

# ZEN NOTES



THE SECULAR WORLD  
1939

Thus have I heard. When the Buddha was sojourning in the Deer Garden of Benares he said to the monks one day: "There are many beautiful things in the secular world. Do they attract people with their beauty?"

The monks replied: "Yes, O Lokanatha."

The Buddha said: "There are many beautiful things in the secular world--many kinds of music, drama and merriment--performed in certain places. There people gather like clouds. A man who is not an idiot or a fool enjoys pleasure and turns away from agony; he clings to life and fears death. Suppose someone should say to him: 'Sir, you must hold this pot of oil and pass through the crowd gathered about these beautiful things. A murderer will follow you with a naked sword-blade. If you drop a single drop of oil the murderer will slay you.' O monks, without fixing his mind upon the oil or thinking of the murderer how could this man behold the beautiful singers and the crowd gathered about them?"

The monks replied: "He could not, O Lokanatha, for this reason. When he looks behind him and sees the man holding the naked sword, he thinks, 'If I spill a single drop of oil he will cut my head off!' He therefore fixes his mind upon the pot of oil and slowly passes through the crowd and the beautiful things of the secular world, never looking about him."

The Buddha said: "Likewise, O monks, the sramana or brahmana who focuses his mind with self-respect and right demeanor does not turn toward beautiful sound or color. He who is able to focus his mind and to remain in the state of right-mindfulness of the body is my disciple. Why does he who follows my teaching not focus his mind with self-respect and right demeanor, without turning to beautiful sound or color, and focus his mind, remaining in the state of right-mindfulness of the body? Thus, O monks, if you practice this right-mindfulness of the body, with right knowledge and right mind, you can conquer all desire and anxiety of the secular world. This is also true of right-mindfulness of sense-perception, right-mindfulness of thought and right-mindfulness of consciousness."

## SOKEI-AN SAYS

THIS SUTRA has a little more hanging down these lines and a song, but this is very long for one lecture, so I have translated the important parts and have omitted the unimportant parts. I think I shall not put emphasis on the narrative part. I shall explain the four kinds of mindfulness.

In these days the Buddhist student practices koans in the Zen School. By that he eliminates the filth of mind gradually and discloses the true crystal mind. "Filth of mind" means all kinds of impurities.

There are two kinds of impurities of the human mind: first, impurities of secular emotion; second, impurities of secular reasoning. People live in secular emotion or desire and think their attitude is erroneous. Then they invent some secular idea to emancipate themselves from that secular emotion or desire. From the Buddha's true view both of these two kinds of impurities are secular mind-productions. So from the true view of the Buddha, almost all religions are secular religions, not to be called sacred religions.

Today we study koans in the Zen School and destroy both secular ideas and secular emotions and desires. Then we discover the pure crystal mind. This pure crystal mind is neither pure nor impure. It exists alone, without being infringed by secular ideas or emotions.

In ancient days, in the Buddha's time, the monks practiced the four kinds of mindfulness. In detail, they are the state of right-mindfulness of body (*kaya*), the state of right-mindfulness of sense-perception (*vedana*), the state of right-mindfulness of thought (*citta*), the state of right-mindfulness of consciousness (*Dharma*).

*Citta*. This word is translated into many English words, sometimes as mind, sometimes as intellect, sometimes as thoughts, sometimes as consciousness. In the Chinese this is always translated 心 (*J.shin*) 'mind-essence.'

And *Dharma* in this particular sense I translate here as 'consciousness.' But this "consciousness" is not personal consciousness or individual consciousness; it is the consciousness which is original and is intrinsic to all sentient beings. It exists within us. It is written in Sanskrit as *Dharma*, but in this particular sense it must be translated as consciousness.

*Kaya* and *vedana*, body and sense-perception, make a pair. As a mirror has surface and back, body is front and sense-perception is back. Without a back the mirror cannot exist; without a surface there is no back. Body and sense-perception create one existence.

