

ZEN NOTES



THIS WORLDLY LIFE
1942

The Five Skandhas is one of the most important technical terms in Buddhism. The Four Smriti is also a very important technical term in primitive Buddhism. There are four states upon which the monks of ancient days meditated. The first state is body, kaya; the second, vedana; the third, citta; and the fourth, Dharma. About these four smriti the Buddha addressed the monks in a sutra, the name of which is "This Worldly Life."

(Because of lack of space we are not repeating Sokei-an's abbreviated transcription of this work here as it was included in the previous issue of ZEN NOTES under the name of "The Secular World." It may be referred to there. Editor.)

I have heard this sutra referred to many times when I was associating with my friends. The king ordered a gentleman to pass through a place of performance with an oil vase, holding it filled with oil. "If you pass through there without spilling a drop of the oil, I will give you a reward. If you fail, a man following you with a naked sword will slay you." But in my sutra there is no such line and no king appears here.

By the "performance", mentioned in this version, the Buddha means all objective things of beautiful appearance and all beautiful objects, including dancing and singing and music and farce. Perhaps the "farce" was really a drama, but from the Buddha's view it looked like a piece of farce, with no meaning in it. I think the Buddha would not perceive the drama in such a fashion, but those who wrote the scriptures put it that way.

And the "gentleman" means one of proper conduct and way of behavior, that is, someone observing the commandments. Properly educated, he acts, puts on his garments properly, walks properly, guards his sense-organs properly, and maintains his self-respect, then concentrates on the four states of smriti. For when you observe the four states with concentration you must observe as though you are one who is holding the oil vase and passing through a crowd. This is smriti.

In the Western World there is no such word as samadhi or smriti. But in Western daily life many times I observe people in samadhi and smriti. Samadhi and smriti are really everyday practice for the Buddhist. In everyday life, in the Buddhist mind, when Buddhists try to make access to something, to analyze something, they empty their minds. Therefore they will be absorbed into samadhi, or will concentrate their minds to smriti.

Samadhi is concentrated mind, negative; smriti is concentrated mind, positive. Mind in smriti is like an arrow in a bow on a bow-string which is drawn tight--it will be discharged in the next moment. Mind in samadhi is like the bow with the string not tense, not pulled, but relaxed. So you must understand in such a way the difference between samadhi and smriti.

Now to correspond the Four Smriti to the Five Skandhas, you will find out a very interesting relation between these two. In the Five Skandhas rupa is body; vedana is perception; samjna is present mind which thinks, counts numbers and discriminates between this and that--mind which can be controlled by smriti; samskara is the mind which is in the state of samadhi and which cannot be controlled by the present mind. But in samadhi the meditator will find the finest and marvelous quality of the creative force of Nature. Ancient scholars counted all these passions, moods, agonies, anger and everything in samskara because of course they do not belong in samjna, the thinking mind. The seeds of samskara are sown through many reincarnations on the ground of the human mind. Then there is the soil of mind which is consciousness, vijnana. These five are called the Five Skandhas. Consciousness is not eternal existence. Consciousness comes and consciousness goes. If you wish to find the perfect self of Buddha you must find his entire person outside the state of consciousness. Usually people believe that consciousness is Buddha; most people think consciousness is final, but the Buddha taught us from the beginning that consciousness is not final.

In the Four Smriti the first, body, corresponds to rupa. And when you are meditating on rupa, body, you are really meditating upon vedana. Meditate upon the eye and the things the eye contacts. What is this eye? In such a way we meditate. What is this sound? What is ear? The smriti of rupa meditation corresponds to the smriti of vedana; the smriti of citta corresponds to samjna. And Dharma corresponds to both the outside of Dharma and the inside, within and without, and the inmost Dharma. This Dharma includes all the finest part of the mind--samskara, consciousness and the state which is not consciousness.

