

ZEN NOTES

nyogen sanzaki



You have asked me to write about my past training and my work in America. I am merely a nameless and homeless monk. Even to think of my past embarrasses me; however, I have nothing to hide. But you know a monk renounces the world and wishes to attract as little attention as possible, so whatever you read here just keep to yourself... and forget about it.

My foster father began to teach me Chinese classics when I was five years old. He was a Kegon scholar, so he naturally gave me training in Buddhism. When I was eighteen years old, I had finished reading the Chinese Tripitaka, but now in this old age I do not remember what I read. Only his influence remains, to be lived up to outside of name and fame, and to avoid as far as possible the world of loss and gain. I studied Zen in the Soto school first, and in the Rin-zai later. I had a number of teachers from both schools, but I gained nothing. I love and respect Soyen Shaku more than all other teachers, but I do not feel like carrying all my teachers' names on my back like a sandwich man.....it would almost defile them.

In those days one who passed all ko-ans called himself the first and best successor of his teacher and belittled others. My taste does not agree with this manner. When I left the monastery, Soyen Shaku wrote me a letter, which I recently translated and am enclosing. It may be my foster father's influence, but I have never made any demarkation of my learning, so do not consider myself finished at any point. Even now I am not interested in inviting many friends to our meetings. You will read the paper I am also enclosing on this subject. You will laugh, but I am really a mushroom without a very deep root, no branches, no flowers and probably no seeds.

After my arrival in this country in 1905, I simply worked through many stages of American life considering myself a modern Sudhana, meditating alone in Golden Gate Park or studying hard in the public library of San Francisco. Whenever I could save money, I would hire a hall and give a talk on Buddhism, but this was not until 1922. I named our various meeting places a floating Zen-do. At last in 1928 I established a Zen-do, which I have carried with me as a silkworm hides himself in his cocoon; thus, I came to Los Angeles in 1931. The silk thread surrounds me unbroken. It may weave a brocade of autumn leaves or a spotless spring kimono for the coming year. I only feel gratitude to my teachers and all my friends, and fold my hands palm to palm.

TUESDAY TALK AT LOS ANGELES ZENDO September 19, 1933

Bodhisattvas: In the beginning this place was selected by some Japanese Buddhist friends as a shelter for Buddhist monks. My ideal as a Buddhist monk is to have no permanent place to stay, but to take a course of pilgrimage as a lone cloud floating freely in the blue sky. Even though I have been staying in this place two years and five months, I have been always considering myself a pilgrim on a wandering journey, making each day a transient stay. It is a transient stay, therefore, I do not worry about tomorrow. It is today that I am living with gratitude. What can my regret do with the happenings of yesterday? If I have to go away for a long trip, some other monk or monks may stay in this shelter, making each day a transient stay, the same as I. As long as this principle of *Anicca*, this principle of impermanence, is practiced, this shelter will remain a Buddhistic house. In fact, I am passing away every day--what you saw about me yesterday, you cannot see anymore. Tomorrow you will meet a man who looks like Senzaki, thinks like Senzaki, and speaks like Senzaki; but he is not the Senzaki you met today. As long as you are dwelling in such understanding of *Anatta*, the principle of non-individuality, the friendship between you and me will be Buddhistic.

If any of you have a desire to move our meditation hall into another location to increase your comfort and pleasure, you are clinging to delusions which are not Buddhistic at all. Buddhists--true Buddhists, never use propaganda. I did not ask you to come to this place, but your own Buddha-nature guided and brought you here. If a new location and a better house would draw more people, if we had no Buddhistic spirit within ourselves, what would be the use of having a crowd around us? Some may say they are satisfied with this location and with this house, but for the sake of strangers we must make some attraction. This world is, however, nothing but the phenomena of dissatisfactions. Wherever one goes, one must face some sort of suffering. This is the principle of *Dukkha* which Buddha repeatedly taught us. Those who come for comfort and pleasure will never be satisfied in a Buddhistic house. They do not belong there from the very beginning. So why should we try to attract them? This house is a shelter for Buddhist monks, and you are all our honorable guests and should feel obliged to follow the principles this house stands for. If you want to meditate, I will join you in meditation. If you want to study the Scriptures, I will

MENTORGARTEN

IF the hitting of Toku-san's big stick covers me like rain I will not be frightened. If the shouting of Rin-zai's "Kwatsu" roars like a thunderstorm, I will not be surprised. If Punna's sermons are as fluent as running water, and Sariputta's wisdom sparkles like the morning star, I will not envy them. If one keeps the precepts, consecrates his life, lives alone in a mountain hut, takes his meal once a day, fasts often, makes his body transparent with pure food, and performs Buddhist ceremonies six times a day, but lacks the vow to save all sentient beings, I cannot encourage myself to respect him.

