

# ZEN NOTES



## SOKEI-AN SAYS

LUMBINI Legendarily speaking, when Buddha was born he took seven steps and, gazing about him in every direction, raised his right hand and pointed to heaven and dropped his left hand and pointed to earth. He said, "Between Earth and Heaven I am the one to be most revered." This passage is always used on Buddha's birthday, April 8th.

A young novice said to his master: "I can't understand that a young infant could say in human words 'I am the one between Heaven and Earth to be most revered'. How could he say that?"

The master answered, "I'll show you how he said that. "Wa-a-ah! Wa-a-ah!"

Today, in the Zen school we use that expression "Wa-a-ah!" Or Hakuin used the hand: "Can you hear the sound of the single hand?" If you have heard the sound of one hand it has covered the entire universe. You cannot hear it with this ear, but in meditation you know the sound you hear is that universal sound which does not resound on your eardrum. It is truly the deepest and most dynamic sound. When it is stated by the human voice it is just a baby's howl. It is this "Wa-a-ah!" If it is stated in the sky it is a thunderclap. In my school, the Zen school, this sound of the hand represents it. So this is not a mere hand. This hand is the universe. All the universe is within it. This hand is as large as the universe. It reaches from corner to corner of the universe. It is as old as the universe.

Well, those Zen students meet a Zen master and he asks, "Have you heard the sound of the hand?" The smart-aleck claps his hands and answers, "Which hand?" and the master whacks him. Smart-aleck, thinking to catch the Zen master in his little catechism! Zen is not such a shallow thing.

Hakuin Zenji showed it in one hand. Gutei Zenji showed it in one finger. "What is Zen?" He lifted one finger. "What is the universe?" He lifted one finger. "What is Buddha?" He lifted one finger. Whatever question was asked him he always lifted a finger. "What is existence?" "What is non-existence?" He always held up one finger.

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In the temple of Gutei there was a very smart young novice. He went into the village and people asked him, "What is the teaching of your master?" He answered, holding up one finger. "Has it some meaning?" He held up one finger. "Has it no meaning?" He held up one finger. "Is this universe an existence?" He held up one finger. "Is this universe non-existence?" He held up one finger.

Somebody reported this to Gutei, who was waiting for the opportunity to enlighten this little novice. One day the novice appeared before the Osho. Gutei lifted a finger and the little novice imitated him. At once Gutei drew a dagger and cut the boy's finger off. "YAAAHH!" As the boy ran away Gutei called, "Boy!" The novice turned. Gutei lifted a finger. The boy imitated him. "Oh!" The novice realized he had no finger. At that moment he was enlightened. He lost one finger but grasped the whole universe. The teacher was very severe but he was very kind. He took one finger but gave him the whole universe; he took one finger but gave him Buddha.

Buddha demonstrated the same kind of thing. Among the monks one day Buddha lifted up the stem of a lotus. He spoke no word, only lifted up the lotus. All the monks just looked at the lotus, waiting for Buddha to speak. Buddha did not say a word. Only one among the disciples, Mahakasyapa, understood the meaning. He smiled. This was the origin of the Zen school.

Lift up a hossu, it is the same: there is no particular meaning but it has tremendous significance. This line, "I am the one to be most revered," is the significance of this. When Buddha was born he stated this, crying "Wa-a-ah!" Zen is queer, but it is nearest to our heart. We understand immediately what it is.

I had a disciple who was coming to me for five years. Finally this disciple said, "It is meaningless." I was glad to hear this. Everything in human life has meaning, but a true thing has no meaning. Meaning is created by the human brain. Reality has no meaning; it is transcendental. It has transcendental meaning which no one can understand. What we can understand with reason is not worth understanding. Such small meaning as man can understand we don't need to know. You can call it by a name, I can call it by a name. But there is something which is nameless, ageless and meaningless. The meaning of meaninglessness is a wonderful meaning, isn't it?

The passage about the Buddha's birth word was recorded in the Samyukta Agama. The value of these primitive sutras is wonderful and priceless because this Buddhism was described two thousand five hundred years ago. But the lines are short and the true meaning is hidden behind the words. I shall give you a little commentary on some lines of this sutra.

A more complete translation appears in *CAT'S YAWN*, p. 37. You may have noted that the beginning paragraphs, somewhat shortened here, were earlier presented in *ZEN NOTES*, Vol. I, No. 4, April 1954.

