

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE ZEN SCHOOL is a very queer school. We are not really *teaching* Zen. We find a man who has Zen in his mind naturally and we say: "Don't you know it is Zen that you have in your mind?" We don't explain, "Zen is this, Zen is that." Those with Zen minds are not limited to monks, but may be businessmen, artists, military men, all kinds of people. When we meet them: "Ah, that is Zen." We shake them and make them realize it.

There is no English equivalent for what we call this in the Orient, but the nearest word is "opportunity." They can grasp the opportunity; they can seize the chance of the moment. Other people do not recognize it and so they lose it. It is just as a good business man grasps the chance in a conversation and makes a good business. In our tradition, to have a great opportunity one must be prepared to grasp it. If he does not grasp it at that moment, he must complete his education through many reincarnations. Then when he hears a word he opens his eye.

There are many people in the world, but among them here and there some will listen to Buddhism and have queer feelings, will really hear it. The Sixth Patriarch said: "They possess the Dharma in their mind. They will attain the Dharma."

Manku dō ichizetsu
Shikai dō ikke

The ten-thousand mouths
Speak with one and the same tongue,
The four seas
Belong to one and the same family.

四 萬
海 口
同 同
一 一
家 舌

Zen in America may be said to stem from the genius of a great modern Zen master, by name Kosen, who occupied the position of Superior Overseer of Religious Teaching in the Educational Bureau of the government of Japan under the enlightened rule of the Emperor Meiji during the second half of the nineteenth century. As a reflection of the feeling of the times, and a stimulator of it, he took great interest in Western thought. He was also the leader of the movement for the development of Zen study for laymen and lay-education for Zen Buddhist monks. (Living)

In furtherance of his views, he held meditation meetings in Tokyo for a group of distinguished laymen, among them Tesshu Yamaoka, a famous fencing-master. With this group, called the Ryōmō-kyōkai, modern organized lay-instruction in Zen study not differing in essence from that given to monks came into being.

Soyen Shaku was the heir of Kosen. Sokatsu, a young layman who studied with Kosen in his later years, finished his Zen under Soyen, and was adopted by him as his son, taking his family name of Shaku. These two men, father and son in their personal relationship, might be called the fathers of American Zen.

Soyen Shaku, under the influence of Kosen, undertook his lay-education at Keio Gijiku, now Keio University, which had been established by Yukichi Fukuzawa on his return from America in 1866 as a school for the study of western culture and learning. In 1887, when he was 29 years old, Soyen, still under Kosen's direction, went to Ceylon to complete his education with the study of Pali.

In 1893, the year following the death of Kosen, Soyen was invited to attend the World's Parliament of Religions, to be held at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Accepting the invitation, he was the first priest of the Rinzai Sect of Zen to come to America.

In 1905 Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Russell of San Francisco knocked at the door of his temple, Engaku-ji, in Kamakura, and entreated Soyen to instruct them in the principles of Zen. Soyen returned to America as their guest and remained with them until the following spring. Afterwards he visited many American cities and then continued his journey homeward by way of Europe and India. It was in India that one side of Soyen's personality, which perhaps influenced his disciples to follow his example, was manifested. Though the patriarch of a wealthy and famous temple, when his funds were exhausted, Soyen did not call upon either his adherents or his government for aid, but walked the Buddha's path as a pilgrim, begging food from door to door. By the time he boarded a native coastal steamer, homeward bound, sailing by way of Shanghai, his only possessions were his kesa and bowl. The former he gave to a beggar on board. *The Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot*, Soyen Shaku's American lectures translated from the Japanese by Dr. Suzuki, was published in 1906 by The Open Court, Chicago.

Sokatsu Shaku was barely 29 when he finished his Zen study and set

zen
out upon a pilgrimage, first to the great Zen temples of his own country and then, begging his way as his teacher Soyen had done, continued his journeying as far as Siam and Burma.

After he returned to Japan he was instructed by Soyen to revive the group for lay-students of Zen, the Ryōmō-kyōkai, originated by Kosen but long since dispersed. In the suburbs of Tokyo he gave lectures and instruction in Zen practice to ten or fifteen lay-disciples, most of whom were young university students. It was there Sokei-an, then a sculpture student of the Imperial Academy of Art, received his first instruction in Zen.