The Buddha used the word Dharma many times to express the state which is not consciousness yet, but will be. When he used it as Dharmakaya, the state which is not yet consciousness, he used what will be consciousness, in which consciousness is latent. If it were born in this world or in any world it is a condition of Dharma; if it were not born in this world or in any world, it is a condition of Dharma. If you are born in this world it can be a consciousness. Consciousness is a condi-

Dear Everyone:

IMMEDIATELY after the rains ceased this year the summer heat began with a vengeance. Since the middle of July we have sweltered with the thermometer continuously between 95 and 100, and the same weather promised until well after the middle of August. We found work under these conditions almost impossible, so decided to close the Institute the first of August rather than the middle, as is our habit.

Almost every year on August 16th, the last day of O Bon, the Buddhist festival for the souls of the dead, we have a picnic on the river at Arashiyama. Since many of our members would be out of town by mid-August, we decided to have the excursion on July 31 and, instead of taking our supper with us, to go to Tenryu-ji, one of the seven Rinzai Zen headquarter temples in Kyoto, for a vegetarian dinner there before embarking on our boat ride.

Tenryu-ji- "The Temple of the Heavenly Dragon"- was founded by the first of the Ashikaga shoguns (military dictators), Ashikaga Takauji, under rather interesting circumstances. The period in Japanese history was that of the last days of the Hojo family, who for two hundred years had held the military dictatorship of the country, with their seat of power at Kamakura, far to the east of the "effete" capital Kyoto where the emperors resided.

At the beginning of the 14th century a struggle began between the senior and junior lines of the imperial house for succession to the throne, a struggle that eventually engulfed the entire country in war for over fifty years. The details of the struggle are almost too complicated for even historians to unravel. It suffices to say that Ashikaga Takauji, an extremely able and ambitious man, who began his career as a general under the Hojos, when he sensed that the days of this family as a military power were numbered, transferred his allegiance to the then reigning emperor Go-Daigo, who represented the junior imperial line. Still later, when he saw great personal advantage to be gained by espousing the cause of the senior line, he turned against Go-Daigo and almost simultaneously brought the Kamakura shogunate to final defeat, seated the claimant of the senior imperial line on the throne, and established himself as the first of the Ashikaga line of shoguns with headquarters in Kyoto.

Meanwhile the emperor Go-Daigo had been forced to flee from the capital to the mountains of Yoshino south of Nara. There he died in 1339. When news of the death of his former imperial master whom he had betrayed reached Takauji, it is said that he was overcome with grief and remorse. He ordered five days of mourning throughout the country for Go-Daigo and himself copied a sutra as a means of bringing repose to the soul of the deceased emperor. Moreover, in memory of Go-Daigo, he had constructed a magnificent temple at Arashiyama which he named Tenryu-ji. The finest of the buildings was a shrine for the memorial tablet to the

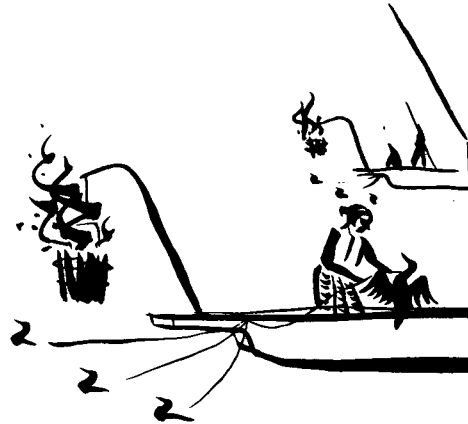
late emperor. To be the ecclesiastical founder of the temple he called one of the most famous Rinzaï Zen priests of the period, best known by his imperially bestowed title Muso Kokushi, or the "National Teacher Muso." Muso Kokushi was a great garden architect, among his other accomplishments, and the large and serene garden he constructed for the main building, with its broad pond and masterly arrangements of rocks, and with the wooded mountains of Arashiyama as a background, still stands today as one of the gardening masterpieces of Japan.