Dear Everyone:

In Japan, as perhaps you know, a marriage ceremony traditionally takes place in a Shinto shrine. Buddhism has nothing to do with that rite. To Buddhism has been assigned the last rites for the dead and the ceremonies held on such specific occasions as the dead are to be remembered from time to time. This is true to such a degree that in these days Buddhist priests are often facetiously referred to as "high-class undertakers." Japanese Buddhism, therefore, has never developed a form of wedding ceremony and Japanese people are greatly astonished when they hear that a Buddhist priest has performed one.

Last Spring, after I had returned from America, I had a letter from a young Japanese-American working in the offices of the U.S. Army in Yokohama asking me to marry him and his nisei bride. They had gone through the necessary official procedures at the American Consulate, and had had a Christian service as well, since the bride's family in America were Christians. But the young groom was a confirmed Zennist, and as such was not going to be satisfied with less than a Zen ceremony. I declined to officiate, naturally, but consulted about the matter with the Kancho (Chief Abbot) of Daitoku-ji, whom you know better as Oda Roshi. It seems that some years before he had devised a simple ceremony for a Japanese friend and was willing to perform it again for these young Japanese-Americans. They came down to Kyoto one week-end, and, in the main hall of the Sodo, were for the third time pronounced man and wife by Oda Roshi after what I thought was a charming ceremony. They went away satisfied and happy.

So, when some months ago Gary came to me to tell me that the date had been set for his Joanne to sail for Japan and he was now thinking about plans for the wedding, I could suggest his going directly to his own Zen teacher and requesting him to perform a Zen Buddhist ceremony.

Joanne's ship took three weeks to cross the Pacific, but it did finally arrive in Yokohama where an impatient Gary was waiting for her. They came immediately to Kyoto and the next day were legally married at the American Consulate in Kobe, as we do not have a Consulate in Kyoto. This was a Tuesday. The Zen ceremony was set for Sunday, February 28th. I'm going to tell you in detail about it, for I am sure the time will come when other American Zennists will want to have a Buddhist wedding.

At two o'clock the afternoon of that Sunday about ten of Gary's friends, including a delightful baby boy of less than a year, assembled at the Sodo. I went over with Gary and

Joanne, as the bride had come to Ryosen-an to change her dress and primp a bit after her ride down on the back of Gary's motorcycle from their little house in the mountains near Yase. Joanne is a very pretty girl who reminds me quite a bit of my granddaughter Joan, who was married here in Kyoto two and a half years ago. She is tall and slender, has wavy blonde hair, a lovely skin, and golden eyes fringed with thick black lashes. Having heard from Gary of the ultra-simplicity of life here, she had chosen a smart black wool dress to be married in, one that would be continuously useful.

We were all shown into the main reception room at the Sodo where we sat formally on zabuton in two rows facing one another. Soon the head monk came and escorted us into the main hall. The guests were seated in a row to the left of the altar on the red felt carpets always used in temple ceremonies. The line of monks sat on the opposite side facing us. Presently the Kancho appeared, dressed in a handsome purple robe and wearing a large scarlet and gold rakusu. He burned incense in the large *koro* before the altar, which was decorated for the occasion with a formal arrangement of pine and spring flowers and a tall burning red candle. Then he bowed deeply three times before the Founder, Daiō Kokushi, whose wonderful wooden statue is seated deep within the shrine at the back of the altar.

Next he took his seat before a small black lacquer table to the left of the altar, and before which Gary and Joanne were already kneeling on red brocade cushions. At a signal from the Kancho, the monks chanted the *Hannya shingyō*. The head monk then came to the Kancho bearing a tray on which was a large sheet of heavy white paper folded. This the Kancho opened and read aloud. It was an announcement, couched in the most formal language, addressed to the Founder of Daitoku-ji, the successive patriarchs of the Daitoku-ji line, the guardian gods of Daitoku-ji, and the ancestors of the young couple, and stating that he was about to unite Gary Snyder and Joanne Kyger in marriage, that they would take the "Three Refuges" and the "Four Great Vows." and would swear to remain faithful to each other in this relationship throughout their lives.

With the reading of this document concluded, the monks recited the "Confession":

All the evil karma ever committed by me since of old,  
On account of greed, anger, and folly, which have no beginning,  
Born of my body, mouth, and thought--  
I now make full open confession of it.

