

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE GROUP SOUL

To us in the East it seems that Western civilization developed by everyone first cultivating his own individuality and satisfying his personal desires, then shaking hands with each other and associating together. It appears that Western civilization is founded on the satisfaction of individual lives, while Oriental religion is founded on the satisfaction of group life. Western psychology calls this characteristic of the East "group consciousness." So Orientals have a group soul, which we regard as fundamental wisdom or alaya-vijnana, everlasting wisdom.

This wisdom can be divided into two parts or stages: first, consciousness; second, intellectual power or wisdom. Buddhism is to us very simple; it means that we turn this consciousness into awakened Wisdom. Perhaps we could name consciousness, or deluded wisdom, instinct, and awakened wisdom law.

When I came to your country I realized that your material civilization must have been, in its early days, founded on spiritual life. But it seems to me that this root is forgotten in America, and that you are living merely in the superstructure of material civilization. The Oriental went to the root and stayed there.

Our group desire led to spiritual organization; then began our life as a tribe. A tribe is a body. One year I gave a Christmas present to an American family. I was asked, "Is this to Mr., Mrs., or ...?" I was puzzled to find an answer. Later I realized I must make a present to each individual--to Mr., Mrs., son, daughter, cat, dog! In ancient days we did not give to any individual, but merely carried the gift to the family. Then first Mr. came and said, "Thanks," then Mrs. came and said, "Thanks," then son and daughter, and then cat and dog said "Meow" and "Bow-wow." It is very strange to us at first, this individual giving.

THE KNOWER, THE GOD OF BUDDHISM

The God of Buddhism is the God of Wisdom. In Buddhism Wisdom means the faculty of knowing. Buddha means one who knows, the knower. He who knows his own Wisdom is Buddha.

Our eyes, which have the faculty of seeing; our ears, which have the faculty of hearing; our other sense organs--those of smelling, tasting, touching--all are manifestations of the power of knowing. So our sense-organs are the eyes of Buddha. We, each one of us, are Buddha himself. This Mr., Mrs., Miss So-and-so is not Buddha, but our "persons" are Buddha.

A Buddhist student who comes to this Western country to study Christianity hears Christian preachers attacking the Buddhist faith. They say that Buddhists worship something abstract, some doctrine of emptiness or nirvana, philosophical conclusions that are not God. They say that Christians worship a personal God, but that Buddhists worship some metaphysical doctrine or notion symbolized in their iconographic images; that they do not know a personal God, and therefore that Buddhism is not in the true sense a religion.

One young monk went back to his temple and asked his elder about this. The elder said: "We do not need to say anything about our personal God, nor do we need to worship Him, because each one of us is God in person." But I think more questions must be asked on this matter.

The Buddhist believes in a pantheistic God. This "personal" God is pantheistic, is God-nature in me, in you, in all sentient beings, in everything. The Christian believes that a man can achieve access to God through Christ, that those who do not know Christ cannot achieve access to God, and that sentient beings lower than human beings have, of course, no God-nature, no soul, in them. The souls that are chosen by God are the subjects of God.

When we talk about the attributes of God according to Christianity and to Buddhism, we find many questions that must be asked and answered. This is not an easy problem for one lecture. The Buddhist thinks the person is God, but that the person is not an individual. There is no such word in the Orient as individual! The Buddhist believes that souls are not created by God one by one, but that each is a drop of water of the ocean of Soul. The ocean of Soul is existence; it is Being existing from the beginningless beginning to the endless end. So there is no creation of the universe and no destruction of the universe. Each wave of the ocean has its own character, its own shape, its own power, and its own velocity, yet all waves are nothing but the body of water of the sea. Each individual has its own keynote, its own characteristics, yet all are nothing but waves of the ocean of Soul.

This pantheistic view of soul we are in the habit of calling Orientalism. The Occident believes

each individual soul was created in the past and will continue to manifest its own phase for a long, long time. This is a distinction between Occidentalism and Orientalism. Certainly we must note this point. The West believes souls are individual; the Orient believes souls are non-ego. Of course we in the Orient have been attacked many times by Christian missionaries for this belief. All Orientals, they say, are like salmon in the Alaskan Sea. When one surges right, all surge to the right; when one surges left, all surge to the left. They are groups of souls. We can make a very good reply to this: "There is no opposition."

