

ZEN NOTES



A remark in Eugen Herrigel's posthumous *THE METHOD OF ZEN* (Pantheon, New York, 1960), "The specifically spiritual training starts with *purification of the power of vision*," recalled the following to mind. If some of you who have read this little book wondered how Herrigel's description of Zen study tallies with your own, here is what Sokei-an had to say on this subject, as heard by four of his students on the evening of November 2, 1935, collated and edited by Mary Farkas.

RUPASKANDHA When you read the Agama sutras, the sutras which are the oldest of all in Buddhism, on the first page you will find a word, Rupa. Rupa in Sanskrit is physical appearance, that which we can see with our eyes. The object which we can see is Rupa. Of course sound, smell, taste, and touch are also Rupa, but forms and color relating to our eyes are the first Rupa.

Following this Rupa, there are four more terms: Vedana, Samjna, Samskara and Vijnana. These five terms are the most famous in Buddhism, called by us the Five Skandhas, the five shadows of consciousness. These five shadows of consciousness are the fundamental delusion of sentient beings. Destroying these five shadows one enters pure Nirvana. So these five shadows are the backbone of the Buddhist system. Without these five shadows there is no Buddhism. All other principles are derived from these five shadows.

European scholars studying Buddhism do not find these five terms. Of course they read about them, but they do not realize their importance. When they read Buddhist sutras, they try to make Christianity out of them. Their attitude is disgusting to Buddhists. When we study Christianity we pay homage to them, we kneel down before them; but when they study Buddhism they try to step on our heads. If they want to get Buddhism they must kneel down. Buddhism cannot get through their minds unless they kneel down to the law. This "kneel down" is written in man's consciousness whenever we try to be taught by others.

To find pure Rupa is the first practice to a Buddhist. To find pure physical appearance, to find pure phenomena relating to our two eyes is the first practice of a Buddhist. We think we are looking at something. We think we are observing something. We think we are observing the outer world. If you look into your mind you will find that you are not observing outer existence but that you are observing your own notion, your own idea. Japanese come to this country and begin to study English. The teacher says, "Up." The

Japanese says, "Up." The teacher says, "Perfect." The Japanese says "Perfect." The Japanese thinks he is listening to the teacher's pronunciation, but he is not, he is listening to his own mind.

When you begin to study painting, you imitate the blue after the sky. You think "blue" sky, so you get a tube of "blue" paint and paint your "blue sky" with it. When you bring it to your teacher, he says, "What is this?" You say, "This is blue sky, sir." The teacher says, "Are you making a catalogue of paints or are you making a painting?"

Our eye is a very poor eye. Deluded by our thoughts, we cannot see the real outside. To see the real outside is the first practice of Buddhism. We avoid our own notions, our own preconceived ideas. We try to look at the outside, not with our minds, but with our eyes. We are not trying to be artists, but we try to avoid our notions, our conceived mind-stuff. Then we try to correct our Vedana (perception), Samjna (thoughts), and then Samskara. Samskara is not thought--there are no thoughts in it--it is like emotion, deeper than thoughts, mood. So we try to correct the distortion in our emotions. Then there is Vijnana, consciousness--or, sometimes, conscience. You say "good" conscience, "bad" conscience; but the Buddhist's conscience is neither good nor bad. If you try to use a "good" measure to measure the world, then the world is bad. If you try to use a "bad" measure to measure the world, then the world is good. Usually man tries to measure the world with a home-made measure, his own measure, not an authentic measure, and to judge "this is no good, that is good," with it. He thinks his "good" is always correct and the whole world always wrong. We must destroy such home-made measures and get a universal measure not made by man.

These five practices are nothing but the practice of the Buddhist. But first you must know, must understand, what Rupa is, what physical appearance is, what material appearance is. If you do not know what the physical world is, what material appearance is, you cannot free yourself from avarice, the inordinate desire for gain. You get one, you want to get two; you get two, you want to get four--and five, six, seven, eight, one hundred, two hundred, four hundred--there is no end to it. Avarice is the most painful torture when it cannot be satisfied. But when you understand what Rupa is you will give away your avarice.