Following this was a recitation of the "Three Refuges":

I take refuge in the Buddha;  
I take refuge in the Dharma;  
I take refuge in the Sangha.  
I take refuge in the Buddha, the incomparably honored One;

I take refuge in the Dharma, honorable for its purity;  
I take refuge in the Sangha, honorable for its harmonious life.  
I have finished taking refuge in the Buddha;  
I have finished taking refuge in the Dharma;  
I have finished taking refuge in the Sangha.

Now the head monk came again to the Kancho bearing a tray on which were two rosaries. Gary then went and knelt before the Kancho with his hands held before him, palms together, in what is known in Buddhism as *gasshō*. Over Gary's hands the Kancho slipped a rosary of small coral beads. Then Gary went and knelt before Joanne and placed this rosary over her hands, also held in *gasshō*. Joanne now went and knelt before the Kancho, receiving from him a rosary of heavy brown beads, which in turn she placed in the same way over Gary's hands.

Again the head monk came forward with the tray, this time presenting Gary with a large sheet of white paper folded. Gary opened it and read in Japanese the mutual vow which he and Joanne were taking:

"Gary Snyder and Joanne Kyger have asked Sessō Roshi, Kancho of Daitoku-ji in the presence of the Founder, Daiō Kokushi to hear their vow to marry. They beg all the guardians of Buddhism to protect them and swear to observe the commandments of the patriarchs and the admonitions of the Roshi."

Again the head monk brought a folded paper to the Kancho. This contained the Kancho's personal admonitions to the young couple: "The ceremony is now at an end," he read. "You must forever remember the oath you have both taken today and try to keep it. You must never be forgetful of the benefactions of the nation or of the Buddhas. Live harmoniously together and with mutual respect. Thus, as you grow older you will go forward together in the correct path of married life."

In conclusion, the monks in unison with the young couple recited the "Four Great Vows."

The ceremony was over. The Kancho retired and the bride and groom, followed by the guests, returned to the reception room. A few minutes later the Kancho reappeared and took his seat before the tokonoma, in which had been hung a magnificent piece of calligraphy bearing the two characters "Harmonious Joy." The monks served pink and white iced cakes, the kind always used on congratulatory occasions, and thick green tea. The Kancho spoke a few final words of congratulation, then took his leave.

At the monastery gate the photographers were waiting. Somehow both the American and Japanese press had gotten hold of the news of the wedding. The next day a lovely picture appeared in our *English Mainichi*, and a long and, for once, accurate article.

The wedding reception was held at Ryosen-an. The guests who had attended the ceremony at the Sodo were soon joined here by at least twenty more Japanese and Americans. Gary has made many friends in Kyoto.

The day was perfect--warmish and with flooding sunshine, so that we could have all the shoji open to the gardens. The white plum tree in the water-garden was in fullest bloom. The young couple stood in my study to receive the congratulations of their guests. The tokonoma was soon so piled with gifts that getting them all back to Yase presented something of a problem until Phil and others offered to transport them in their cars.

It was a gay party. We had a traditional American wedding menu--chicken salad, crab-meat salad, many kinds of sandwiches, coffee, fresh strawberry ice cream, and wedding cake. The cake was also the traditional American wedding cake, four stories high, and topped with a miniature bride and groom. The bride cut the first pieces of the cake, of course, and everyone drank a toast in champagne to the happiness of the young couple. It was dark when the party finally ended. But I hear that it really was only adjourned, for those who took the presents back to Yase continued the party on until rather late in the evening.

As Gary and Joanne said good-bye to me at the *genkan*, Gary said: "Well, I certainly feel married." We hope they will have many, many good years together.

TIBET IN GERMANY -- From a letter from a former member of the Institute, now living in Munich:

"One evening I went down to shop for little food items I needed. When I looked to the other side of the street I saw a Tibetan lama in his white dress standing and looking at me. I finished my marketing, went home, was putting down my purchases and thought, "Maybe this Tibetan needs some help or doesn't know his way." He was still standing at the same place, looking very round, like a ball. So I went over and asked him in English if I could help him. He answered that he was waiting for a friend who seemed to be late. I gave him my name, address, telephone number. What I liked was that he stood there really at ease, rather a little amused and interested about the head-turning and staring people.

