

ZEN NOTES



THE THREE WORLDS *Concluded*

SOKEI-AN SAYS

MEDITATION upon the Arupadhatu was transmitted by previous sages in India. Sakyamuni Buddha learned that method from a rishi of the Samkhya School, Udraka Ramaputra. But finally Sakyamuni disagreed with Ramaputra's view of approaching truth, left him, and reached his own solution which had never been found by any previous teacher. So it is written in the Sutras.

In the sphere of Arupadhatu there is nothing which can be thought or seen. This is the nature of this state of meditation.

When I first heard of Arupadhatu meditation I thought immediately that it cannot be concrete truth. For human beings cannot refuse that which can be seen by our eyes; cannot escape from the sound which vibrates in our ears. And though we conquer all the thoughts in our mind we cannot root them out absolutely from our consciousness. So I realized that this Arupadhatu doctrine is pure hypothesis, that it cannot be accepted as fact. I am quite sure that Sakyamuni Buddha also realized this in some such fashion as I did.

You must understand that I am merely giving you a lecture on the theory of Arupadhatu, that I am not insisting that this Arupadhatu theory is true, and that I am not imposing on you that you practice it. Buddhism is absolutely a theory, and Zen is a practice to introduce you to a truth, to carry you into the state of realization. While you are observing koans or listening to lectures you cannot perceive in haste what Buddhism is, or arrive at any conclusion about it. I remind you of this point. This Arupadhatu theory, however, has some importance. In the abstract sense it is not entirely hypothesis. It is one of the great divisions of Buddhist theory.

In Arupadhatu there are four stages. When the meditator has abstracted every thought and every form of existence, he will find himself in boundless space. To you space extends before your eyes. To us space extends within our minds. You try to retreat to a place quiet on the outside. We try to attain quietude within our minds. What disturbs our mind is thoughts. Thoughts are temporary phenomena. Of course with these thoughts comes violent emotion which has disturbing force. In meditation the Zen student tries to conquer this. That is our discipline. We cannot live always in such a

fashion because we must live as human beings, but fundamentally our minds must take root in immobile mind. Without finding yourself in this Arupadhatu state you cannot find yourself in absolute quietude.

In the second stage of Arupadhatu, the meditator will find himself in his own consciousness. Until this time the meditator thought that he was in the center of immense universal space. But that universal space was not space; it was the sphere of his own consciousness. Consciousness means duration. It has no extension, but it has duration. Duration means time, that is, the duration of all life. It means the life of the soul. Of course in that samadhi the meditator does not abstract space. He finds time within space. This space, however, is not so-called geometrical space, but so-called time-space. These days Western people talk about time-space, or space-time, and they try to call it the fourth dimension. To explain it they use many words and figures and apply higher mathematics; we simply apply our meditation to solve that question of time-space.

In the third stage, having acquainted himself with endless time, the meditator disappears. He buries himself in the samadhi of meditation. It is like a deep sleep. In deep sleep, you know, you disappear, and until you wake up you cannot find yourself between Heaven and Earth. Absolutely disappeared! In meditation, also.

I was meditating in Oregon, in the Rogue River Valley, on a rock, for many nights. Every evening I exhausted myself in meditation; at dawn, I found myself still meditating. Of course I was sleeping--or was I? But I have a memory that I wasn't sleeping. I wonder about this word "sleeping"--I am not quite sure that people know its meaning. Certainly in daily experience there are many different types of sleeping. The insect, for instance, hibernates. That is some type of sleeping, isn't it? When autumn comes, the tree sleeps. It does nothing during the winter. And the earth sleeps, too, for the winter interval, but when spring comes, it awakes. Figuratively we use the word "sleeping" to describe death. "A long sleep," we say; or, "it was his last sleep." You cannot take sleeping just as sleeping. When you are fatigued at the end of the day, you go to bed and sleep. You don't put any value on this sleep, no religious value at least, and you do not think about the meaning of sleeping. We say that when a saint sleeps there are no dreams. I believe this. I am no saint, but after long years of practicing meditation I do not dream as I used to when I was young.

My people try to discriminate between sleep and samadhi. We call samadhi concentration. You must realize that there are many types of sleeping and many types of samadhi too. You cannot rush to say that sleeping and meditating are the same or that they are two different things. You cannot make any conclusion about it.

