

ZEN NOTES



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

May 7, 1957, Senzaki-San sent us some Mentorgarten Dialogues--in the question-and-answer form first noted in his *BUDDHISM AND ZEN* (with Ruth Strout McCandless, 1953) now available in a paperback edition in The Wisdom Library. No words equal his own in conveying his living spirit so we present these now, remembering his more than fifty years of pioneer effort. Attached to the Dialogues was a message written on yellow cypypaper, which read, in part: "If any point of view is congenial to yours, use it..."

nyogen Senzaki



Would you translate the meaning of the four vows?

1st: To save all sentient beings	Shujō	muhen seigando
2nd: To clear our delusions	Bonnō	mujin seigandan
3rd: To study all the teachings	Hōmon	muryō seigangaku
4th: To attain the highest wisdom of Buddhahood	Butsудо	mujō seiganjō

Our life is limited. How can I save all sentient beings by myself?

It is your delusion that makes you think you are alone. You are one life with all sentient beings together. Therefore, when you say "I vow," all sentient beings vow with you. Your wish is for peace on earth for the entire universe. The second vow is to clear out delusions. If mankind would get rid of unnecessary desires, there would be no quarrels between persons and no wars between nations. The third vow says to study all the teachings in the world. The broader meaning is that Christianity, Mohammedanism, etc., are part of Buddha's wisdom. In the future, another teacher may come, but he will not be separate from the universal truth. The fourth vow means that achieving Buddhahood is not only to enter the highest stage of the region called the Buddhas, not only to be a faithful servant of a god, but to be a Buddha yourself. Mankind himself becomes god and each person preaches this truth by his action and his word. When Buddha Sakyamuni was born, he pointed one hand heavenward and one toward earth. "Above the heaven and below the earth, I am the only noble one." When I take the vow, mankind together takes it.

Dear Everyone:

SPRING in Japan is a season not only of flowers but of flower-viewing. During April and well into May not only do thousands of tourists come from foreign countries to see the cherry blossoms, but it seems as if all the populace of Japan as well leave their homes for trips to even far distant places famous for their spring beauty. Special trains are run, for seats on which people stand in line for hours at the stations and many all the way to their destinations; the hotels and inns are overflowing, so that, without reservations made long in advance, even a bed is unobtainable; and here in Kyoto, a mecca for visitors, the streets, shrines, temples, and parks are so crowded that even to walk in them on ordinary business is like jostling one's way through a subway crowd. This is the season of the year when I keep as much as possible to the quiet confines of Ryōsen-an.

After the cherries have fallen the peonies bloom. Peonies are not so widely cultivated in Japan as in America, and the type grown here is that rather rare peony known to us as the Chinese tree peony. This peony is the flower associated with Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Intrinsic Wisdom. The lion, on which he is most often represented as riding, is the animal associated with him. As his animal is known as the King of Beasts, so his flower is known as the King of Flowers. One of the Noh plays often given at this time of the year includes a dance by a white maned and a red maned lion in a peony garden.

Perhaps the association of peonies with Manjusri has made them a favorite temple flower. Here in Daitoku-ji, the Sōdō has the finest display, ten magnificent plants, each of a different variety. Painters flock to sketch them each year. Kōtō-in has a fine "black"--actually deep crimson--peony, and at Daikō-in, a recently rebuilt temple, one of the main gardens contains peonies only. The earth of the garden is golden-colored sand, arranged in hillocks bordering an imaginary stream that is spanned by a small stone bridge. On each hillock is planted a peony tree, some twenty to twenty-five plants in all. The trees are quite old, a gift to Daikō-in from a temple in Gifu Prefecture, and all are semi-double pale pink or double rose-colored. Unfortunately we had heavy rains just as the pink variety, which blooms early, were coming into flower, and their fragile petals were quickly sodden.

The rose-colored peonies fared better as to weather, however, and one fine warm

day the priest of Daikō-in had a peony-viewing party to which I was invited. The party was in honor of his Rōshi, the Kanchō of Nanzen-ji, and included four other priests from Nanzen-ji, two Daitoku-ji priests who were relatives of the priest of Daikō-in, and nine or ten lay persons connected with his temple. Because I began my Zen studies at Nanzen-ji, I am still considered as, in part at least, a Nanzen-ji person, and the present Kanchō, now 88, is an old and dear friend.

