

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

AT NOON One thing which is characteristic of Buddhism is calmness. From the beginning of this religion, this calmness was emphasized. At our meetings I ask you and everybody to maintain this quiet. Afflictions or disturbances I abhor.

In Shakyamuni's time India was divided among many rajahs. Each rajah was engaging in warfare with others. It was quite similar to the situation of the world today.

The Buddha was the crown prince of Kapilavastu. He did not accept that type of life, and he left home to maintain the quietude of his mind. So his followers have preserved that quietude of mind through two thousand five hundred years. It is the main behavior in Buddhism still. Gentlemen and ladies, cultured people, are always quiet in attitude, very graceful. Quietude of the physical body controls mind disturbances.

To control one's mind is essential for keeping peace in the country--but it is foolish to talk about keeping peace in the world. It is like trying to squeeze down water with something. Peace must be kept by the individual, not by the ruler. If we compare modern civilization with the civilization of olden times we must realize that modern people do not want peace. They are pursuing disturbances and afflictions. For to gain happiness in human life we must invent something to produce more and more. Everyone must work and produce. I wonder how they can attain real peace. Of course it is impossible to keep this quietude, this calm attitude, in the modern person, because everyone is running--one runs without a reason; another follows and another; and hundreds and thousands and millions--then all are running. It is impossible to hold back! There is nothing to do but run with the others--for what! Swami Bodhananda once said, "This material civilization must be wiped out!" Sometimes I agree with him.

From my own viewpoint, however, we do not need to wipe out this civilization; this mental affliction must be wiped out.

I shall cite an illustration from the life of the monks in the Buddha's time. It will tell you of their quiet life. You will feel how far we have come from that time and how different our attitude is from theirs.

The sutras I am translating into English are quite old ones, composed about 200 years after the Buddha's death. In the Samyukta Agama, Chinese translations of the Sanskrit, there are many small sutras of four or five or ten lines-- fragmentary scriptures. In Buddhism these fragmentary scriptures are really very important; they are the base of developed Buddhism. Buddhist sutras are not composed as the Bible was composed in Christianity. Our scriptures are fragmentary-- four or five, sometimes one line; or a poem, or part of a poem. We conjecture that these fragmentary lines of poems are the Buddha's own poems. Our historical research gives us knowledge to discriminate between the Buddha's own teaching and that of his disciples, or the disciples of the Buddha's disciples. While we are reading, we feel that this line or this poem is the Buddha's own line or poem-- very hard to read and very deep.

There is one from the Agamas, the title of which I translate "At Noon Time."

It begins, as do all Buddhist sutras:

Thus I have heard.

It is supposed that Ananda had heard these stories from the Buddha, and repeated them. He is the "I."

When the Buddha was in Jetavana

Jetavana was one of the Buddha's favorite gardens and temples in Vaishali, a place not so far from Shravasti.

There was a Bhikshu

European scholars have translated this word *Bhikshu* as "mendicant" because a *Bhikshu* was begging food from door to door. When I came to this country, to Seattle, Washington, a policeman asked me who I was. I said, "A mendicant." I was almost arrested. "A professional beggar?" "Yes, I am." My friend said to the policeman. "He is a monk. Mendicant

means monk in his country." The policeman looked at me. "Is he a real monk or not?"

It is not strange in the Orient for monks to beg from door to door. You pay your professors salaries. I went to the mountains, saw a beautiful school which had cost \$1,000,000 to build though it had only twenty-five pupils. It was paid for by taxes. At that time the temples were the universities and the monks were the professors. Today monks have nothing to do. They have entirely washed their tasks off from their heads, so they have time only to meditate; they have really become professional beggars.

*This Bhikshu was meditating in
the woods about noon*

Monks begged food in the villages before noon, from ten o'clock on, and ate any place, under the trees, or on the stairway of a house. If they were invited in by a layman, they did not enter the house but sat down in the entrance and ate their food; then they went back to their own places. Many lived out-of-doors, because India is a very hot country. Some monks never had a house. But the monks had a law, never to sleep under the same tree twice; for all attachments must be forsaken. Of course these days we explain everything from economical reasoning, so we think that the villagers didn't want to keep the monks under the same trees, that this would be annoying to the villagers.

The mind of the monk who was meditating under a tree in the woods, after his meal, was unconsciously disturbed. He failed to keep his mind symmetrical. He felt some fear and this fear disturbed him and he was depressed.

I think everyone has this experience sometimes. He thinks, "I have money in

the bank--\$5,000. I have food, walls, and a family about me and a permanent job. Why should I be disturbed? It is foolish for me to be so greatly depressed!" He tries to control himself in vain. He snatches his hat, rushes into the street, walks around Central Park three times; goes to a movie, goes to a night club, and thinks his mind is quieted down.

Those gentlemen in night clubs, trying to keep their minds quiet, are attacked by this unconscious fear. This mind must be controlled always, but it cannot be controlled all of a sudden. You must practice it every day for ten or fifteen minutes.

Some Japanese said: "If all Americans would practice meditation ten minutes a day, how much gasoline would be saved!"*

The monk expressed his thoughts in a gatha:

*At this clear noon, all the
birds in the woods were
silent.*

*Suddenly I heard a voice in
the empty field.*

Fear came over me.