And then the next stages, *citta* and *Dharma*. *Citta* is what you experience in your mind, and *citta* proves its own existence--existence which we experience in mind and our own intellect. When mind registers thinking it is *citta*; when it flows as debris in the water we don't call it *citta*, it is just *manas* (mind-stuff). But when this *manas*, this mind-stuff, is registered in our own intellect this awareness is called *citta*. And this

Dear Everyone:

(Continued from the July Letter)

THE Emperor, too, would grant us an audience. At eleven one morning the limousine of the Imperial Household drew up before the hotel entrance. Our interpreter, a young Chinese from Peking whom we shall call Mr. Li, was in cutaway and winged collar, gray gloves and patent-leather shoes. So was my husband. And I! Well, it doesn't matter what I wore. In the car Mr. Li suggested that we tell him the questions which we intended to ask the Emperor. Not that he wished to be inquisitive, but it did make it easier for him if he knew beforehand what the subjects of conversation were to be. He wouldn't have to strain quite so much. Since his clothing was quite a strain and his shoes quite a strain and since he was already mopping his brow from the warmth of the day, we would have liked to help him out; but the best we could do was to assure him that we wouldn't ask any embarrassing questions.

We arrived at the palace. Not the great edifice to be "built in the grove of trees yonder," but at the gates of the gray brick Salt Gabell, or former administrative offices of the Salt Tax Board. Past single lines of soldiers at attention we walked, down a short avenue to the inner gate, through a modest courtyard, and into the large drawing-room of a gaunt, spare building. Almost as soon as tea had been served us by an attendant we were told that the Emperor was waiting to receive us. We crossed the courtyard again and entered another, smaller building. A very short hall brought us to a door which opened even before we reached it. Into a good-sized, foreign-style room, furnished as you might expect to find any nice hotel sitting-room furnished, we entered.

From the couch opposite the door where he had been sitting there rose a young man of perhaps thirty, dressed in a simple, khaki-colored uniform and wearing a single decoration on his breast. A slender young man, fairly tall, with sensitive hands and with the eager expression on his sensitive face somewhat sobered by the large, pale blue glasses which shaded his dark eyes. He greeted us in English and motioned us to seats on either side. Mr. Li, more warm and strained than ever under increasingly onerous duties, excused himself for having to address himself solely to His Majesty in order to thoroughly acquaint him with who my husband might be and with the fact that I was, well, simply I. That accomplished, the Emperor turned to my husband and through Mr. Li thanked him for his understanding viewpoint on various political matters.

Then turning to me he said quite simply and naturally,

always through Mr. Li, of course, but indicating in various ways that he understood much of the English in which my part of the conversation was carried on:

"And so you are a Buddhist?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"And you have studied Zen in Japan?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"And you have practised meditation in the Meditation Hall of a Zen monastery?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"I also do meditation every day. Will you tell me..." And there followed a short conversation, more or less technical, concerning the practice of meditation.

A secretary entered and laid several cards on the table before the Emperor. But still he continued:

"Do you know our Chinese Sages?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Do you think that they still have something living and worthwhile to offer to our people today? Or do you think that only your own western philosophers have a vital message for these times?"

I expressed to him my deep and sincere admiration for Confucius and begged that in the new State of Manchukuo the school-children from their earliest years might be taught that most important of all the great Sage's teachings: that the welfare of the State depends upon the rectification of the heart of the individual man.

"Then you understand what is meant by 'Wang Tao'?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

And lest you, perhaps, do not know the "Kingly Way" of the Confucian Teachings, I shall quote it here, this "Kingly Way," which the Emperor Kang Te has proclaimed as the basic political doctrine of the State of Manchukuo.

#### WANG TAO

Yen Yuan asked about perfect virtue. The Master (Confucius) said, "To subdue one's self and return to propriety is perfect virtue. If a man can for one day subdue himself and return to propriety, all under heaven will ascribe perfect virtue to him." Tzu Lu asked what constituted the superior man. The Master said, "The cultivation of himself in reverential carefulness."

"And is that all?" asked Tzu Lu.

"He cultivates himself so as to give peace to others," was the reply.

"And is that all?" asked Tzu Lu again.

The Master said, "He cultivates himself so as to give peace to all people, even as Yao and Shun were solicitous about this."

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From the Son of Heaven down to the masses of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides.

