

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

BUDDHA'S WISDOM The Buddha's enlightenment is the origin of Buddhism. This teaching called Buddhism is based upon the Buddha's highest wisdom. It is written in the Buddhist scriptures that on the morning of December eighth, two thousand five hundred years ago, under the Bodhi tree at Buddhagaya in the kingdom of Magadha in India, the Buddha attained Bodhi, 'Awakening', and Sarvajnana, 'All-wisdom.' We thought he must be a wonderful man to attain all wisdom. This "All-wisdom" is not the knowledge of all departments of science and sociology, of all types of philosophy and theology, of course, but when we were children we thought the Buddha had attained all this knowledge, something impossible for a human being. It was a superstition. "All-wisdom" is not the so-called wisdom which we have, the wisdom with which we gather knowledge of objective existence.

Of course, when a Buddhist priest opens his mouth he immediately divides the world into two pieces; usually he uses two terms, phenomena and Reality.

I think you know how disinterestedly Orientals take the outside. The outside! It is just the same as a dream: it is always mutable; nothing is stable. Anyone who tries to seek truth in the outside is like a man trying to get milk from a he-goat. Everything in the outside takes different phases periodically, and these phases are continually changing; therefore there is no truth in the outside.

Then, what is in the inside? Truth must be in the inside. Well, the inside exists corresponding to the outside. When the outside does not exist, how can the inside exist? There is a famous expression in Buddhism: "Outside is empty; inside is empty; inside is empty; outside is empty; everything is empty." Well, if everything is empty we don't need to be bothered. Good-bye Buddhism. Many people take that attitude.

But this "to be empty" is the aim of the discipline in the Buddhist practice. You use a different word: you don't say "empty" your mind, you say "purify" your mind; but we say "be empty." These words indicate our different conceptions of the human mind. You think that, if you become "pure," you will be serious; if you become "empty,"

you will be stupid, an idiot. The mind of an infant is pure and empty, but the mind of an infant is also dark; it is like a black diamond. By our effort we must make it pure and empty like a transparent diamond.

As a first step to the practice to attain this empty mind Buddhists, as we said, divide everything into two pieces: inside and outside, phenomenal and Real. All-wisdom does not have much to do with the phenomenal side, but it has a great deal to do with the side of Reality. Usually people think that the phenomenal side exists outside, and that Reality exists inside; but in the state of Reality there is neither inside nor outside. All-wisdom is the wisdom which realizes the state of Reality.

In our youth we practice meditation to attain Reality. Going into a mountain cave and closing our eyes we try to forget everything, staying all summer and eating only once a day. In the autumn we come back to the temple. We meet the teacher and he says, "You have met Reality? Prove it!" But how can we prove Reality, when it doesn't exist in this phenomenal world? We are still sticking to two sides; our attainment is not true attainment. Reality must be attained at this moment. It is not necessary to close your eyes; it is not necessary to keep your eyes open; it is useless to hibernate in a cave, it is also useless to run around the city blocks. At this moment, sitting here, you must attain Reality.

Do you think Reality can be attained with your eye? The eye creates color. Do you think Reality can be attained with your ear? The ear produces sound. You must realize this also is a Buddhist way of speaking. Buddhists do not say, "The eye sees color and the ear hears sound"; we say "the eye produces color and the ear produces sound." Wisdom, however, attains Reality. How? The answer to this question *how* is written in the scriptures. There are five thousand and forty-eight volumes translated into Chinese. We have the answer there. This *how* is written down, but though we spend all our life reading the scriptures, yet we are very far from attaining Reality.

We don't need to read all those sutras. We must attain Reality at this moment, immediately. THIS is the state of Reality. You don't need to look around. You don't need to puzzle your mind. The Zen masters use the expression: "*Kachi issei!*"--'one sound of clatter!'--attain Reality! It is not necessary to wait many years; in this moment you must attain Reality.

