

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

ANURUDDHA'S BLINDNESS
1934

Anuruddha became blind following the great shock of being accused by the Buddha because he had fallen asleep in the Buddha's lecture. In that great shock his nerves vibrated day and night--he couldn't close his eyes, so finally he became totally blind. Such a way it is described.

The Buddha sent his personal doctor to Anuruddha to cure his blindness. This doctor was a lay disciple, something strange in a group of monks. He wore white robes while the monks wore dark colored ones. His story is an interesting one. He was the child of a harlot and the king. She threw him away on a street corner and the king picked him up and educated him. Later he became a disciple of the Buddha.

In India, all dead bodies are thrown into the forest on a platform between trees. If you put a corpse on it, it will dry up like a mummy. There was a corpse which passed through sixty years in the cold wood. Then this doctor operated and took a baby out. Sixty years in a dead body! Of course some babies in one thousand years don't come out. It was such a doctor the Buddha sent to cure Anuruddha.

The doctor said: "I can cure Anuruddha's small blindness, but I cannot cure his greater blindness. My Tathagata, you are the one to cure his greater blindness. I can cure his illness of the physical eye, but you are the doctor to cure the eyes of the soul. And the doctor refused to go. He understood the Buddha's request, also the condition of the blindness. He wasn't blind; he knew the nature of Anuruddha's blindness. A doctor's medicine is no good for such blindness.

So Anuruddha was sent for by the Buddha. The Buddha told him: "Anuruddha, you'd better go to sleep in the woods. Never mind because you were accused by me. Get a good sleep for three months. Fold your hands and close your legs and sleep. Even if you snore, no matter. Sleeping is food for the eye, and beautiful sound is food for the ear, delicious taste is food for the tongue and beautiful thoughts are food for the mind. Anuruddha, go into the woods and get a good sleep."

(please turn to the last page)

NO PURPOSE
1938

During a week's vacation in the Catskills, I noticed the trees and little forest animals. They were putting forth their very best efforts in order to live. For them there is, unconsciously, just one purpose. They are not so highly developed as we are; their state of consciousness is unconsciousness. In an unconscious manner, they are striving; their only purpose is survival. Why they should survive is not a problem for them. From their own standpoint, they are not living for any purpose; they are just living. They do not know that they are living. Their living is observed by us. They do not know that they are ignorant of their own existence. They are just in the state of death for in them exists no intellect. They exist as the sky above and the earth beneath them exists. In Buddhism this state is called *Asamskrta* or No-purpose. This view shows how very different Buddhism is from Christianity. The Christian believes that existence has a purpose. He believes that the purpose is the realization of the scheme, plan, or idea of God. It is often said that this idea is the consummation of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Furthermore, the Christian believes that everything that exists here on earth is imperfect and that only by realizing God's purpose will we be perfected. When this purpose is realized, all tree leaves will be as the acanthus leaves, without distortion. I suppose there will be no fat men and no skinny ones. Everyone will be as beautiful as Greek statues. After all, according to the Platonic Idea, the Idea will be realized. To reach the perfection of already existing ends is the goal.

The Buddhist does not take this view. The Buddhist thinks that pushing each other and dividing one's self and squeezing each other--all existences--make *one* position. There are fine trees and poor trees, cat and dog, man and woman, long and short, fat and thin, ignorant and wise; all things take their positions and make their own lives. Sometimes one is bigger than the other and then, later, it becomes smaller; things emerge from nothingness. This *variety* in existence is the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. There is no end to this variety; and it all has existed always and for no particular purpose. The only thing is that the small will become larger, and, then, in the end small again. This is the Buddhist view. The Christian's view has an aim; losing the vision of his goal, he becomes discouraged. The Buddhist's aim is just to survive; when the end comes, he closes his eyes and dies. All is purposeless. We find refuge in this purposelessness. Of course, the Christian finds his refuge in his final aim or goal. Usually Christian teachers in the Orient do not like this Buddhist view. They say that it is pessimistic and has no purpose; if what the Buddhist believes is true, they say, why should we strive? Having no special goal, the Buddhist attempts to enjoy every day whether he lives in poverty or in wealth; he does this because he has no purpose or idea to be realized in the future. The Buddhist believes in karma. I was born in a poor man's family; the time was not good. I came to America to spread Buddhism, but America is a Christian country; I could do very little here. If I had some *idea* of making a temple with a big bell on top of it and twenty-five Japanese monks inside and if I worked to bring three hundred persons here every time I lectured, there would be no time to speak true Buddhism!