Muso Kokushi left a number of distinguished Dharma-heirs. They, in their turn, have provided many equally distinguished priests to Rinzaï Zen in the intervening centuries.

Tenryu-ji has been devastated by fire many times. Most, if not all, the buildings that comprise it today date only from the beginning of this century. But all are on the same grand scale as characterized them in the past. The shrine to Go-Daigo, for instance, though bare of everything but the imperial tablet, is built of the most exquisite woods and its metal trimmings are gold-plated.

Since the last war Tenryu-ji has suffered the same rapid decline as several of the other large Zen monastic establishments. The sixty or more monks that its sodo used to house have dwindled to a mere three or four. Recently the present abbot seems to have decided that, in order to have funds to keep the temple in existence even physically, a drastic change in its administration was necessary. What Zen study the few monks residing there have is not clear. But the temple itself has become a place for fee-paying sightseers as well as a restaurant where a most excellent vegetarian dinner, including anything one may want to drink, will be served. Several new tea houses are being constructed for the use of small groups, and in the great entertaining rooms parties of two hundred can easily be accommodated. The shrine rooms are kept intact, however, and presumably the usual services held in them. On a hot summer night Tenryu-ji provides an ideal place for dinner, with the sun sinking over the cool green hills to the west and its last light playing on the broad, still pond and the stretches of white sand that surround it, and the evening bell sounding from the somewhat distant bell-tower.

After our dinner last week, we all, some twenty of us, walked to the river, not far distant, and took one of the lantern-decorated boats that are slowly poled up and down. The heat had brought out hundreds of Kyotoites to enjoy the cool of the evening breezes on the water and to watch the cormorant fishing. I have told you in an earlier letter about this very ancient method of using birds to catch small river fish at night. The fishing boats, manned by three men and with a flock of seven or eight birds, come slowly down the river, great flares of burning faggots



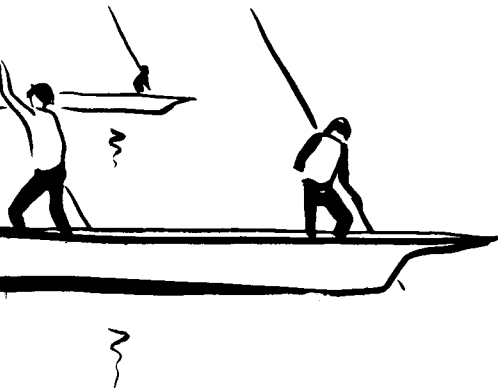
hanging from their prows to entice the fish. Jack Craig, one of our new members, who has come for a long period of Zen study, has made a sketch of one of these boats. I hope that from now on Jack will provide more illustrations for these letters.

Another sad example of the inroads of commerce upon the old Buddhist establishments due to lack of support is what is happening to the Tendai temples on Mount Hiei to the east of Kyoto. Last year a fine sightseeing toll highway was completed up the mountain from the Kyoto side, with magnificent views of the surrounding mountains and of lake Biwa. To accommodate the streams of sightseeing buses and cars that go up and down this road daily a great parking space has been made just below the main temple compound on the top of the mountain. There loud speakers blare all day long, souvenir hawkers vend their wares, and ice cream and soft drink parlors abound. The finest of the temples in this compound burned to the ground a few years ago. Now only two of any importance are still standing. Of the quiet and beauty of the great cryptomeria forest in which these temples were set not a vestige remains. One must go deep into the forest by almost invisible paths to reach the few small temples and hermitages where some of the old practices are still carried on.

On the top of an opposite peak an amusement park has been constructed, a kind of small Coney Island with a few purely Japanese innovations, all conducive to more raucous noise. That these mountain amusement centers answer a need or demand of modern Japanese people, young and old, is proven by the hordes who mill through them daily.