Some days later he called me and I asked him to come in the evening for a cup of tea. Just this day I was rather busy and when the bell rang I was just able to pull back my hair, which was hanging down like falling autumn leaves. When he came in in a golden red-violet dress with a red-violet toga around him, I felt terrible because I was in a simple cardigan, no tea prepared, and only modest cookies. I tried my very best to be charming and was lucky enough that he liked my room and my little things in it. He talked about his work at the Sanskrit Institute of the University. They are preparing there a dictionary, I think Tibetan-Hindi-German. Then I had the courage to ask if he would meditate with me. He said yes, that in Tibet people visiting each other have meditation together. He sat down on a cushion which he took himself, wriggled a little from one side to the other as you showed us in the Zen Institute, waited until I had arranged my different cushions, closed his eyes without a word, once breathing in deeply, and started. So I did. And without anything I was in deep meditation as easily as formerly. Since then he comes once the week, we eat something together, have a little philosophical chat, drink tea, and then have a meditation. It is like coming home, nothing holy...

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AGAMAS

*Whereupon King Asoka said to his ministers,*

Asoka was one of the great kings of India. He was born about two hundred years after the Buddha's death. He was the King of Kings in India. When Alexander the Great invaded India Asoka made a United States of India and fought against him. They made a truce on the banks of the Indus River. Asoka was a wonderful man. Western people observe history from the Western standpoint so frequently they do not even mention Asoka, but sometimes they do.

*"When I was a child I made an offering of sand to the Buddha*

He made a sand tower, as children do, just of grains of sand, but it brought him a wonderful reward. In his infant mind he felt the joy of giving, even if it was just a grain of sand. You see many times children making little towers of sand by temple gardens. Of course the child had seen his parents offer incense, and send blossoms, beautiful flowers.

*Now I have received my reward. What else can I do but pay homage to the Buddha?"*

This Asoka restored all the remnants of the Buddha; and he carved inscriptions in stone which are still preserved. He also sent out missionaries to Alexandria, Syria, and Asia Minor, and he made hospitals for dogs and cats, the first.

Virtue was planted in his mind when he offered the grain of sand to the Buddha. So-called Karma. As my audience comes here and their effort keeps this temple. It is not for their benefit but for the sentient beings of the future world.

*The King said also to Upagupta,*

Upagupta was the fifth patriarch of Buddhism. The first was the Buddha, and the fourth from him was Upagupta. Upagupta lived during the golden age of Asoka's kingship. From the time of Asoka, Buddhism was promulgated and protected.

*"O Sthavira, you have told me about the places where the Buddha preached as he journeyed here and there.*

The Buddha was going around both shores of the Ganges with fifteen hundred disciples. Sometimes he scattered them in small groups, but sometimes they went in big processions.

*I must visit these places that I may offer alms and pay homage to the Buddha for the sake of the persons of the future world who shall receive the fruits of good Karma."*

This is oriental virtue. When I do something I always think of someone who follows. I build a bridge in a village of five hundred, but it brings great benefit to posterity.

*Then the King said in a gatha:*

In India, gentlemen when they have formally spoken something then put it into a short poem. In translating this gatha into English I have lost all its poetic flavor.

*You have described to me the places  
And the countries where the Buddha preached.  
I must visit them in order to pay my homage  
And to restore them for the sake  
Of the sentient beings of the future world.*

*The Sthavira said: "Very well, very well,  
O Great King. You have made a wonderful vow. I shall  
conduct you to those places for the sake of the sen-  
tient beings of the future world."*

*Whereupon the King commanded the four kinds of  
armies to make ready to depart and to prepare all  
varieties of offerings: incense, flowers, banners, can-  
opies and musicians. Then they departed with Sthavira  
Upagupta. The Sthavira led them to the Lumbini Grove,  
the birthplace of the Buddha. There he recited a gatha:*

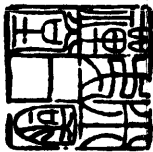
*This is the place where Buddha was born.  
After his birth he took seven steps.  
Gazing about him in every direction,  
He raised his hand and pointed to Heaven.  
This is my last incarnation.  
I must attain the highest enlightenment.  
Among devas and manus  
I am the one to be most revered.*

Seven steps! Three steps, five steps! Human beings count every-  
thing in numbers. But in Great Nature three or seven is the same;  
there are no numbers. I will create this temple in three days, three  
hundred days, three hundred years. Great Nature has no three days.  
You can say any number. There are no numbers in the state of Reality.

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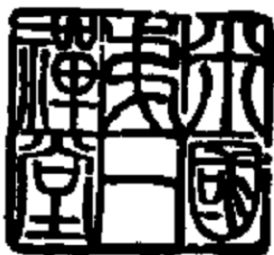


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