

ZEN NOTES



In "This Worldly Life--1942" featured in the September issue of ZEN NOTES, a word, "pratyaya", was used. In May 1938 Sokei-an described pratyaya as "the interdependence of all things," one of five famous elements brought by Buddhism into Asiatic civilization which distinguish it from Western civilization. This excerpt from the 1938 lecture noted by Edna Kenton was reconstructed by William A. Briggs.

SOKEI-AN SAYS

PRATYAYA The understanding of reciprocal relations is quite an old thing in Asia. Anything keeps its own existence in interdependence on something else. Today you use the word "relativity," but even that is a new word to you.

We think about length, but we cannot think of length without thinking of width and depth. When thinking about this present moment, we must think of past and future. What is the ceiling without the floor and pillars that support it? How can we speak of hand except in relation to the other parts of the body? Thinking of myself, I think of my parents, uncles, aunts, friends--all my "relations."

Your friend becomes famous as an artist. You think, "My friend was with me in school and he was rather stupid, but now he is famous. If he didn't happen to be in this particular environment he would never have become a famous artist. He's just the type for today, that's why he was able to become famous." There is a futuristic painter who has become very famous in modern times because the thoughts of modern man support him. But there were no such thoughts in the 19th Century. In China and Japan you will find wood carvings not even completed--just one line or tracing or square in a corner somewhere. In their time they were not appreciated, but today they are museum pieces. We call them the first cubist, the first futurist art.

(Please turn to the last page)

I came to this country seven years ago asked by five American gentlemen to give them Buddhism. I was compelled then to stay in this country longer to give them Zen. They also asked me to open these lectures.

Today, after a long history, Buddhism is a criterion of the Orient. I call it a religion because the Oriental doesn't differentiate much between ideas. He calls almost everything religion, including philosophy and science. In the West religion has a special meaning, but in the Orient it includes all that a human being must attain.

A Buddhist usually will begin an outline of Buddhism with the Buddha's birth and his life as an ascetic and as a bodhisattva. But those life-stories of Shakyamuni are written in every book, so I shall omit all this.

In the Buddhist scriptures the Buddha's life before he became an ascetic was described as a very luxurious and brilliant one. But if we study the period of the Shakyas in India historically, we realize the circumstances were not really very happy. The Shakya tribe was not an alien tribe; it was made up of aborigines of Northern India who lived perhaps on a range of the Himalayas on the border between India and Tibet. The Brahmans had arrived in India in an early period. As Aryans, they considered themselves the race of the sons of God, purest in the world. While they were calling themselves sons of God, the Shakyas thought their origin was the sweet potato. As the Shakyas did not think they were sons of God, this gave Buddhism a different quality from the Brahman religion.

The Shakyas' country was not large--it was about the size of Long Island--and it hadn't much of a population. Later, when the Shakyas were crushed by the King of Magadha, no one was left after three months but the disciples of Shakyamuni. But even at the time this son of Suddhodana was born, this country wasn't very important economically, and it was already facing decline. There was desperate fear that Magadha might attack the country suddenly. There was a reason. Bimbisara had asked Suddhodana for his daughter in marriage, and Suddhodana gave him the daughter of a slave. Bimbisara accepted this daughter of Suddhodana's as his queen, but she was not of pure lineage. This queen had a child who visited his mother's country and was driven out by the Shakyas. So this was the reason that, when he became king, he smashed all the Shakyas but the Buddha's monks, late in his life.

Shakyamuni's life therefore wasn't a very happy one. History proves that the Shakya tribe wasn't large and rich, and

OUTLINE OF BUDDHISM 1937

Part One

This and the next two issues are what we editors have been able to glean from the notes of Edna Kenton on a series of eight talks given by Sokei-an in 1937. As usual in "reconstructed" articles, please understand that sins of omission and commission are very probably the students', not the master's.

had feared Magadha for a long time. It was in this atmosphere that Shakyamuni grew up to young manhood. When he was thirty he suffered a change of mind. He decided he would not struggle longer against the pressure to become a king of India; he would become an ascetic. So he left his home--he was about thirty years old--and his life became a beggar's life. He visited many scholars living in the woods--no scholar then had schools of brick or stone as today--then, trying to find his own faith without any teacher, he found Zen.

In that day a young man who wished to attain knowledge must leave the city, go to the teacher's place and stay there. He must beg food as his teacher did; he could not stay at home, could not marry--economic reasons were a great element to make monks celibate. Many times Shakyamuni was standing under the eaves of a rich farmer who had three daughters. One of them saw the Buddha many times in the evening dusk, standing alone, holding his bowl in silence, and she would give him something to eat. Occasionally I go down to Greenwich Village and see some poor artist standing on a street corner, holding his hat in his hand, and I give him something. This is exactly analogous.

