. After a short while, the hermit made some tea, took a cup and poured tea which he drank. Master Han-Shan also took a cup, poured some tea and drank it. After tea, the hermit put the tea cup at the original place and continued his meditation as before. Master Han-Shan did the same. A moment later, the hermit cooked rice and when it was ready, he put it before his seat, took a bowl and a stick and ate. Master Han-Shan also took a bowl and a stick and ate. After the meal, the hermit sat as before and Master Han-Shan did the same. At night the hermit went out and walked. Master Han-Shan followed him and walked in the opposite direction. The next day at tea time, Master Han-Shan boiled tea and ate rice and at night both went out and walked as the previous night. This continued for seven days...

One night, Master Han-Shan went out and walked as usual. Suddenly his Brahma aperture burst with a noise like thunder, and everything including the mountains, the rivers, the earth, his body and mind, and the universe, disappeared entirely. That voidness was not comparable to the usual empty space, and this state of the Void-Samadhi lasted the time about five (Chinese) inches of an incense stick took to burn. Gradually he felt the presence of his body and mind and the firm stand of his feet on solid ground. He opened his eyes and gradually saw again the mountains, the rivers and the earth, and everything that surrounded him previously returned to normal. His body and mind became light and joyful, and the effect of all this was indescribable. He moved his feet to walk and felt they were as light as the air. Upon his return to the cave, the hermit enquired: 'Why your stroll lasted so long to-night?' Master Han-Shan told him about what just happened to him and the hermit said: 'This is only the (manifestation of the) element *rupa* (the first of the five *skandhas*) and is not what you originally had. I have been here for over 30 years, and excepting when the wind blew or when it rained and snowed, every night I have had the same experience while walking. If one does not allow oneself to be attracted by it, it will not obscure one's original nature.' Master Han-Shan accepted the hermit's teaching for which he thanked him respectfully...

(After a time) Master Han-Shan took leave of the hermit but so great was his attachment to his host that it was difficult for him to leave. There was, however, an engagement to keep and the hermit, with tears trickling down like pearls, accompanied him until they reached half way of the mountainous path when he turned back.

Translated by Charles Luk

FROM THE CITY OF HSINCHU

About the practice in Chinese Buddhism, I fear that my pen will not be so nice as to describe it as it really is. Japan and China are brother countries and intimate neighbors. Chinese Buddhism is very like that of Japan only with some minor differences. We had eight Mahayanist sects and two Hinayanist sects formerly, and now only some Mahayanist sects left. Recently the division of sects is not very clear and critical. For easy understanding, we consider two big aspects. One is principle and another is practice. About the principle the most prevalent is the Tientai (Tendai) and next come the Fahsiang (Hoso) and Huayen (Kegon). The Venerable Yinshun is now teaching on the Sanlun (Sanron) which emphasizes on the principle of voidness. Personally I prefer this kind of representation. We have many chances to hear the Bhikshus preaching on the Dharma; besides, the most common are the strict obedience of the precepts, the alms giving and a lot of Buddhist rituals. The personal endeavors are in the main of three kinds: the most popular is the Chingtu (Pure Land or Jodo-shu) which is to repeat the name of Amitabha (Nembutsu); a small percent of Buddhists practice Chihkuan (Shikan) and Chan (Zen) which belongs to the Dhyana group. Many Nienfo (Nembutsu) enthusiasts died quietly and happily declared that Buddha Amitabha came to receive them. Some of the Chihkuan (Shikan) practicers appeared that they became less worryful and more happier as they went on and some Chan (Zen) followers had seen their true nature of their hidden mind and treat everything with mindlessness. I am one of the Chihkuan (Shikan) practicers, although I practiced for many years yet I am far away from the door of enlightenment. Only I gratify Lord Buddha that my life has become enriched and broadened.

I appreciate your nice work for teaching the noble practice of Zen. Hope your lamp of wisdom will enlighten the whole New Continent.

With best wishes,

Yours in the Dharma,

H. Y. Li

In case you wondered, the translation by Mr. Luk of Heng Kong was not the report of a recent visit to the Chinese counterpart of Hiei-zan (See ZEN NOTES Vol. I, No. 5 and 6 for such a report) but one said to have taken place in the year 1573. This account is part of a fascinating autobiographical work, Master Han-Shan's JOURNEY TO THE DREAMLAND. For other articles by Mr. Luk, see The Middle Way, February, 1957, and (in French) La Pensee Bouddhique, October, 1956.

The character for "heart" as in the "Heart Sutra" was originally a picture of a physical heart. By extension, it means everything that "heart" can mean, including "mind."