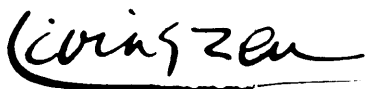
My ideal is shown in the *Saddharma-pundarika Sutra* as a character named "Bodhisattva Never-Despised." If in our day a Bodhisattva accomplishes realization of selflessness using his hands only for lovingkindness as a mother cares for her baby, walks the road of life to serve him, rocks his cradle to comfort him, and thinks of all boys and girls as her own children, so a monk considers all workers on the different stages as his companions, makes a home without wife or children, gathers mentors with no discrimination of guest and hosts, speaks plain humanity implying Buddha-nature; he will certainly bring my admiration and make me shed tears of sympathy. I wonder, how many monks or priests such as this are among the hundred thousand Buddhist workers in Japan?

Monk Nyogen tries to live the Bhikkhu's life according to the teaching of Buddha, to be non-sectarian with no connection of cathedral or headquarters; therefore, he keeps no property as his own, refuses to hold a position in the priesthood, and hides himself from noisy fame and glory. He has, however, the four vows--greater than worldly ambition, Dhamma treasures higher than any position, and lovingkindness wealthier than church properties. He walked out of my monastery and now wanders around the world meeting young people, gradually associating with their families and so tries in making religion, education, ethics and culture as the steps to climb to the highest. He is still far from being a "Bodhisattva Never-Despised," but I consider him as a soldier of the crusade to restore the peaceful Buddha land for the whole of mankind and all sentient beings. Every step of continuation means success to him for this sort of endless work. I congratulate him at this very moment.

Autumn 1901

Engaku Monastery, Kamakura

SOYEN SHAKU



For others in this series of stories of noted Zen personalities told in their own words, see *ZEN NOTES*, Vol. I, No. 8 and Vol. II, No. 7.

For an identification of Soyen Shaku and Engaku Monastery at Kamakura, see *CAT'S YAWN*, pp. 2, 3, 7, 12, 16, 17, 19. See also *ZEN NOTES*, Vol. I, Number 7.

assist you in learning. If you want to take vows in keeping precepts, I will ordain you as monks, nuns, upasakas, or upasikas, and will endeavor to live the Buddhist life with you. If you want to donate material or immaterial things, the monks will receive them in the name of *Dana-paramita*. You need not worry how and where your seeds of charity are planted. Just give and forget that. This is the only way to maintain the Sangha, a group of practical Buddhists. No guest of the Buddhist house should worry how to spread the teaching or how to maintain the movement. Their time should be taken in studying meditation, digesting the Scriptures, and practising what they are learning for their own world. This is the true spirit in which the teaching of Buddha will remain among mankind in its proper form.

Of course I have no objection to you starting your own movement with the understanding that you have attained, but while you are coming to this meditation hall, I wish you to be the silent partners of Zen, and throw out your ideas of "teaching others" and devote yourselves to study-- there are one thousand and seven hundred Ko-ans that you have to pass. There are five thousand books on Buddhism written in European languages which require your reading. And as for realization, once you think you have attained something, you will be down ten thousand feet below, and you will have to start from the bottom again.

I am telling you in such a severe way because I want you to attain a real Buddhistic enlightenment. There are many teachings from the Orient, but none of them can lead you into a true emancipation except Zen-Buddhism. They may give you satisfaction in worldly desires which they call spiritual attainment, but since that is not the highest stage of Nirvana, you will drop to the world of dust again as an arrow shot towards the heavens falls. Whatever I say is the echo of my teacher's wisdom, and whatever my teacher told me is the wisdom of his teacher, and so forth. We can trace back 79 teachers, finally reaching Buddha Sakyamuni. Until you are ready to do Zen meditation, I shall tell you how to discipline yourselves. I could give you a longer discourse, but unless you are ready to enter Samadhi, the more you hear about the theories and speculation, the more you will carry the unnecessary burden upon your shoulders.

I wish all of you to come and practice the true Buddhism, following the discipline of Zen monks; forgetting your own self-limited worldly opinions.

zen notes

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Until 1956, when for the first time we offered flowers to the bold and tiny image of the Buddha at birth graciously loaned to us for the occasion by the New York (Shin) Buddhist Church, we at the Institute had never witnessed or taken part in a traditional observation of the Buddha's birthday (April 8). Our celebration of it therefore has been a matter of our own feeling. It seems to us that this is a proper time to express our special reverence and affection for children, inviting them and their parents to take part. This brought to our mind Monk Nyogen's once telling us of how, following the advice of his teacher, he came to find what is now his "Mentorgarten." In the very beginning, he said, as we recall the story, his Mentorgarten was actually peopled with infants and their nurses. The babies were swung in hammocks overhead from which cries and something like warm rain would from time to time descend on those below. It seemed to us to have a very springlike feeling. We do not know when Nyogen Senzaki's birthday is but at this very moment we feel like congratulating him on the more than fifty spent in pioneer work in America and wishing him many more to come.

大 小
隱 隱
隱 朝
山 市
林 市

Daiin wa chōshi ni kakure
Shōin wa sanrin ni kakuru

A great recluse
Hides himself in the market-place,
A small recluse
Hides himself in a mountain retreat.

Han Shōin shi

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