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When the great doctrine prevails all under the heaven will work for the common good. The virtuous will be elected to office and the able will be given responsibility. Faithfulness will be in constant practice and harmony will rule. Consequently mankind will not only love their own parents and give care to their own children; all the aged will be provided for, and all the young employed in work. Infants will be fathered; widows and widowers, the fatherless and the unmarried, the disabled and the sick, will all be cared for. The men will have their tasks and the women their home. No goods will go to waste, nor need they be stored for private possession. No energy should be used for personal gain. Self-interest ceases, and theft and disorder are unknown. Therefore, the gates of the houses are never closed.

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Our audience had lengthened far beyond the time allotted to it. We rose to go. His Majesty rose also and stopped us for a moment.

"Our teaching is the rectification of the individual that the State may be rectified. Your teachings are in essence the same, are they not? Our people wish for peace. And your people have the same desire, do they not? I practise Taoist meditation and you practise Buddhist meditation. And yet we realize the same Reality, do we not?"

And then very simply and in English His Majesty said, raising up the forefinger of his right hand,

"All is One, is it not?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

And we bowed our way from the room\*\*

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Kung Tzu, whom we in the West know as Confucius, was born in the State of Lu, modern Shantung, in 551 B.C. Though born in a humble family he seems to have been of aristocratic lineage. We know little of his early life but he himself says that he was born with a hunger for knowledge and a love of learning which made of him an indefatigable and devoted scholar to the end of his life.

In his early manhood he travelled extensively, even going as far as the former capital of the Chou dynasty where tradition tells us he met the old philosopher, Lao Tzu. After his return home with his students who were already numerous, at the age of forty, he plunged into active politics, as it were, and served his state brilliantly in various official capacities. At the age of fifty-two, his success as an administrator had so increased the fortunes of Lu, of which principality he was Acting Minister of State, that jealousy was aroused in the hearts of the neighboring rulers. When a gift of dancing girls and musicians was sent by these same neighboring princes to the ruler of Lu for the

express purpose of diverting him from the path laid out for him by his talented Minister, Confucius urged against its acceptance. The charms of the dancing girls, whom the prince had already surreptitiously visited, proved more potent than the high ideals of the sage, however. The gift was accepted, and the Minister, discouraged and disheartened, took his departure. For the next fifteen years he roamed the country accompanied by his students, looking for a ruler who would listen to his doctrines and who would put them into practice. But all, while they esteemed him highly, seemed to feel that his political theories and his moral precepts were of too rarefied a character to be wholly compatible with the yearnings of their more earthy natures.

Upon his return to his native state of Lu at the age of sixty-eight, he set about to rearrange and explain the ancient texts and records of the Middle Kingdom, in accordance with his own ideas. Traditionally he is said to have so edited the Five Classics: The Book of History, the Book of Poetry, the Book of Rites, the Book of Changes, the Book of Music; and to have rewritten, under the name of the Spring and Autumn Chronicles, the history of his own State of Lu in such a manner as to have embodied in it, through his system of the "Rectification of Terms," his criticism of past history and his own theories of government.

Four years later, at the age of seventy-two he died. The following quotation from the "Life of Confucius", a section of the "Historical Records" of Ssu-Ma Ch'ien, written about the second century B.C., reveals in part the response of his contemporaries to the passing of the Master and of those men who came later, to the greatness of his nature and his teachings:

"All the disciples mourned him for three years. When the three years of mourning were over, then they separated and went their ways, and once more each one wept bitter tears wrung from his heart. Some there were who remained even longer. Tzu Kung alone built himself a hut by the grave mound. He remained, all in all, six years before he departed. The hall in which the pupils of Confucius dwelt was later turned into a temple in which the clothes, hats, lute, chariots, and books of Confucius were preserved. All of this was kept for over two hundred years, until the Han period. When the first emperor of the Han Dynasty came through Lu, he offered a great sacrifice to Confucius. When princes, dignitaries and ministers come, they always first visit the temple, before they go about their business. Confucius was a simple man of the people. But after more than ten generations his doctrine is still handed down, and men of learning honor him as Master. From the Son of Heaven, and from Kings and princes on, all who practise the six free arts in the Middle Kingdom take their decisions and their measure from the Master. That can be designated the highest possible sanctity.

"The Chief Historian says: 'In the Book of Odes it is written':

'The high mountain, he looked toward it;  
The distant road, he walked along it.'"