Shakyamuni meditated about six years in the woods. He thought he must find some entrance into meditation. Thoughts are endless, they turn like a wheel--cigarette, light, ashes, clothes, bushes, mountains, sky, mist, and then the smoke of a cigarette--this is the mind that divides inside from outside. My sect places its emphasis on the eye; other sects emphasize the ear. Shakyamuni began his meditation on sense-perception; he kept his eyes half-closed, half-open. Trying to keep between the inside and the outside, between subjective and objective, he made his mind empty. Of course this emptiness is not trance. He watched the thoughts that haunted his mind like the clouds the sky.

My teacher once said, "What do you think is the size of an ox?" I said, "Exactly the size of an ox." He said, "That is not the way of Buddhism. You must think *big*." So I thought of an ox as big as a house. Now I do that always. So what I think would cover all New York.

Shakyamuni found a link between himself and the universe. I call it the universe, because Buddhism is a kind of pantheism and does not think God exists outside of the universe. Although I use "God" here, the word does not give the exact meaning. No idea of any form of God--that is our idea of immaculate conception. Universal consciousness is immaculate, is Brahma, is pure. The word I speak is *not* immaculate; the silence I speak is immaculate. To find your pure mind-activity, you must erase the thoughts which haunt your mind. This is the Buddhist training. So, when you think of a cat, think of it as the size of a house. In this way, every moment we meditate.

There is an allegory of the archer who came to a master for the secret of archery.

"You are a great archer, you have no more need of a teacher."

"But you have a secret."

"Then practice not to wink your eye. Do this two or three hours every day, and come back in three years."

In three years the archer came back. The master instantly hurled a spear at the archer's eye. The archer did not wink. The master said, "You have attained."

He told the archer to practice looking at something little until it became big, and also to practice looking at something big until it became little.

The archer went back home, found a tiny insect, and fastened it with a horsehair to the eaves. In three years the little louse became as big as an elephant to him.

He came back to the master who said, "Shoot it!" The archer did. No louse was left any more!

If you practice this way you can become quite conscious of the thoughts in your mind.

Practicing in such a way Shakyamuni realized his own consciousness. He observed the evolution of consciousness in twelve stages from bottom to end, and from end to bottom. One day he said, "When one Buddha opens his eye, all the universe, rivers, trees, weeds, are enlightened." Of course this is written, not in a Hinayana, but in a Mahayana sutra.

In this brief sketch I cannot come to the core of his enlightenment, but in some following lecture I shall try to express this and make you understand. *Reconstructed by ENEN*

PRATYAYA (continued from the first page)

Who defeated Napoleon at Moscow? Did the Russians do it alone? Or was it that bitter cold winter? Perhaps, if it had been summer, Napoleon would have given us a different story for our history books.

In the Orient if someone becomes famous, one cannot think he is a famous man. It is the time and place! I sowed some sunflower seeds in my window box; some of them dried and died and some grew tall and very strong. I did not *intend* it, but accidentally or fortunately, the lucky ones fell into good circumstances and found their opportunities.

Those who are born without a good environment have no reason to be depressed. Even though a man was born in a cellar somewhere in a dark suburb or slum, with no family, no friends to pick him up and place him somewhere, if he has his own strong will power he will find some opportunity to express himself. Maybe he will become a famous racketeer or be put into a good job.

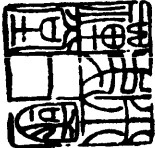
I came here and I am preaching Buddhism. I did not intend it, but my teacher brought me to America when I was young. I studied my ABC's and went back to Japan to remain there. But somehow that Columbia River and that range of the Rocky Mountains stuck in my dreams. Then I was asked to come here and I came. Sometimes I was pulled to Japan, sometimes to America, like a rubber ball. This is also a reciprocal relation.

OUR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS will be happy to hear that October 5th the Institute takes possession of our new home at 113 East 30th Street. We have no idea when we will take up residence there--that depends on many things as yet unknown--but from that day we have a local habitation as well as a name.

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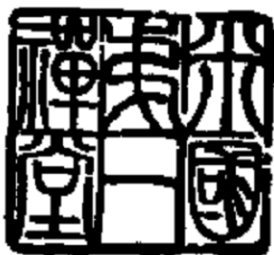


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