By meditation we cultivate willpower, the power of concentrating our observation of our fragments of thoughts. When I was young, I paid no attention to my subconscious mind, never knew what was going on in it. But later, when I was older and paid attention to it, I carefully penetrated some

懷 胸
抱 襟
積 懸
陽 古
春 鏡

*Kyōkin ni kokyō o kake
Kaihō ni yōshun o tsumu*

In my heart I hang the old mirror,
In my bosom I store the bright spring.

Chūhō kōroku

THIS MONTH all our subscribers as well as members (who receive it free of charge) are being sent this sample issue of LETTER FROM KYOTO. Subscribers who live in the United States have since the first of the year been finding a blank page with their ZEN NOTES. This is not a mistake, or the secret teaching in invisible ink, (as one reader suspected) but necessary to unify the number of pieces mailed so we can use bulk-mailing privileges available at one cent for religious organizations instead of the usual three. If you would like to receive LETTER FROM KYOTO each month along with your ZEN NOTES, or by itself, please send \$1 for a year's subscription. Because it has been called to our attention that, all over the world, persons who have been trying to read LETTER FROM KYOTO in the small type we have been obliged to use to get it on one page are complaining that it is ruining their eyesight, we have printed it on both sides of the sheet this time as an experiment. If a sufficient number of new subscriptions are made to pay the cost, or our readers are moved to contribute enough in donations to make it possible, we shall be delighted to continue this. Please let us hear from you.

Dear Everyone:

This is a homecoming letter. On March 25, just six months and ten days after we had set out from Haneda, Washino San and I put foot again on Japanese soil.

Our flight from San Francisco promised to break the good flying luck we had had throughout the entire trip. Though twice, in Copenhagen and Zurich, we had come down in rain, never did we take off or fly in anything but perfect weather. But the afternoon our friends the Chēns drove us to the San Francisco Airport, misty rain and pale sunshine were vying with one another for supremacy. Was our perfect record to be broken on the last leg of the trip? Yes and no. On reaching the airport we found the takeoff had been delayed, the first delay we had experienced. Two hours later, however, when the sun had won out, we took off, our flying record untarnished. The gods were with us to the end.

Immediately we stepped off the plane in Tokyo we were enveloped in Japanese atmosphere. The Japanese people love parties above everything else, and to have friends leaving for or returning from anywhere by any kind of carrier is always the signal for a party. So the Tokyo Airport is always bubbling with excitement and gayety that seems, to me at least, to extend even down through the immigration and customs, in other countries so formidable to face. As the plane we were taking to Osaka was leaving in a half hour, we were hurried through the necessary formalities so quickly that one official forgot to return my passport, another to stamp my customs declaration, and the baggage clerk to check one of the bags. But in the end everything was retrieved amidst much laughter and many *sumimasens*, the magic password that in Japan instantly wipes out all omissions or commissions.

While we drank coffee and ate strawberry shortcake--sweet sponge cake thickly layered and topped with gelatinous whipped cream and an occasional berry--we flew swiftly along the Japanese coast, sometimes hidden by low-lying cloud ceilings, sometimes with its mountains, bays, and tiny villages clearly visible. As we passed over the Hakone district, the glistening, snow-covered cone of Mount Fuji pierced through a bank of clouds into the brilliant blue sky. A happy omen for a home-coming.

At Osaka Walter and Dona, our Egyptian lady, were waiting. Driving up to Kyoto the rape fields were showing a faint yellow in the late afternoon sunshine and the mountains the early green of spring, dappled with puffs of wild cherry

blossoms. We were soon drawing up at the entrance to the lane leading to Ryōsen-an. There stood all the household and all the library staff waiting for us, and the neighbors and their children coming running from all directions. How many bows, and embraces, and even kisses, after such a long absence!

It was with some trepidation that I walked through the first gate. But there was Fujiwara San's vegetable field planted as usual, beyond it the trees of the nursery, and beyond that the blue height of Mount Hiei. Now through the next gate, and there was the gnarled old pine just as I had left it, only looking more vigorous if anything. From over the row of oak trees to the west came the cooing of the Miyamoto boys' doves in their high dove cote. The camellia near the stone lantern had kept back a mass of its coral blossoms to greet me.

At the front entrance to the house we took off our shoes. My feet forgot to slip into the felt slippers, partly in my eagerness to see the house again and partly because they had lost the habit. In the hall were the long low bookshelves with their rows of blue-boxed sutras. In the dining-room tokonoma hung Goto Rōshi's "Dreams," that I love so well; and in the shrine in that room, that shelters the antique Korean Buddha given me by my teacher some years ago, were flowers and tea and incense, just as usual. Then Aza and Chibi, our two cats, came meandering in, Chibi with her stomach portentously distended and Aza with that relaxed expression on her often worried face that indicates she is enjoying motherhood again. Only little Mike was missing. She had been found dead in the garden early one winter morning after a short illness.