\*\* When the Russians entered Manchukuo in the final days of the last war (1945), the former Emperor was immediately taken prisoner. His whereabouts, if he was still alive, have been totally unknown to the public until a few months ago. At that time, a short notice appeared in the Tokyo papers to the effect that he had recently been released and was now engaged in garden work. Where was not stated.

citta is the surface of the mirror and consciousness is the back. So I translate citta and Dharma 'thought' and 'consciousness'--thought is the surface of the mirror and consciousness is the back.

From this diagram our existence is veneer. There is a surface pair, kaya and vedana, and in the rear is a pair, citta and Dharma. So our mind is created. It is a very awkward diagram, but primitive Buddhism was systematized very carefully. By that analysis of mind the Buddhists practiced this type of meditation to realize true existence, to realize the original aspect of existence. In a Zen koan it is said, in Japanese, "*Honrai no memmoku.*" It means the original aspect of you yourself. If I borrow a western philosophical term, it is the word Reality, or the state of Reality, or the nature of Reality.

Secular people think there is a state which is called pure. Everyone thinks there is a heaven. No storm or tempest reaches there, no filthy smell of the burning earth will reach there in the end of the earth. When the Seven Suns appear and old Earth Mountain burns no filthy smell will reach there! Almost everyone has this secular thought. When they conceive this mind everything on earth becomes impure. And then they think that eternal peace and happiness are in heaven, that after our death we go up there if we have created merit here and will dwell in eternal peace.

There are three secular thoughts, three words which the human mind likes--peace, happiness, success. Heaven is the result of success, and peace and happiness are there. When you think about it, how foolish and illogical, and how miserable too.

And then secular people think of "eternal" too. This is one of the big words, big thoughts. "Everything changes, but there is something which is never changed; the eternal never changes. After my death, when ends this human life, I go to eternal life." Who is the one who lives this eternal life? And then comes the answer which spoils everything. It is "I"--the eternal "I."

Well, we think, this is a big question. Is there atman or man? Does "I" exist as a drop of water in the ocean or as part of the ocean itself? We don't know. So "I-ness" becomes very dubious. Well, if I-ness exists, then under what name? No name. What is its character? No character. And so on.

To destroy these four secular ideas--peace, happiness, success, eternal--we practice the four states of right-mindfulness. In ancient days, in the Buddha's day, there were many teachers who initiated this.

In the first place they observed this body (kaya). Body is an agglomeration of the four elements--earth, water, fire, air. It will be decomposed finally; therefore life is agony, therefore life is impure. Of course this body is decomposed as filth, as pus, as blood, and gradually ceases to exist. This body is impure therefore. To escape the idea of impurity you must not think that this is *your* body. When you realize this is not your own body, that you are not possessing this body, you forget

impurity and forget the related thoughts, pure and impure-- "impure" exists because of "pure"--and then you really reach the state of Nirvana, neither pure nor impure. When people forget dualism, then immediately--Nirvana. Nirvana is there, very near.

We have a koan about this in Zen: "When the light of your eye disappears in the pangs of death, how can you emancipate yourself from agony?" In such a way the student realizes this body doesn't belong to him. Well, if this body doesn't belong to him, is there any necessity for emancipation?

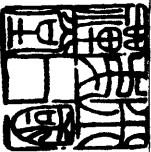
Next, he comes to vedana, sense-perception. What is sense-perception? Then he comes to citta, thoughts. What is citta? Then he comes to Dharma, consciousness. So he practices from one to two, three and four. Next he practices, inverting, from four to three to two to one. Then he destroys all those queer notions produced by the thought of dualism and he realizes Nirvana. His body disappears and his mind disappears. He is living here, eating, sleeping, but from the foundation his ego is destroyed. In ancient days those monks practiced so.

But this is not yet Buddhism. It is a contrivance, a boat to carry you to Buddhism. There is no "ism" when you reach there. This sutra is a doorman, an elevator man, not the master. You come to the doorman, "How do you do." You think he is the master, but he is not the master. And you come to the elevator man and say, "How do you do." You think he is the master, but he is not the master, he is the lift-man to lift you to the master. Everyone places the emphasis on a queer place.

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