When the Buddha said, "You must understand what Rupa is, what phenomenal appearance is," he was talking about what THIS is. We know one thing exists--it is entity. Temporarily we call it Reality. Really we do not know by what name to call it, but a name is not necessary. If you understand what Rupa is, you can free yourself from avarice. When you understand what Rupa is you yourself will not be a mass of avarice so you can free yourself from avarice. This is the Buddha's teaching. In Zen study, when you enter the Zen room and pass the first koan, you will get into this Reality. In Buddhism we call Reality Dharmakaya. Reality cannot be described by words. There is just One--we do not need to call

it *One* but when we use words, we have to call it something. When you get to Reality there is no word to utter, no way to think about it. Reason cannot enter there. But fortunately we have intuition. When men see Reality they use intuition. There is no way to reach Reality but through the avenue of intuition. Intuition is wisdom without experience of eye, ear, or reason. Immediately you realize what THIS is when I strike my gong. But do not make any mistake in perceiving this Reality. When you say "Reality is..." you are only reasoning about it, thinking about it, you have not realized it. It is reason, not Reality. Reason will not take you into Reality. Your eye will not take you into Reality. When you try to get into Reality, get your brain and throw it out, and throw aside your physical body. There is just one avenue--one hope--through intuition. Through intuition immediately you prove Reality. Reality is not a dream. Reality is not a far-away country. Reality is not heaven. It is here, everywhere. THIS is Reality.

When you understand Reality through Rupa, then you must enter deeper and realize it through your perceptions, then through your thoughts and so on until you enter Nirvana. Through Nirvana you get into Reality. This is Buddhism. Through all the sutras the Buddha speaks of nothing but Reality.

Truth is everywhere, in the gutter, on the street corner, everywhere. But you must observe it with your own true experience. "Take clay and make gold," is a word of the Buddha. You must get truth from the gutter, the street corner, and experience it through your wisdom, then you will understand.

There was a fisherman in China who was using a straight needle to fish with for forty years. When someone asked him, "Why don't you use a bent hook?" he replied, "You can catch ordinary fish with a bent hook, but I will catch a great fish with my straight needle." Word of this came to the ear of the Emperor and he came to see this fool of a fisherman for himself. The Emperor asked the fisherman, "What are you fishing for?" The fisherman replied, "I was fishing for you, Emperor."

If you have no experience of fishing with the straight needle you cannot understand the story. Simply, I am holding my arms on my breast. Like that fisherman, with my straight needle I fish for you good fishes. I do not circulate letters. I do not advertise. I do not ask you to come. I do not ask you to stay. I do not entertain you. You come and I am living my own life.

If you fish with the straight needle life is easy and there is no danger of your hooking yourself. When you get the truth and let it pass through your wisdom, then you have true religion. With one koan you will understand the law of the universe and you can acknowledge the truth in each stage of the life of all sentient beings. All experience is the experience of Buddhism. Let each experience go through your true wisdom which is the wisdom of Reality. If you understand Rupa--if you understand what Rupa is in the original sense, you will emancipate yourself from avarice.

Dear Everyone:

A few days ago when rummaging through a file of old manuscripts I came upon an article written in 1934 about a visit we had made that same summer to Peiping and Hsinking, the latter then the capital of the ill-fated Japanese established state of Manchukuo. Four years before we had spent two months in Peiping and the present account makes some reference to that earlier stay in the old imperial capital of what had by this time become the Republic of China. Today China is a closed land to Americans and probably will be for a good many years. So a glimpse of this fabulous city in its last twilight hours may interest you. I am happy to add that the imperial art treasures mentioned eventually reached Taiwan and are safely stored in mountain caves there. Occasionally a few are taken out and shown to distinguished visitors. The account of the visit to Hsinking I'll give you at a later date.

High on the Palace of the Long Spring

Golden bells tinkle melodiously.

In front of the ageless mountains

A water-clock drips slowly.

(Sōji shū)

After an interval of four years we were revisiting Peiping. With peace prevailing in Central China and railroad communication reestablished we were traveling this time from Shanghai on that romantic sounding Shanghai Express made famous by Marlene Dietrich and the movies. There really is a Shanghai Express, the remnants of the famous "Blue Train" of Wagon-Lits cars which used to run before the revolution of 1925. But the train is scarcely as the picture would have us believe. True, we did start out with a great guard of soldiers at the station. Some minister of state, perhaps the Minister of War, was traveling in the coach ahead as far as the capital, Nanking, which we would reach about midnight. And there were soldier-boys guarding each individual car all the way--young, beardless youths armed to the teeth, but always ready with a smile when a photograph was suggested or cigarettes or cakes. But disillusioning as it may be to believe, it wasn't necessary to send a man ahead to shoo the chickens from the track, nor did we have as traveling companions any glamorous ladies who might be international spies in disguise nor any bandit generals. And as for the dining car! Well, I would let the others eat first, and if they assured me that the food really tasted better than it looked, then I took heart and ordered something.