FROM THE CITY OF TAIPEI

... WE decided to visit the Vairo Temple, the most elegant and the largest temple in central Taiwan. We arrived and solemnly filed into the temple, following Venerable Hsin-wu (Dean of the Buddhist College of Taichung, and leader of the group). When we had paid our respects to the Buddha, we were cordially received by the guest nun (a schoolmate of the author). The temple is modern in style. You feel and enjoy coolness and peace in the tall, heaven-like hall where only the Vairocana Buddha is enshrined. The temple has a position commanding wide view of water, hills and farms.

The head nun requested that Venerable Hsin-wu give lectures on the "Heart Sutra."

The following is one of the lectures on nothingness. Venerable Hsin-wu said, "When nothingness is wrongly interpreted to mean the state of a thing after having been ruined, this is then called destruction. The Buddhist nothingness is the state of absence of intrinsic nature, lacking independence and substance. Not only the composed matter but the component parts of it are insubstantial. It is the natural disposition of everything. It is proved by the fact that nothing can exist by itself. Its existence is only possible when some factors and conditions come together. When these factors and conditions fail to harmonize, the existence of a thing is not possible. We, therefore, say everything is nothingness. And a thing, too, is insubstantial after these factors and conditions are withdrawn from the temporary combination, which it manifests. Since a thing is insubstantial before and after the combination of the factors and conditions, the nature of the thing therefore is void. The house, for instance, is void before the combination of the bricks and timbers, and it will be void too after we throw away these bricks and timbers. The nature of the house, therefore, is void when the bricks and timbers are now in proper combinations.

"Some of the people of the world, however, take it for granted that each thing possesses its intrinsic nature. It is not true. They do not..."

In conclusion Venerable Hsin-wu told an interesting story as an example of his theory. He said, "When we were enjoying ourselves on the other side of the hill yesterday, there happened to be a couple of soldiers who at first thought me to be a nun like you, and then broke into laughter when they found out, from my beard, that I was a monk. You see, though they took me for a nun, I am not at all a nun, for the elements of a nun do not exist in me. The absence of the elements constituting a nun showed my actual disposition and did not negate my being a monk and did not signify my destruction. The nothingness of all follows this same pattern."

Nobody felt there was any want of heavenly delight in understanding the Heart Sutra.

SUMMARY OF MISS YAU'S TALK ON ZEN BUDDHISM AND CHINESE ART

Freely translated on the spot by Mr. Chao Tze Chiang, a poet

Calligraphy by Miss Yau

In India there is no such term as Zen Buddhism, but the Wisdom needed to reach ultimate truth through the Indian practice of meditation was deep-rooted in ancient Chinese philosophy before Buddhism was introduced there, and it was this Wisdom Chinese art liked to express. That is why Chinese art is inseparable from Zen Buddhism.

The great Chinese poets and painters retreat from the world by staying in the world and stay in the world in order to retreat from it. Therefore in this world they develop a spirit unique to themselves. When they develop this spirit their mind is full of light, independent, and serene. In this spirit is the guide for them to attain Wisdom, and in this mood they reveal the spontaneity of their minds. A poet of the T'ang Dynasty wrote: "If you observe things in quietude, your mind will feel comfortable." The truth expressed in this line indicates the essence of Zen, for the most subtle part of Zen is that "serenity gives light and light produces serenity."

Yet there is a slight gap between Zen and art. It is certain that a poet or painter cannot create great art when his mind is in agitation or commotion. A poet or artist, to be great, needs serenity. The mind is like a mirror: in order to reflect the changes in the universe it must be bright.

Buddhists often use a mirror as a simile in their interpretation of life. Why do Buddhists so often use a mirror to explain their principles? Because a mirror can cause us to be awakened if we stand before it. To indicate this to you I shall quote two poems.

The Fifth Patriarch of Zen in China had two great disciples. One was Hsinshiu and the other was Wei Neng (The Sixth Patriarch). Hsinshiu wrote this poem:

Wei Neng wrote this poem:

The body is like a Bodhi tree
The mind is like a mirror
When we dust the mirror often
There will be no dust on it

A Bodhi tree is no tree
A mirror is not a mirror
Originally there is nothing
How can it gather dust?

Before a Bodhi tree grows up it is no tree at all. It is merely a seed. And after a number of years the tree may no longer exist. A mirror, before it is made, is no mirror at all. And after some years, it, too, may not exist at all. Therefore we know that nothing exists in the world. Since there is no mirror, how can there be dust on it?

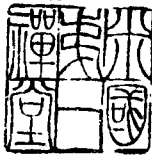
Zen cannot be expressed in words. As soon as one speaks of it, it becomes a theory. Therefore I explain Zen Buddhism only by quoting these two poems. Since Zen cannot be expressed in words those who are interested in it must understand it by intuition.

In the first step of cultivating our mind we have to regulate our conduct, but when we reach the final step we will forget our selves. If we always remember ourselves we work only for ourselves and not for others. But in forgetting ourselves as well as all our possessions we are able to render the greatest contribution to mankind.

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