Somewhat below this amusement park and just off the scenic highway a new hotel has been built. This is quite an attractive building, constructed and furnished in good present-day Japanese taste. It was financed largely by big Osaka companies--banks, manufacturers, etc.--and its guests are in large part the employees, with or without their families, of these companies who, at company expense, come here usually in large parties for vacations of several days, or just for a day's outing. The smorgasbord is "the thing" in Japan right now, and the Hieizen Hotel provides a fine one every Saturday and Sunday night, occasionally varying this with an outdoor barbecue, so I am told, which is equally popular. In addition there is a swimming pool, ping-pong tables, and various games, as well as outdoor movies after dark. We go up to this hotel for dinner on occasion when further endurance of the heat seems impossible. The temperature is a good twenty degrees cooler on the mountain and the food, all western style, better than any served in our Kyoto hotels at present.

As for news of our Kyoto members, there is not too much to say. Miura Roshi must already be with you in New York. He came twice to Kyoto this summer and stay-



ed at Ryosen-an. He had much to tell of his experience this past year and of his hopes and plans for the coming one in your new building. Mrs. Coward should be back with you by now, and I hear you are to have another O Sesshin at Bedford Hills the end of this month. Now that their house is completed, our Egyptian lady has finally gone to Tokyo to live. We all miss her very much indeed, as we do Mrs. Coward. Ernesto Falla of Guatamala, who has been at the Daitoku-ji Sodo for the winter and summer terms, returns home in a few days, and Zeff Ben-shahar of Jerusalem is already on his way back to Israel after a like stay in the Sodo.

The library staff are either already vacationing elsewhere or about to go, so I am here at Ryosen-an alone, except for the almost daily visitors, in large part professors or students from America on short holidays.

But my hands are quite full, nevertheless, and not only with my own work. This seems to be the "building year" for the Institute. Zuiunken, the fine house situated within the Daitoku-ji compound only two minutes walk from Ryosen-an, which was offered us last year and not accepted for a number of reasons, was offered us again this spring by the Honzan. Since a number of people had written indicating their intention of coming this fall for long periods of Zen study, the directors decided to make the plunge and take over the building for use as a student's residence. We are presently in the midst of such repairs and alterations to it as will make it an ideal place for foreign students to live. There will be rooms for seven students, two baths and toilets, a shrine room, a large common room to be used as a dining room and sitting room, a modern kitchen, and quarters for the housekeeper. Four young men and the housekeeper are already living there in the part of the house that has already been put in order. For the housekeeper we have been more than fortunate in getting Morishige San, who for two years was housekeeper for our Egyptian lady. She speaks considerable English and is a famous cook. Our young men were so tired of eating where they could about town that they induced Morishige San to fix up a temporary kitchen in the big bathroom--toilets are always separate rooms in Japan, so don't worry--and, with a skill that only Japanese women have for producing delicious meals with the most inconvenient and inadequate equipment, she is feeding the boys wonderfully. We hope to have the house all in order by the middle of November.

The students who live there must be studying Zen under the Institute auspices. They must take part in a 6 AM meditation hour in the zendo and then attend a sutra-chanting service immediately afterward. This five days a week. They must clean their own rooms, the common room and halls, and take care of the gardens. The regular evening zazen is also compulsory, but their days will be free for language study or such other work as they may wish to do. We shall have two series of lectures from the fall, one on *Mumonkan* by Kobori San, and one on Buddhism as it relates to Zen by myself. A former monk from Nanzen-ji, working in the library now, will be in charge of all the meditation periods. We hope to be able to keep one room at Zuiunken available for short-term Zen students and transient guests interested in Zen, but by the looks of things that may be a bit difficult this winter.

Wish us well in this new undertaking as we wish you well in yours. ERYU

Ryosen-an Daitoku-ji, Aug. 6, 1960-Issued with ZEN NOTES Vol. VII. No. 9, Sept.

tion of this Dharma, just as our five senses are a condition of this Dharma, and these phenomenal appearances are also a condition of this basic Dharma. Dharma is used in many ways.