Now to my own room, and again just as I had left it. Flowers on my desk and Eleanor's picture under them. My books all in order in the case to the right, my typewriter on the low table to the left with a new ribbon in it. In the tokonoma, the great map of China showing the sites of Zen temples in T'ang and Sung, and flowers again, of course; on the *biwadana* (raised shelf) Sōkei-an's photograph with fresh incense before it. On the south verandha my canary was singing.

Then to the kitchen, spotless as always and bustling. Green branches and tea as usual in the tiny shrine to the kitchen god, and in the shrine of those spirits who preside over the "face-washing" room and the toilet as well.

Now I must quickly wash my hands and go to the *ozashiki* (reception room) from which up to now I had been carefully excluded. There a big table had been set. In the center, lying on a bed of red camellias, was a huge boiled tai--a kind of red snapper--symbol of congratulation at all Japanese feasts, and around it all sorts of other good things to eat and drink. All the Ryōsen-an family had assembled, including Gary, who had arrived just the week before from America. It was only much later that the merrymaking subsided and all the guests but Walter said good night. Then he and I and Washino San sat down to a good gossip about all that had taken place during our absence, both in Japan and in America.

But far too soon the bath was ready. In a Japanese household one is never excused from the daily evening bath, and soon after dinner the "master" of the household is made clearly aware that the bath is waiting him. For the master must bathe first, then after him each member of the household successively according to his or her order of precedence. I, being the head of the household, am therefore "elected" for the first bath. Tonight, in honor of my return, the water had been made unusually hot. But not only was the water scalding, the iron tub itself was still red hot. Getting into the tub for the customary soaking after scrubbing and rinsing, the water was so hot I could not tell whether it was burning hot or freezing cold. Where, where could one sit so that one's toes were not against the burning iron and other more extensive parts of the body as well! I was soon out you may be sure, looking like a boiled shrimp, and into the cold "face-washing room". We have no heated bathrooms in Japanese houses, you know.

My bed was ready, a thin pad spread on the matting covered floor, with thick quilts filled with the floss from the cocoons of wild silkworms, lighter and warmer even than goose-down. Inside reposed my best friend, the Japanese metal hot water bottle. It warms one's bed all night long in the winter and keeps the sheets dry during the spring and summer damp. Again everything was as usual. The reading lantern by my side, the book I would read for a few minutes, my glasses; and when I was settled among the bolsters in my warm padded coat--it was still quite cold the end of March--my little family, headed by Washino San, came in to bow and say good-night as they always do. Yes, everything was just as usual. But in the morning, not quite the same. How my bones ached. The fancy box springs and mattresses of America had temporarily spoiled me, and the chairs also, as both Washino San and I later found out.

The next morning, after breakfast and a quick look at the garden to ascertain that the weeping cherry had not yet come into bloom and that the gold fish in the pool were fat and healthy after the winter, Washino San and I were knocking at the door of Daishu-in to bring our greetings to Goto Roshi. Later in the day, wearing my robe and *kesa*, I went to the Honzan to burn incense before the founder of Daitoku-ji, Daitō Kokushi. The following morning I bowed before Daiō Kokushi at the monastery and paid my respects to the Chief Abbot of Daitoku-ji. Next, to my neighboring temple of Hōshun-in to burn incense before the statue of the original founder of Ryōsen-an, kept in the pagoda of Hōshun-in until we can have our own Founder's Hall here. Then to the Honzan to call on the Chief Secretary. Only after these official calls had been completed could I settle down to the daily routine of life.

Perhaps you will think this letter the sentimental effusions of an elderly woman. Undoubtedly it is just that. But when you are my age I hope you may know what it is to be surrounded by such beauty as we have at Ryōsen-an and such loving care as my household, one and all, showers upon me. ERYU
Ryōsen-an, Daitoku-ji, Kyoto, *Issued with ZEN NOTES Vol. VI, No. 6, June, 1959*

considerable depth into it. The subconscious mind is absolutely uncontrollable but sometimes by willpower it is possible to penetrate into it. When your conscious mind penetrates to your subconscious mind, then you forget yourself and there is no space or time left.