We were invited for ten-thirty in the morning. As social time in Japan is said to be half an hour to an hour later than clock time, reaching Daikō-in at eleven I found myself the first guest to arrive. The entrance garden had been newly swept and the stone path freshly watered. A freshly watered path and entrance stone is the first courtesy to a guest, whether the host's house be the most humble or the most magnificent. The entrance was wide open, a second courtesy, for no guest should have to ring for admittance. As I slipped out of my shoes my host, Daikō-in--we usually call priests by the name of their temple, not by their family or personal names--came to greet me and led me into the room prepared for the party. All the sliding panels had been removed so that the peony garden, on which the reception room faced, had become an extension of the room. Did the room contain the peony garden, or did the peony garden contain the room?

And what a sight it was! The rose peonies were at the height of their bloom, about twelve trees in all, and each bearing twenty to thirty flowers, five to eight inches in diameter. Here and there throughout the garden had been placed huge lacquered parasols, some scarlet, some yellow, and one black, parasols that had once been used in a religious procession. The just-before-noon sun poured down on the parasols, and the light filtering through them seemed to enhance the exquisite color and texture of the flowers, giving them a soft luminousness. One could only exclaim, then sit down on the edge of the verandah and drink them in with one's eyes, drink and drink and drink all this beauty and color.

Now the other guests began to arrive. I was invited to go to the tea-room with two or three others. As we slipped into straw sandals and stepped down into the midst of the peonies the air of the garden seemed drenched with their perfume and it was all one could do not to touch their great silken petals. The tea-master of the day was of the Enshū school, founded by the famous tea-master, garden



maker, and aesthete Kobori Enshū, one of whose lineal descendants Daikō-in is. The tea-room was charmingly appointed and the cakes and whipped green tea delicious. But this was no day for a tea-room. On a morning when the early summer rain is dripping from the eaves, or on a late winter afternoon with the early dusk falling, to drink tea around the murmuring kettle with two or three congenial friends I find delightful. But today was the peonies' day. So as soon as good manners permitted we returned to the reception room where all the guests had now assembled.

Here the tokonoma, in which hung a large piece of calligraphy by the guest of honor, was now piled with the gifts which each guest had brought to the host. One never goes to a Japanese party without bringing a gift of some kind. From the shapes and wrappings of the gift boxes one could guess at the contents: sake, fruit, cakes, and, since this was a temple, several envelopes containing money.

We were shown to our seats for the luncheon. On the three sides of the reception room--the garden made the fourth--zabuton--sitting cushions--had been placed, and conveniently between them small pottery braziers for smokers. Years ago one often saw the small "three puff" pipe, but nowadays even elderly men and women use cigarettes almost exclusively. The first guest of honor sat in front of the tokonoma, of course, and beside him in descending order according to their rank, the four other priests from Nanzen-ji, then an elderly gentleman whose name I never did get, myself, an eminent university professor, the other lay guests, and at the end the tea-master. The host and the two Daitoku-ji priests served the beautiful red lacquer trays with five red lacquer dishes that are always used at temple parties. The vegetarian food had been entirely prepared by the mother of Daikō-in with the help of two young girl relatives. It would do you no good to have me tell you the menu for most of the things we had to eat are unknown in the West. At such parties only the soup and the rice and tea are hot, everything else is cold, so that many things can and must be prepared two or three days in advance. Side dish after side dish followed, served in a quiet and leisurely manner. Between the dishes we smoked and talked and the host and his two relatives served sake, exchanging cups with each guest in turn. Everything was exquisite to look at and most delicious, but so abundant that I, at least, gave up taking more than a taste from each dish as it came. At last the rice was brought

in, heaped up in a great red lacquer bowl. Japanese people eat rice only when they have finished the main part of a meal, never with it. With the rice they take salted vegetable pickles and tea. At a party where sake is served, the rice is delayed as long as possible for no appreciator of either food or sake will drink after he has eaten the rice. Finally came strawberries.