But for China it was a luxurious train, and it arrived everywhere almost on time, and we had no complaints to make

whatsoever. What matter if the ice-cream freezer and the canned goods and other culinary articles were stacked in various places around the dining-car. Who wants to travel on an air-conditioned, stream-lined, Diesel-engined train anyway? For those who do there is always the United States and the Union Pacific.

Two days and two nights of traveling took us through the lush, green rice-fields of the Yangtze valley, where sleek, brown water-buffalos tended by tiny boys, as in Sung paintings, went patiently plodding round and round drawing water from the wells to flood the paddies; and through hundreds of miles of yellow earth that was yielding up its golden harvest of wheat under the myriad sickles of blue-garbed folk. To see with what care and with what tireless expenditure of effort the Chinese peasant, himself and his entire family, cultivates every available bit of this not too responsive land is to realize as never before what the "Good Earth" really means. It is the source of Life itself. And every inch is tended with a devotion which is at once passionate and patient.

The high, gray walls of Peiping, or Peking as old friends still prefer to call it, enclose many lovely homes and gardens. But none is lovelier than the house which we call home there. "The Tranquil Abode of the Peaceful Heart" is its name. An old Manchu palace situated not far from the Forbidden City, it really belongs to friends of ours, a former American Army Officer and his wife. When the Colonel retired from active service after many years spent in the Far East, this delightful couple found that their affection for China had developed bonds too strong to be severed forever. Six months of the year now find them enjoying the picturesque and colorful life of Peking city and the wonderful stillness of the almost deserted temple which is theirs in the wild and rather barren Western Hills. During the other six months both their house and their temple are havens to friends like ourselves.

The same courtly old man in his long, gray silk gown and stiff, black satin hat unbolted the great brass-studded, red-painted gates which open onto the narrow, dusty *hutung*. The same red spaniel, David, a little stiffer and a little grayer than four years ago, wagged and barked his welcome. The same great oak tree in the garden, an oak tree well over four hundred years old, is the abode of the same fairy to whom offerings are always made on the night of the full moon. And against the almost unbelievably blue sky of Peking the flocks of pigeons still fly of a morning, leaving behind them wisps and trails of eerie music from their dainty bamboo flutes. There really is no city in the world quite like Peking, with quite its charm, and with quite its thrill.

Dr. Hu Shih came for tea with us the afternoon of our arrival, and a day or two later took us in his car to see the university of which he is Dean of Literature, I believe. Yes, in his car. For the number of

cars is increasing even in Peking. The rickshaw is not yet a relic of the past in China as it is in Japan. There are more automobiles and more paved streets than four years ago. In fact Peking seems to be sprucing up a bit, to be becoming a little more tidy and better kept. But one has the sad and depressing feeling that, under all this appearance of youth and good grooming, the city is gradually dying. The movement of the national capital from Peking to Nanking, while it was, no doubt, a rational act, sounded the death knell of Peking as a vital, living metropolis. True, the foreign legations have not as yet removed to Nanking, but many merchants have, and all the activity and bustle which is the natural accompaniment of a seat of government is ebbing away.

The Forbidden City with its rosy walls and its roofs of gold and turquoise and sapphire and jade tiles--roofs the fantastic beauty of which seems the flowering of imaginations totally incomprehensible to us from the West--with its great courtyards and balustraded terraces of white marble surrounded by pillared halls of lacquer-red, this is still there. But these halls have not only lost their Imperial Master but also most of the treasures which, under Republican government, had made of this Imperial dwelling one of the greatest art museums in the world. Removed to Shanghai from supposed fear of destruction by hostile armies, these treasures have vanished, many of them. Where? A committee is now at work in Shanghai to determine.

Grass and weeds are sprouting between the exquisitely carved marble blocks of the beautiful Altar of Heaven. The great iron braziers, in which the Son of Heaven was wont to have placed the huge bales of multi-colored silk to be burned in sacrifice to the Sovereign on High, are rusting away. A melancholy charm is beginning to pervade the city, making all the more appropriate the verse of some unknown English poet, which Dr. Hu has translated into Chinese and which our absent host has had carved, after the style of Dr. Hu's own calligraphy, on the white marble tablet surmounting the back of the white marble tortoise near the entrance-gate to the second garden:

Guard each moment preciously;

Already more than you realize have passed by.