I think Western people must think this a stupid poem, that any kindergarten child could make this poem. But from the Buddhist standpoint it is very clear.

At this clear noon

When the sky is clear, one forgets everything; the head disappears. Sky is Mind. Oriental poets do not put legs on the snake. "At this clear noon"--that is enough.

*All the birds in the woods were
silent.*

Woods--not only the physical woods but the mental woods. In meditation the whole circumference is woods--not only trees, but sky, mountains, red, green, yellow, and rain are woods. And you are not swaying,

but your mind sways.** In my meditation I hear the steam heat coming up. My mind sways with it. Or perhaps you think "So-and-so borrowed five dollars from me" and you spend one or two minutes on this kind of bird-singing. Or perhaps you are sewing clothes, and suddenly you think: "Where is my husband now?" And sometimes it is not birds singing, but tigers roaring.

*Suddenly I heard a voice in
the empty field.*

Almost inaudible, so faint! It whispers from his conscience. It comes from somewhere, like the voice of Socrates' daemon--it is mysterious. It disturbs this man.

After you have the Experience of Zen you think you will have no doubt any more. "I reached Nirvana," you say. "My intrinsic wisdom and my intuitive knowledge and empirical knowledge were amalgamated into one state. Why should I have this doubt? There is something not quite settled in my mind yet, something wrong." And the foundation of the universe shakes. "But this could happen to anyone," you tell yourself. Your mind is the judge and you are the criminal. You accuse yourself.

When a bodhisattva doubts, all the flowers which adorn his crown droop; his jewels lose their lustre, and his robe looks filthy. His posture becomes uncertain, and he does not enjoy life. I think a beautiful woman has something like this same experience when she grows older. She cannot find any acceptable reason for her disturbance.

A voice in the empty field

Empty field describes his state of meditation.

Fear came over me.

It is a good poem. The monk was troubled when a god, which is a symbol of his own

mind, appeared before him. The Buddhist thinks this mind is a semi-sentient being living inside the Mind, a member of the sentient city. In meditation, when the mind is enlarged, it stands in front of you as some god or evil being with power. It says to you, "In the clear noon, all the birds in the woods were silent. Suddenly you heard a voice in the empty field. Fear came over you. Why do you not forsake fear and maintain your peace of mind?"

This is the conclusion of Buddhism. Fear does not come from the outside but from within. When you feel fear your meditation is not pure. Fear of what? Fear of ignorance of your own wisdom? We have our own wisdom. What is this? You are meditating upon this, but *who* is meditating? Consciousness is meditating. He is the meditator. What is consciousness? Who is consciousness?

When you call it universal consciousness, or *alaya* consciousness, it is not the end. If you think consciousness is God, you will make a god--it is not the god. It is the foundation of your fear. With the foundation of your consciousness you must find the real state.

So the Buddha did not believe that his consciousness was the consciousness of his attainment. Consciousness is not the total end. Consciousness is a door, and through this door you will attain. There is no word to express it.

After the Buddha's day they found a name: *Tatha--That*. When I write this in English I do so in quotes and capitals--"THAT." Through this *tate* you will attain "THAT." This god who appeared in front of the monk was his conscience, to tell him his attainment was not completed yet. *Reconstructed by ENEN*

EDITOR'S NOTES

CORRESPONDENCES William Shakespeare, we note, also used "bird-singing" in one of his sonnets to convey a state of mind. But his snake has quite a few legs compared to ours.

"and then my state

Like to the lark at break of day arising

From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate."

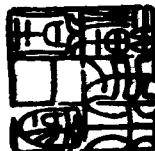


The character for bird is a picture of a bird

* Japan is beginning to feel the problem of motorization, not yet a fact when this lecture was given in 1938. At least the Japanese seem to be practicing what they earlier preached to us. The Bulletin of the Washington Friends of Buddhism (October 1960) noted that Japanese bus lines and trucking companies are reported in the press as giving courses in Zen Buddhism to their drivers as a means of reducing the accident rate. We wonder if it works. Any statistics, Friends? A traveling salesman member says he practices *zazen* while driving, but we don't recommend it for beginners.

** We suppose this line may allude to the remark with which the Sixth Patriarch quieted the dispute of two monks. One said: "The banner is waving." The other said: "The wind is waving." The Sixth Patriarch said: "Neither the banner nor the wind is waving, your mind is waving." Other words used to try to indicate what it was the mind was doing are "fluttering, moving."

Copyright 1961 by The First Zen Institute of America, Inc



Vol. VIII, No. 2, Feb., 1961
Mary Farkas, Editor
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Published monthly by
THE FIRST ZEN INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, INC.
156 Waverly Place, New York 14, New York

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
New York, N.Y.
Permit No. 528

Copyright of Zen Notes is the property of the First Zen Institute of America, Inc., and its content may not be copied or e-mailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download or e-mail articles for individual use.

Founded in 1930 by
Sokei-an Sasaki



First Zen Institute of America
113 E30 Street
New York, New York 10016
(212)-686-2520
www.firstzen.org

會協禪一第國美