Most of us at this point had much delicious food remaining on our trays and dishes. This was anticipated and as it should be. How disappointing for some member of the family to go to a party and return empty handed! Now little boxes of thin white wood were brought to us, along with neatly folded squares of wrapping paper and pieces of brightly-colored string. We carefully arranged in the box all the uneaten delicacies it would contain, wrapped it in the paper and tied it with the string. Those who had eaten their entire luncheon were given boxes of food packed in the kitchen. Next we were brought boxes of congratulatory cakes, and next a small square of thin white cotton cloth in which to tie up our packages in case we had forgotten to bring our own furoshikis.

By the time the luncheon was over and all the trays removed, the inevitable photographer had arrived. Benches were placed in the peony garden and pictures taken, first of the old Kanchō alone sitting under a parasol in the midst of the flowers, then of us all, including Daikō-in's mother and her two young helpers, who, their duties concluded, cool and unruffled, had joined the party. Now the Kanchō and the Nanzen-ji priests went off to the tea-room to drink tea, some of the other guests, sufficient time having elapsed since they had eaten their rice, resumed their drinking of sake, and others just sat quietly drinking in the beauty of the peonies. The formal part of the party had come to an end and everyone was at ease.

The next morning a heavy rain was falling. As I have said before, there is always just one day for viewing flowers. But there is just one day for doing anything, one moment, really.

Paul F. Sasaki

Must I always count my breath during meditation?

Counting is not the main purpose. The awareness of breathing is the important part of meditation. Just recognize your own inhalation and exhalation. Let the breath come and go naturally, as in the breathing of an innocent child. Forget everything else.

It is very easy to say forget everything else, but when I start to meditate, many thoughts arise in my mind. What shall I do when I can't even empty my mind for one second in time?

At the moment you think about being unable to empty the mind, you are neglecting awareness of the breathing. At the moment you think you have nothing in your mind, again meditation is being obstructed. The important thing is to maintain awareness of your breathing, ignoring all other thoughts. That is your meditation which Buddha, Bodhidharma, and all the other Patriarchs practiced.

When can I reach the condition of mind where nothing disturbs my meditation?

Do not say "when" as there is no limit of duration. The true meditation has no beginning and no ending. If your awareness of breathing continues until an inch of incense is burned, you are one inch of Buddha. If you continue for the time it takes to burn one stick of incense, that much of your Buddha-Mind is manifested.

What is Buddha-Mind?

It is the essence of your mind. We think many things in the manner of actors who play many roles on the stage, but Buddha-Mind is the stage itself. In Buddha-Mind there is nothing good, nothing bad, nothing to be called right, nothing to be called wrong.

What is the good, then, of engaging in such queer repetitions?

What is bad in it? I have never asked anyone to follow me in Zen meditation. Those who want to accomplish breathing, who are dissatisfied because their minds run in all directions, and out of control, come to me and ask what to do. I only show my own experience. There must be other ways to follow. I do not monopolize the method, nor will I snobbishly insist on my way.

What is the purpose of the awareness of breathing?

To forget that we are breathing is the real purpose of meditation. A child never recognizes that he is breathing. The pianist forgets the fingers and the beautiful melody comes forth. The artist forgets his brush, and he can paint the masterpiece. We cannot work properly and skillfully just because we cannot devote ourselves completely and innocently to our work, but always mix unnecessary thoughts with it. Professor Suzuki says if a man could do what he ought to do, then he would not need Zen.

How can I solve the problem of birth and death?

If you think life consists of birth and death, you have the wrong idea from the beginning. Birth and death are just two phases of the one life. Life is just life.

Do you worship God?

No, I do not, at least while in this Zendo. We meditate on the continuing awareness of the breath, without worshipping anything. *Then the teaching is lacking consolation, is it not?*

Certainly not. As Descartes said, "I think, therefore, I exist" (*Cogito ergo sum*), I would say, "I breathe, therefore, I exist." I am quite satisfied with this; walking on the endless road of "Breathe in, Breathe out."

It may satisfy you. But what about the new student who wants some measurement of progress in this process?