A look at the extensive building plans for the new university library to be built on the site of the former palace of a Manchu Duke, and a visit to the handsome, new, and most modern Peking City Library built from American Boxer Funds, would seem to belie what I have said. I spent a morning with my friend Dr. Suzuki, the well-known Buddhist scholar of Kyoto, in the basement of this latter library looking at manuscripts taken from the caves of Tun Huang in western China, Chinese translations of Sanskrit Buddhist texts and the writings of ancient Chinese Buddhist scholars. I hesitate to say, for fear that I may exaggerate, but as I remember it the oldest one I examined was thought to date from about 420 A.D. The ink was still fresh and the writing

perfectly legible. Dr. Suzuki, reading another text as easily as if it were in the language of today, translated to our amusement the complainings of the scribe who had copied this particular sutra, because of his patron's dilatoriness in paying the agreed fee. If the scribe could not get his money at least he could assuage his aggrieved feelings by perpetuating his patron's perfidy.

But the sense of the eventual passing of all that goes to make up the phenomenal world was strong again when, with Dr. Suzuki, I went to visit two Buddhist temples. The blind and aged Abbot of the first, sweet and peaceful and dignified as he was, could have little, or so it seemed to me, to give which would answer the needs of young China. And the dilapidated temple buildings which were his home emphasized only more clearly the lack of real vitality and effectiveness in the younger men surrounding him.

The other temple, just outside the South wall of the city, was interesting from the standpoint of the antiquarian. The fine old buildings had been kept in excellent repair. The courtyards were filled with pots of flowering plants and trees. Every corner was an exquisite composition of curved roof-line, lacquered pillar, gnarled pine branch and quiet gray-robed monk. The meditation-hall which interested me especially, was indeed from times medieval--a glimpse back into ages otherwise difficult for us to envisage. And as we drove away in our somewhat precarious vehicle through the deep dust and the heavy ruts of a Chinese country road, the sharp, harsh tones of the bell which had announced our coming, now softened by increasing distance, floated after us mingled with chanting voices and the throb of the sutra drum.

Yes, dusk is descending upon Peking. But elsewhere in China there are signs of a coming dawn. Let us hope that from the old China will arise a new China which, while adopting for itself all that is best and most modern in present-day science and culture, will not forget its obligations to its own past. Let us hope that above the clangor of machines and the hum of factories and the clatter of the cities will be raised again the voices of the Sages of old, who together with the true leaders of the present day will bring about for their people a new era of prosperity and peace, even as did Yao and Shun.

The autumn gale
Blowing over the waters of the Wei
Enshrouds all Chang-an
In falling leaves.

(*Kidō roku*)



GOOD AND BAD Of course you will see people doing good and others doing bad. And you will like them or dislike them. There was a Japanese gentleman in San Francisco whose name was Mr. A. He was the owner of a Japanese-American bank, the only bank for Japanese immigrants on the Pacific coast. All those Japanese farmers working there were keeping their money in that bank. One day all of a sudden the bank closed. They stopped paying anything and announced bankruptcy. Many farmers committed suicide or went insane. It was really a tragedy. I lost about \$80 too. Everybody was talking about Mr. A. very badly then but today everybody talks about him like a god. With the money he had bought land. It was just a big desert then where nothing would grow. After the land bill was passed, all the Japanese streamed into that land and cultivated the sand and made fields of vegetables. Soon they were supplying greens to a large area of southern California. We call it the "A" land. Well, Mr. A's bad deed turned out to be a good deed. "Bad and good" is always like this. There is no permanent goodness; there is no permanent badness. For the time being this certain deed is bad, but in time it will be good, and vice versa.

From a Sixth Patriarch lecture, Feb. 1936

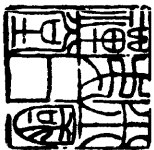
In the notes we had from which the above "Good and Bad" story was taken, the name of the Japanese gentleman was given as Avaho(?), the name of the land Imperial. If any of our California friends have more information on this, we'd be interested to know the details.

The relation of Zen practice to the Five Skandhas is noted also in ZEN NOTES, Vol. VI, No. 7, in case you'd like to compare notes.

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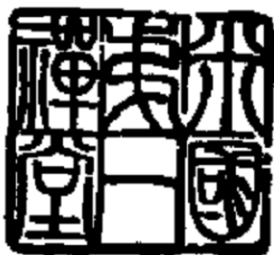
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