

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE FOUNDATION OF BUDDHISM is the Buddha's enlightenment. Since the Buddha attained his enlightenment through his meditation, Buddhism is founded upon meditation. "Zen" Buddhism means "meditation" Buddhism. A building has its foundation. It is upon this foundation that a building is built. It is written in the sutras "The Bodhisattva builds his life upon samadhi."

In the Buddha's time the title or name of "Bodhisattva" was used to describe those lay gentlemen who came to the Buddha's meetings; the monks were called *sravakas*, literally "listeners." About five hundred years after the Buddha's death, monks' Buddhism in India began to decline, and Bodhisattvas' Buddhism became powerful and dominant. Then, of course, the lay gentlemen became the teachers and the monks became the listeners. Monks made monks' Buddhism; Bodhisattvas made Bodhisattvas' Buddhism.

Bodhisattva Buddhism lasted for about one thousand years, until Buddhism itself was entirely wiped out in India by the Moslems. Up to the time of the Moslem invasions, about fifteen hundred years after the death of the Buddha, Mahayana, what I have been calling Bodhisattvas' Buddhism, prevailed not only in India but from Turkestan through to China, from east to west. Indeed, it was the Moslem invasion that drove Buddhism from India to China. It was at that time that the Indian monks went to China.

Of course, Buddhism had come into China earlier, about seventy-five years after the birth of Christ. It was monks' Buddhism that first moved into China; later Bodhisattvas' Buddhism came.

Naturally, monks' meditation and Bodhisattvas' meditation are the same. The English word "meditation" does not really convey the meaning of Zen, which comes from the word *dhyana*. In the T'ang Dynasty *dhyana* was transliterated into Chinese as Chian; today in Japanese it is Zen. In our meditation two elemental parts can be distinguished: samadhi and dhyana. Using the analogy of a candle light, we might say the fire is samadhi; the light is dhyana. Using the analogy of burning charcoal, we might say the charcoal which holds or keeps the heat is samadhi; the heat is dhyana. The word "meditation" lacks such connotations; I use it only temporarily, for lack of a better one.

You must not take just a part of Zen and say: "That is it!" For example, Buddhism teaches us not to believe in this outer existence; outer existence is nothing but an optical illusion, so to speak. Outer existence is nothing but color, sound, smell, taste, feeling: this is true. But then, there are erroneous teachers who tell us that in samadhi--in meditation--this outer existence will be wiped out. We must, they teach, wipe out this outer existence by meditation. Anyone who believes this teaching will fall into erroneous meditation practice. There is no such meditation in Buddhism. Outer existence has no fault. It is the mind that attaches to the outside which is deluded.

In meditation we do not entertain any attachment to outer existence; we leave outer existence. By leaving it we annihilate the mind which is attached to outer existence; but when we annihilate the mind's attachment we do not annihilate outer existence.

If you are attempting meditation under the cherry blossoms in Japan and while so doing begin to think of the Japanese cherry blossoms back home in Washington, D.C., by attaching to these thoughts you are disturbing your meditation. In Zen we do not care about those thoughts which are related to other thoughts at all. You must learn what the true attitude of meditation is.

I studied sculpture when I was young. A man once asked me, "But sir, why do you choose sculpture, which must concern itself with the male and female figures?" To me his attitude was very queer. In the mind of a Buddhist, a figure is a figure, male or female. We do not observe these forms from a moral standpoint any more than we do from a political or agricultural standpoint. When an artist goes to sketch in a field, it is no more to him than a beautiful field. If an agriculturalist goes to that same field, he will see soil for growing or grass for pastures. If an economist goes to it, he will see it from an economic viewpoint; if a politician goes, he sees the field from a political perspective. But the artist sees it just as subject matter for his art. The artist cares for the beauty of the field. In meditation we do not even care for its beauty. The field is just an existence. In meditation we are not refusing the outside, but we are not attaching to it. That is the attitude of samadhi.

It is written in the sutras that the Bodhisattva practices "giving" or "charity." Imagine a poor mother having to hide her starving child from a "charitable" organization because once the child is put in a home she will be refused permission to see her own child ever again! In such a "charitable" organization are mixed thoughts of morality and law. Religion and political power are mixed up. Such an organization could be said to have ulterior motives in its action, strings attached. If the Bodhisattva discovers a need, he gives. He has no attachment to his giving. In meditation you must not have any attachments; you must not think of philosophy, anger, or religion. You must not think of meditating for any purpose.





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When I went for meditation in Japan, I once saw a dye worker meditating and wearing his working jacket with his unmistakable trademark on the back. When I asked him his purpose in meditation, he replied, “Well, I believe that if I meditate, I will become a successful dye worker.” Geisha girls also go to meditate, not inside but outside the temple. I asked one of them her purpose in meditation. She said, “I meditate for my business success.” This resembles some Christian prayers. “Oh, please, God, give me....” No desire or purpose belongs in meditation practice. If anyone meditates with philosophical or theological desire, he is no different from that geisha girl. Just meditate purely, as purely as the universe exists.

In meditation our intellectual power finds enlightenment. As a baby, who was once in his mother’s womb, finds himself in this universe, pure and simple, so the meditator finds the intrinsic intuitive power of his own consciousness, then, in that moment, his consciousness and that of the universe become a united intelligence.

Buddhist theory is, as a Bodhisattva once said, like the talk a jeweler makes about the value of a diamond. Such a jewel salesman cannot sell the gem he is talking about; he has nothing in his hand. He is just explaining it. The real way to study Buddhism is to find enlightenment first. Then, if you must, study metaphysics. To find enlightenment there is no other device but meditation. It is the only device, the only way.

Drawing and Reconstruction by
William Briggs

A SENIOR CITIZEN NOTES People ask me: "Why are you attracted to Zen?" It is difficult to explain my interest to a stranger in thought. Since man took his place in the evolutionary cycle as a self-conscious animal, he acquired a new power never before granted to any similar form of life with which we are familiar. This power has become a tremendous source of good or evil. A number of wise men recognized this centuries ago. They also found a means of controlling its potential. They have transmitted this knowledge down through the ages. Few of us have availed ourselves of it--Western man practically not at all. I have been trying to acquire a small measure of its wisdom. The meetings here and the contact with kindred spirits have been helpful.

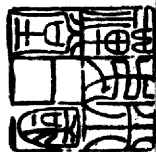
I finally had to write my own formula as it has a special meaning forming a part of my own spiritual experience. When spoken or thought about, it acts as a signal to make me aware of my habitual state of mind with its attendant train of consequences--envy, craving, unrest, ego, preoccupation, compulsions, obsessions, etc. This formula is reduced for brevity as follows: *Words and Thoughts are Living Things.*

Words and thoughts have the power to modify our lives. We can be at their mercy or we can command. The self can dominate and control the self. This idea has been expressed in many forms. Probably no day passes but you will find some manifestation of it. The problem is how to make it influence our own lives for freer living and moral growth. The answer appears to be in awareness, self-reflection, meditation. This idea is the modus operandi of Buddhism. Through application and concentration one finally arrives at a point where this comprehension is the prevailing mood--the permanent consciousness. We become our own watchdog over the Sacred Province of the mind--the source of all our misery and ecstasy.

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