You can observe yourself becoming less excitable and enjoying your daily life more as you continue the meditation. Some of your friends or members of your family may recognize your change for the better. *You say you do not worship God, yet I see you have a painted scroll of Monjusri as well as sculptures of the Buddha and Bodhidharma in shrine fashion as though you emphasize their worship. What are they?*

You are a guest in this monk's home. A guest in any home must accept the host's customs whether they seem reasonable or unreasonable. If you respect and trust him, you assume he has reason for his way of life. *Will you explain to me where your habit of enshrining the Buddha or Patriarchs came from?*

When I first started the meditation class in San Francisco in 1922, we did not have a regular place to meet. Sometimes we met in a friend's parlor and sometimes in a hired hall. During this period the Japanese owner of an art store loaned me the painted hanging of Monjusri, who is the personification of Buddha's wisdom. The Zen monks in Japan and China enshrine him as a saint. This particular hanging was painted by an artist of the Takuma school in Japan some 600 years ago. Then, when I had to move to Los Angeles, I had to return the hanging to its owner. I found a Chinese picture of the Buddha who preached *The Avatamsaka Sutra* and enshrined it in the Turner Street Zendo for 12 years. When the Second World War started, I was relocated to Hart Mountain, Wyoming, where I remained for three years until 1945. The Army was kind enough to move the picture there for me. After returning to Los Angeles, I kept thinking of the picture of Monjusri, so I went to San Francisco and discovered the original owner had passed away, and his son owned the store--and the painting. I then bought it. Therefore, it has a karmic relationship to me and my students. Regarding the carved statue of the Buddha Shakamuni, one of our students asked me to keep it here. The wooden statue of the Bodhidharma was given to me by a brother monk named So-Yen Nakagawa, brought by him on his first visit to America. Thus we have a sort of family. They are very quiet as they join us. Fortunately, I don't have to feed them! These "dolls" are nothing but devices to help our meditation. However, we do not need these devices. We do not need anything. All that is necessary is the awareness of our breathing.

COMMEMORATION OF BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY

Fair weather good
 Rainy weather also good
 In this Angel's garden.
 Thousand red, ten-thousand purples,
 Petals of flowers
 Scatter around.
 Do you know
 What is my family tradition
 Of bathing Buddha?
 This morning I took hot coffee
 And I am warm and comfortable
 Throughout muscle and bone.

晴好雨奇天使園
 千紅萬紫落花翻
 吾家灌佛君知否
 今曉喫茶筋骨溫



kind enough to
 of the genuine Zen
 he "knew it many
 'Mentorgarten' as
 respondent conti-
 Tozen-Zenkutsu, in
 means something

THE PERILS OF TRANSLATION A scholarly friend was write us after a Wednesday evening visit. Speaking spirit he felt at our meeting, he said it was as years ago (circa 1930-1932) at Nyogen Senzaki's he (Senzaki) called it, in Los Angeles. " Our cornues, " The Japanese name of the Mentorgarten was those days a very puzzling name to me, since it like 'East Gradual Zen Rathole!' Now that I'm a little more used to that sort of thing I take it that--barring the ever-possible classical reference which constantly meets us in Chinese--the idea of 'East Gradual Zen Rathole' was that Zen will gradually take root in the East (from the Japanese side of the Pacific, we in America are 'The Far East!') and kutsu I really parody as 'rathole.' It means something more like the burrow of an animal, hence a cave, hence a 'retreat, place of seclusion.'"

In his first talk at the Mentorgarten, Senzaki-San had the following to say about its name: "I named this home *Tozen-Zenkutsu* in Japanese, but it will be called 'Mentorgarten Meditation Hall' in English. *Tozen* means 'the current of Dharma always runs to the East.' *Zenkutsu* means 'the meditation hall,' so the whole name will be 'The Meditation Hall for the Eastern Dharma.'"

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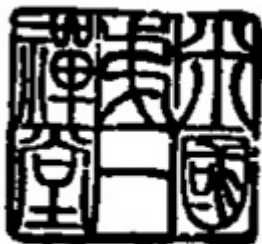
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