Then you can open your eyes to all branches of science, all schools of philosophy and theology; you can acquire the knowledge of economy, law, politics, criminology, sociology, and so forth; you can become acquainted with all literature, so that you understand the emotional life of human beings, the painful struggle of human existence, in sympathy and tears. Then you are a man, a matured man.

While you are struggling to attain Reality you are still a child, you are only half-grown. But when you have attained Reality, your wisdom will expand, the seed of wisdom will flower, will open eight petals,

embracing all the knowledge of the world. Therefore we call this wisdom All-wisdom. The Buddha attained the Seed of Wisdom on the morning of December eighth, two thousand five hundred years ago.

This Seed of Wisdom is like the center of Columbus Circle; from there eight different avenues diverge. If you do not attain this Seed of Wisdom, you will spend your life going around from branch to branch without ever finding the center of Wisdom. You cannot be simple, therefore your mind cannot be plain. You think that you must be wise, that your brain must be like an encyclopedia, that your eyes must be shining, and that you must make all kinds of gestures. No, you must just grasp the center of Wisdom.

If we are talking about this center of Wisdom in Western terms, it is epistemology. Of course, to understand epistemology, you must understand ontology. But the Western approach seems peculiar to us. Epistemology in the West exists only on the blackboard. And ontology is there, too.... That is not the way to find the center of your Wisdom. In the West everything is objectified, while in the East everything is subjectified; neither is correct.

When I was young I admired people who collected many books, who had books in every room of the house. They must have wonderful brains, I thought, to read all those books. But now I realize such people don't read the books because they haven't the time. They have the desire to read, and they pick up a book and read for twenty minutes, then shut it and go to another. They are certainly busy.

I sit down in my chair and think about it. I have five thousand and forty-eight volumes of Buddhist sutras, and I realize I cannot finish reading all these sutras in my lifetime. How can I read all those books? I spent four years reading through the encyclopedia and ruined my eyes. Yet knowledge is endless. There are so many things to be read; books are published in a flood every day. If I study philosophy only I won't have time to study law, or medicine, politics, strategy, or tactics.

I realize I must grasp that something which is the center of them all. If I have the time, I shall go around, but in my lifetime I must be satisfied with this Sarvajnana, the center of All-wisdom, which the Buddha attained long ago.

I am trying to simplify my life, to be a simple man, a plain man. To become a mere human being is what I am striving for. To anyone who meets me I look like a country man. "Good morning! How do you do!" That is all. So my aim is to simplify. I am not talking about myself alone; every religious man will come here in the end. Buddhism teaches this to every one. You say Buddhism is philosophy, tedious and awful philosophy. Yes, it is philosophy, but a philosophy which is like a towel that scrapes off your filth. When the filth has been scraped away, you will come to your hand, a pure, plain hand. Buddhism is plain and simple. There is nothing complicated in it, nothing to give us a headache.

荷 神
水 通
也 拜
搬 妙
柴 用

*Jinzū narabi ni myōyū
Mizu o ninai mata shiba o hakobu*

Drawing water, carrying firewood,
This is supernatural power, this
marvelous activity.

SEKITŌ said one day to Hō Koji: "Since seeing me, what have your daily activities been?"

"When you ask me about my daily activities, I cannot open my mouth," the Koji replied.

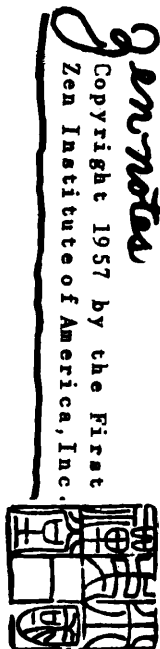
"Just because I know you are thus I now ask you," said Sekitō. Whereupon the Koji offered this verse:

"My daily activities are not different,
Only I am naturally in harmony with them.
Taking nothing, renouncing nothing,
In every circumstance no hindrance, no conflict.
Who assigns the ranks of vermillion and purple?
Of hills and mountains the last speck of dust is
wiped out.

Drawing water, carrying firewood,
This is supernatural power, this marvelous activity.

Hō Koji goroku

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