In 1906, Sokatsu, with six disciples, including Sokei-an, embarked for the United States with the object of founding a Zen monastery there. The attempt proving abortive, after two years Sokatsu was summoned back to Japan by Soyen. Six months later he came again to America, remaining for a year and a half, only to return to Japan in 1910, this time for good, taking his disciples with him, with the exception of Sokei-an, who had decided to bury his bones in America.

For several years Sokei-an led a wandering life, finally reaching the city of New York. One day in 1919, realizing that he must see his teacher, he returned to Japan. In 1928, having completed his Zen study under Sokatsu, Sokei-an was charged by him to carry Zen to America. With the help of friends he returned to New York and founded the First Zen Institute of America (at that time named the Buddhist Society of America) in 1930. During Sokei-an's lifetime, his activities consisted of public lectures and personal instruction in koans. After Sokei-an's death in 1945, his students have carried on his work as best they could, practicing zazen, publishing his writings, and conducting public lectures and classes.

Another of Soyen Shaku's disciples, Nyogen Senzaki, who left him in 1901, heads a Zen group in Los Angeles. With Paul Reys, he published three small books, *The Gateless Gate*, *Ten Bulls*, and *101 Zen stories*, recently combined into one under the title *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, and a fourth, with Mrs. Ruth McCandless, *Buddhism and Zen*, which is one of the few introductory works on the subject.

Sokatsu's work with laymen in Japan is now being carried on by Eisan Tatsuta, one of the four teachers he ordained. The eldest of these, Zuigan Goto, after an energetic career as a missionary in Korea, became first the head of Myoshin-ji and then of Daitoku-ji, in Kyoto. Now retired, he is the adviser of the Kyoto branch of the First Zen Institute of America and the teacher, since Sokei-an's death, of its students resident in Japan.

Two other Zen masters have visited New York. One of these, Miura Isshu of Koon-ji, in 1955 and 1956 conducted Dai Sesshins of several months duration at the Institute headquarters in Greenwich Village and accepted as his disciples ten of its senior students.

In 1954, on a tour arranged by the U. S. State Department, Sogen Asahina, Shaku Soyen's grandson in Dharma, and the present head of Engaku-ji,

Soyen's temple, visited the Institute several times and greatly encouraged the efforts of its members to carry on without a teacher. In the friendly and outgoing spirit of this man, too, might be felt the enlightened attitude toward lay students first manifested by Kosen.

Best-known and most-loved of Zen men inspired by Kosen's spirit is Dr. Daisetz Suzuki. During his student days, he was a lay student of Soyen, who brought him to America as his interpreter on his second visit. A lifelong friend of Sogen Asahina, near whose temple he has established a library for the use of Zen students, Dr. Suzuki has done more than any other individual to awaken the interest of Americans in Zen, particularly among writers, psychiatrists, artists, and university people. Though a philosopher, not a priest, and now in his late eighties, he was recently described by Time Magazine as "one of the most respected religious leaders in America." Through his many books, people in all walks of life have become acquainted with and fascinated by Zen-influenced ideas. A number of writers, among them Christmas Humphreys of England, Dr. Hubert Benoit of France, and Alan Watts of the United States, have written books popularizing his exposition of the theories of Zen.

But the history of American Zen is barely begun. Sokei-an said that if it followed the course it took in China and Japan three hundred years would be needed for its flowering. Of course we of the atomic age tend toward impatience. Must we wait so long?

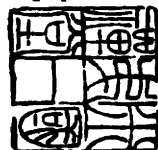
NOTE: Our capsule history of Zen in America has been prepared in response to numerous recent requests for information. Most of its facts may be found in CAT'S YAWN and ZEN NOTES but nowhere in one piece. Its remarks are limited to activities of the followers of the Rinzai Sect of Zen carried on among American people. The activities of the other great living school of Zen, Soto, have been conducted largely among Japanese or Japanese-descended adherents. These were begun in Hawaii in the 19th century and spread among Nisei groups located mostly in West Coast cities.

BOOKS For works on Zen, we refer you to the very useful bibliography prepared by Alan Watts, in his *Way of Zen*, published by Pantheon Books. He says, in an introduction to it, with which we agree: "To the best of my knowledge, this section includes every important book or scholarly article on Zen published until the present time, July, 1956."

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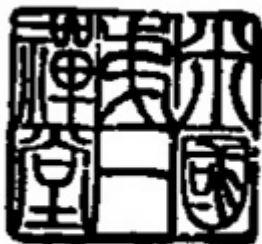
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