In the third stage of Arupadhatu meditation you are absolutely wiped out. But do not make the hasty conclusion that this is the last stage. One of the sages of the Samkhya School in India of the Buddha's time--his name was Alara Kalama--thought this stage of absolute nothing was the highest attainment. It looks that way, doesn't it? But we would say "Your samadhi is quite deep in this state, but your practice is not good enough to find the solution of your samadhi." You think there will be no thoughts, no law, no space, no time, no crystallized operation of mind, but that is erroneous. When you reach the Absolute State, you will find the law of mind. Until that time you are bothered by something else and you cannot find the law of mind written in your own mind. So those heretics get lost because they cannot find the law within themselves. But when you begin to realize that mind operates in that nothing, and that bottomless nothing too is some kind of crystallized form, then you will realize that mind itself is always trying to find a balance. In this present consciousness balance can be manifested as moral law, but in the primary state it appears as balance. Great Life in this universe has this rhythm. You call it vibration as it balances. It is natural. There is no dead emptiness in Nirvana, as your philosophers think. So those of you who drop into the dead emptiness of Buddhism don't know Buddhism.

In deep samadhi when our own mind ceases to exist, our mind is switched to the Great Universe. Its rhythm is not coarse, like our usual thinking. But this state of nothingness is not dead. It is living. Then, for the first time, the individual ego will make contact with the Great Ego of the Universe, and the small ego surrenders before this Great Ego.

This connection makes religion. You may put on robes and you may put a diploma before your shrine and talk about religion, but if you have not this connection, you cannot call yourself a religious man. Before you surrender you are so small, and you try to do everything against the force of Great Nature. Well, you say, if I follow this teaching I will be like those who follow blind nature. I will become like an animal. Perhaps following that religion I will become greedy, passionate, immoral. No, that is your ignorance. We are not obeying human nature then. We are not taking orders from human imagination. We learn the true order, true rhythm, true vibration, true law of Nature.

When you see snow through a microscope, this nice hard snow, how beautiful it is! The law of crystallization is operating in it. There is negative crystallization; there is also positive crystallization. The tree is another symbol of crystallization. It gets warped and distorted by wind and sun and outside environment, but the nature of the tree is naturally symmetrical, so it is always trying to take a balance with its branches, this way, that way. In meditation you try to find that law within your heart. Perhaps you are

painting a picture--just here you put a little bird--it is to take a balance, isn't it? If you do not feel that law you are not an artist. And in the human law of daily life, in the relations of men and women, this law of crystallization also operates. If you don't see it, are blind to it, you are indeed like an animal. We are all like the tree that is warped and distorted and twisted, but we are not naturally twisted and distorted so terribly. We must know where this queer distortion comes to our life, must find out where it begins. So we go back...

The fourth stage of Arupadhatu is not thoughts but it is not no-thoughts. It is neither thinking nor no-thinking. It is not thoughts such as you now have, thinking everything with your mind. That thinking is called coarse thoughts, untrained thoughts, ordinary thoughts. When you switch yourself to Great Nature, thoughts are there, but they are different from your usual thoughts. This much was told, I think, by Udraka Ramaputra. But in comparison with Buddhism it is very primitive. Of course the Buddha could not teach this to everyone. We cannot carry out that stage to convert every one. Only the disciples who have meditated eight or ten years can carry it out.

Refusing to see anything, to hear anything, and keeping the mind quiet as stagnant water Sakyamuni Buddha realized might be the law of the ascetic, but it could not be the law by which the entire world could be converted. So he washed his body in the stream, came back to the Bodhi Tree, and decided to realize his attainment. After he had conquered the attack of Mara's demons and temptation, he came down from the woods to the Deer Garden. Accepting the donations of King Bimbisara he gathered his disciples from among the heretics. Then he built a beautiful temple, put on a priceless white robe offered by his foster mother Mahaprajapati and began his teaching. His attitude was entirely different from that of the sages of that time. They were living in the mountains in caves, drinking from streams and eating wild berries, living between life and death. Their bodies were emaciated and their view narrow. He, too, was called a sage, but his attitude was entirely different from theirs. He brought the law of the mountaintop into everyday life. He extended the law which operates in crystallization into the law of human life.

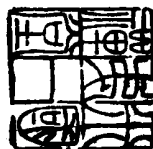


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Founded in 1930 by
Sokei-an Sasaki

A square seal containing stylized Chinese characters in seal script. The characters are arranged in a 2x2 grid. The top-left character is '禪' (Zen), the top-right is '美' (America), the bottom-left is '會' (Association), and the bottom-right is '一' (One).

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