The Buddhist vision of life is very good and realizing this in your daily life will keep you very happy always. The chipmunk lives in secret; he looks like dried leaves. It is his occupation to hide himself in a corner, camouflaged like dried leaves! As the snow drops from its branches, the pine tree springs proud: it has its occupation. And the willow has its drooping branches, and bends to the wind, and in that softness it lives. That is its occupation.

Of course, in the Hinayana phase of a Buddhist's life, this desire should be suppressed; there death is the goal! Not real death. It is the useless mind that we set out to kill. Many die in that effort to suppress desire and end their lives, but that was not the Buddha's intention. He intended that we attain awakening and, then, return again and live in this world.

In Mahayana we do not suppress the desire to live. If I have as a goal going to Europe to study French, I start saving money! In Mahayana we do not suppress such things. Observing all human beings, the Buddha came to one conclusion: they have to have the means with which to live, have to have that which gives them life. We are not protected by the powers of Nature or nursed like cubs all of our lives; we are not in a mother's womb or in Nature's womb; we have been born! As the Christian says, we were driven out of the Garden of Eden. We must live by the sweat of our brow.

The question is what are we to do to obtain the means with which to live? If we have a method, we must excel in it. If a farmer is to be the best farmer, he must have strong hands. If a cowboy is to be the best cowboy, he has to excel in riding and roping. If you are an American Indian, you should put forth your best effort to generate your children, educate them and enlarge your tribe, and prepare for encounters with your enemies!

There are many different occupations. I observed in the forest how many occupations there are. And how many worlds! These desires of ours are divided into five classes according to the occupations: 1. To generate in order to survive as a race; 2. to maintain the physical body in order to survive as an individual, that is to eat; 3. to assure security by saving money in the bank, possessing one's own woman, storing grain; 4. to become superior to other men by cultivating the mind in wisdom and the muscles in strength, securing both mental and physical well-being; 5. to rest, which you cannot do when afflicted by desire, poverty, ignorance, or hunger.

What is my occupation? As a religious teacher I am working to give you the place to grow and to die. What kind of religion am I selling? The Christian is selling God in heaven. Others are selling the Pure Land. Some are selling sheeps' heads hung up in the shop. What am I selling? Nothing! Bodhidharma came to China and said no word for nine years. He was selling Great Nothingness. He sold it to China. I am in these lectures of mine selling my nothingness; it is the greatest thing that can be bought, spaceless and timeless. Can you hear the sound of the hand? Through that sound you will attain the Great Nothingness. I am selling this Great Nothingness, this wonderful Nothingness. I received it from my teacher, going through many fears, discouragements, and agonies. I am trying to sell you this Nothingness.

(continued from the first page)

Anuruddha asked him: "Tathagata, you told me the food for the five branches of consciousness, but what is the best food for Nirvana?" The Buddha said: "The food for Nirvana is purposelessness, purposeless mind."

What is purposelessness? If you are pursuing something according to desire from day to night, by your purpose making something for your own utilization, you are never purposeless. Purposelessness is this--I'll give you an illustration. The persimmon drops its fruit from the tree. A monkey comes and eats the fruit and throws the seed away from the mother tree. It takes root in the ground. This is purposelessness, but performs a great function. The muskmelon in Seattle has a very thick coat in a hard winter. In a soft winter the skin is thick. You will call it instinct--for the enlightened one it will be intuition. Purposelessness is food for Nirvana.

Anuruddha at this suddenly opened the Deva's eye and he could see everything clearly. He attained the Deva's eye. He lost his eye but he attained the supernatural eye. Wonderful, isn't it? He cannot see phenomena, cannot see noumena, but he sees Reality exactly as phenomena. Do you see this? I hope so. Though he is blind, he can see everything. I think it is not a mystery. He attained the supernatural eye. I hope everyone understands this.

This story is very simple. If you are a Buddhist, this is one of the beautiful stories. Of course it is written in symbolical fashion. For one not familiar with Buddhism it seems mysterious, but to us it is just plain ordinary talk.

Published monthly by
THE FIRST ZEN INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, INC.
156 Waverly Place, New York 14, New York

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
New York, N.Y.
Permit No. 528

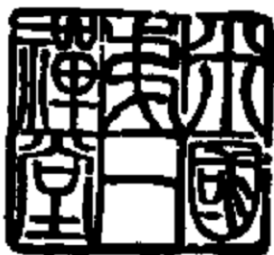
Zen Notes
Copyright 1959 by The First
Zen Institute of America, Inc.



Vol. VI, No. 9, Sept. 1959
1 Year \$1.00
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**Founded in 1930 by
Sokei-an Sasaki**



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