When you have heard enough of Buddhist doctrines and try to practice Buddhism, you must begin by meditating upon these Four Smriti. What is body? It is explained that body is impure. What is impurity? Is it really impure? Naturally you would say such a way. That is meditation with smriti. Keep your mind pure and quiet and select your problem and meditate upon it.

There are seven ways of conducting meditation. The first is to select the problem on which you meditate. For instance the body: the body is impure. What is impurity? Is it impure or not? In such a way you begin.

Next is vedana. Vedana is agony. This is one of the great statements. The Buddha did not say sensation is joy. He said sensation is pain, it has the taste of agony in it. It has the illness of agony to it. When you make contact with it you cannot help accepting this agony. Therefore you must be aloof from it. Being aloof from it you will be transcended from it. In such a way you will attain Nirvana. It is written many places in the sutra: "What is agony?" What you are going to do with this agony is the problem on which you must meditate.

And then citta. Citta means mind, this present mind, human mind. What is mind? There are many degrees in the nature of mind, but citta is this present, awakened, human mind--this mind, not the mind of trees and weeds. The mind is empty; naturally it is empty. Who takes this padding of mind seriously? It comes and goes; it will be created and transplanted in your mind according to time and condition. It changes its value constantly, every moment; a thought had tremendous value yesterday, it has no value today; it attains great value here, but not there. No one cares for and cherishes the stuff of mind.

The mind itself is empty. It has never been created; it shines always; the quality of it will not be destroyed after your death. The nature of it is empty. It is like water which has no taste, pure water. Therefore there is no pain to drink it. Therefore you do not refrain from drinking it. If it tastes like liquor or wine, what are you going to do about it? When you meditate upon citta you will learn about Sunyata, Emptiness.

Then you meditate upon Dharma. Dharma is non-ego; in Dharma there is no ego. Ego will be produced from Dharma according to time and space, depending on circumstance, time and condition. I am here. I am ego, but I came from the Great Non-ego. There is no consciousness which belongs to a person; it belongs to itself. It belongs to a person in condition, affinity. In Buddhism we use the word pratyaya. But according to condition, in affinity, I have this mind, and I have this consciousness which has the quality of man through affinity. According to past karma I was born in this consciousness, which has the taste of man's mind.

Those tea-drinkers know the taste of water. This water has iron flavor, that water has tree-root flavor, that water has the taste of mud, this water comes from such and such a mountain and is very good for making tea.

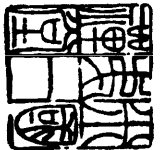
This mind has some certain flavor too. I am in it. I think about it. I call it ego. Originally there wasn't ego. Thus we understand non-ego. I cannot destroy this ego. If I destroy this ego I destroy myself. Then without ego I cannot be myself.

The Buddha did not talk in such a way, but one should know what ego is. The sufferings of life come from not knowing these fundamental laws. These fundamental laws are explained in all religions. But the Buddha told these fundamental laws to his monks and his teaching was always, from beginning to end, touching these fundamental laws. And underneath always, "Stay away from this worldly life." His Buddhism has a peculiar quality and he always emphasized his teaching upon one point, that is, to understand the most fundamental law: What to do in this world. When you know this--how to live in this world, what to do about this "you are wrong or right"--you don't need to struggle about the wrong or right of it.

I cannot call this primitive Buddhism in the name of Hinayana. Carefully thinking, very carefully thinking about it, I cannot see that there is either Hinayana or Mahayana.

Marry and be happy. Raise your children. Step in all kinds of desire and fight with it. It can be Buddhism. But without knowing the fundamental law, to step into the world you have to fight to death. Nothing wrong, but there is no value in it.

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Founded in 1930 by
Sokei-an Sasaki

A square seal with a double-line border. Inside, the Chinese characters '第一禪院' (Dì Yī Chán Yuàn) are arranged in a 2x2 grid. The top-left character is '第', top-right is '一', bottom-left is '禪', and bottom-right is '院'.

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