

# ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

**THE SHAPE OF MEDITATION** To hold the physical shape of meditation, you must recognize that your spine is the central column. You must not bend your spine into the shape of a bow. Make it the straight central column and sit as if your hands were meant to support that column. You must do this in order to meditate. You must not sit on the corner of your hip bone but straight. You must also sit very deep.

Half close your eyes and look to the front. Do not close your eyes during meditation because later you will find that you will always be disturbed in confused circumstances; your mental shape will be disturbed. Soyen Shaku, my teacher's teacher, practiced his meditation with his eyes wide open, but usually we sit with our eyes half-closed.

Such is the physical shape of Zazen. In America, when we meet a friend, we shake hands with him; the strength is in the arm. To walk the street you should put your strength in the abdomen and walk straight. Some people give the impression of being intoxicated, their walk is so weak. A gentleman or lady must cultivate dignity. Therefore you must practice the shape of meditation whenever you have time. A person who cannot keep this shape is very undignified. He comes to a house as a guest and very soon is on the back of his spine with his feet up on a chair. Such slouching is most undignified. Naturally, there are formal, semi-formal, and informal attitudes; but even the so-called informal shape has a kind of formality.

When you study a sport, your teacher teaches you the shape of your body. In Japan we study fencing and judo. The teacher always teaches the physical shape. In the Zen temples the novices must practice keeping this shape before they study koans. I might add that it is not good to look from the corner of the eyes. I once met a Zen Master in Japan who was like a wild boar when he looked at you. He never used his neck or moved his eyeballs to their corners to look at something. When he turned, he moved from the waist, turning his whole upper body.

It is equally important to keep the shape of the mind. In order to keep the shape of the mind, you must keep the shape of the body. If you keep the body straight, then the shape of the mind becomes straight. It is easy to keep the shape of the body, but keeping the shape of the mind is not so easy.

To explain keeping the shape of the mind I will use the Five Skandhas or Shadows of the Mind. Since I have often discussed Rupa Skandha, I will not do so this time except to say that Rupa is all objective existence. According to the Five Skandhas theory, Buddha thought of our physical body as a state of mind. When you move your body, you are expressing your mental body with your physical body. Keep your physical body in shape.

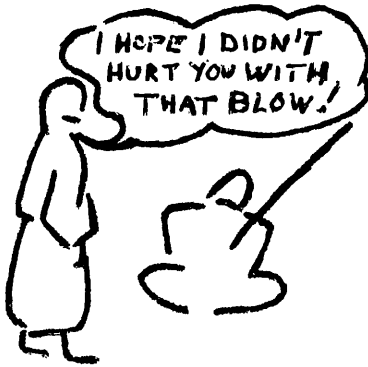


After Rupa Skandha, the second Skandha is Vedana, the sense organs. All of the sense organs must be kept in shape. To do this I have personally always concentrated attention in the ear, hearing all sounds at once and refusing none. In quietude everyone is disturbed when sounds come from the outside, from elevated trains, horns, and the like. Being disturbed, one cannot meditate. Such a person is disturbed because he is refusing those sounds entrance. We do not make any intention to receive such sounds, but we must make complete unity with them. When I was working under the Third Avenue El, it was so noisy that I could not hear my own thoughts. I decided to accept this noise without refusing it, and it wasn't noisy anymore. Of course, it wasn't so comfortable, but I was not disturbed. When I am giving a lecture and the musician next door plays, I accept it as if I were paying him; then, he doesn't annoy me. After all, there is nothing to meditate upon.



The third Skandha is Samjna. This is the main point of the

By WILLIAM BRIGGS



training, the head of the monkey that must be trained in Zazen. You cannot refuse thoughts that rise to the shelf of the mind like air bubbles from unconsciousness and semi-consciousness to consciousness. Nevertheless, such bubbles must be burst before they reach the highest state. Let these thoughts come. First you think about a cigarette, music, beefsteak, a glass of water! You cannot refuse them, but you must not entertain any of these thoughts. Let them come; let them go. Your mind must be like a mirror, reflecting but never holding what it reflects. Thoughts are independent existences. Subjective thoughts belong to you, but objective thoughts belong to the outside. If you entertain them subjectively, your thoughts will disturb the shape of your mind.

The fourth Skandha is Samskara. The thoughts that we have just discussed--about cigarettes and the like--have shape or form; these thoughts create symbols. Words are the symbols of thoughts. When I say "water," the word is but the symbol of the thoughts connected with water. This is not Samskara. Samskara has no words and no figures. Samskara is feeling. It is mood; it is emotion. Essentially, it is emotion. It is always in motion like water, air, or fire. When Samskara moves like any of these moods, you feel that emotion of mind. Such experiences cannot be completely expressed in words. This is the field of the poet who tries to put emotion into words and always feels more

than he can write down. Samskara is a very big world. All things in the sleeping state are in Samskara. Trees and animals are in it; every tree and animal has its characteristic emotion. To keep the shape of your mind you must keep your mood, your emotion, even. When you kill or lie to yourself, you cannot do it.

The root, ground, or foundation is Alaya Consciousness, Vijnana. It is bottomless. Do not think it has a bottom. Do not ever think, "That is the bottom. There is God!" The feeling of God is bottomless. There is nothing in the bottom of the mind. This bottomless mind itself is a mirror, receiving impressions of mood and thoughts and of the outside. Keep your mind in shape as you meditate on thoughts, mood and emotion.

Then you can create your actions from the bottom of your mind. I am very lazy, but I trained a long time to keep my mind in shape. When I came to America, I saw that people here have no form or shape training, for their expression is non-formal. Americans have their own shape, but it is not a cultured shape. When you do not keep control, your mind is out of shape, non-formal.

When you come into the Zen room, try to keep your body and mind in shape. The Zen room is a battlefield. Be trained in Zazen! That is your basic training, your boot camp. It is also the training for daily life. Zen is a very practical religion.

*According to Buddhism there are five desires: 1. to eat; 2. to generate; 3. to become prominent with properties; 4. to become famous by ability; 5. to take sleep.*

WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG I asked my teacher a question: "I came to listen to you; you are my teacher. How do you classify my desire to come here and listen to you under the five desires?" He answered me, "You desire to come here to sleep."

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