A Buddhist who is a person has awareness of his own existence, unlike weeds and trees and lower sentient beings that have no awareness. Their Buddha-nature is asleep, latent. Awakened Buddha-knowledge must be enlightened as Shakyamuni Buddha himself was.

Buddha means power of knowledge. Shakyamuni Buddha is that one who was born about two thousand five hundred years ago, and who attained Buddha-knowledge through his own enlightenment. "Buddha" is therefore an abstract noun, and "The Buddha" is a proper noun that has deep meanings.

The Buddha consists of two elements called mind and body, Buddha and the place of Buddha, Buddha and Buddha's dominion, soul and the place of soul, spirit and the body of spirit. In your language the spiritual side is called mind and the material side is called body. In our language the

material side is rupa; mind is skandha.

When I am listening to Christian sermons over my radio, I hear that the Christians also divide this human body into two elements, body and spirit. The spirit is good, the body is bad. I don't understand why spirit must be mixed up with the sinful body.

We divide this mind into four elements; the body also has four elements. First is sense-perception (vedana); second is thoughts (samjna); third is mind movement (samskara); fourth is consciousness (vijnana).

The second of these elements, thoughts, is regarded as a semi-material state of mind. Pure mind movement is like pure water. The creative power of the universe is not a human being; it is Buddha. Nature throws junk into this pure water; debris enters through the eyes and ears, and so on, and it is all shaken up; so, whenever we think, we must use this stuff--we cannot think without words or vision. Words, visions, thoughts--all this is samjna. If we keep it quiet through meditation all the "stuffs" will be separated from mind movement. The debris will come to the top and clear mind will show its stability. The bottom of the ocean of mind is not my mind--it is the mind of the universe. No "stuffs" from the outside can reach to its depths, it is bottomless. All is transparency here. The ocean is consciousness itself, vijnana. The one who sees, the one who hears is not this eye or ear but He is this consciousness.

Dear Everyone:

THIS is a part of the introduction for ZEN DUST, the publication of which is now moving along.

WHAT ZEN IS.

THE word "Zen" has today become almost a household word, in America and parts of Europe at least. Books and articles on Zen are appearing with such frequency that it is difficult to keep abreast of them. Fortunately, a few translations of original Zen material from both the Chinese and Japanese are gradually being published. It is to be hoped that the number of these translations done by translators adequately equipped for their work will increase. It is only when much more is known about the history of the development of the Zen Sect of Buddhism and of Zen thought and method that what Zen is will be clearly understood.

Among the more popular writers on Zen, particularly those writing in English, there is a general tendency to simplify Zen to the point that it becomes only the satori experience. In fact, with many of these interpreters of Zen to the West, the word Zen is a synonym for satori and satori a synonym for Zen. The zeal and enthusiasm they display in spreading this gospel of a new and, according to many of them, very simple way for modern man to save himself from the ills he is suffering are undoubtedly admirable in intent. But the pleasant sensation that oneself and the universe are just right as they are at this moment and therefore there is nothing further to do but go on eating one's dinner as usual, is far from the content of the satori of Zen. A little more serious study would show these would-be popularizers of Zen that the way of Zen has never been an easy way, never been a short cut. For that very reason true Zen has never been a popular form of religion nor can it of its nature ever be so. Certain elements in it can be, and even have been, popularized, but not those which have made Zen the powerful religious force it has been in the past and to some extent still is.

While the pivot of Zen undoubtedly is the satori experience, and it is upon the satori experience that Zen is based, Zen is not just the satori experience. The great masters of Chinese Zen in the earliest period had the genius to discern, through the profusion of scholastic writing and discussion in which the Buddhism of their time was enmeshed, what was and always had been the source of the dynamic power of their religion, namely Shakyamuni's enlightenment. Supported by firm faith in the teachings of the Buddha and of the scriptures

written by enlightened men who followed him, they forged ahead with indomitable courage and determination to attain this experience for themselves. Once having attained it and comprehended its deepest meaning as well as its implications for human life, out of the compassionate heart born of their enlightenment the masters sought ways and means of helping other men achieve this experience, of letting them comprehend its meaning, and so causing the compassionate heart to be born in them also. Thus, it is the satori experience deepened through training and directed to a definite end that is truly Zen.

The satori or enlightenment that the old masters experienced was ineffable and incommunicable. It had not come about as the result of their intellectual striving, nor could they have reached it by any intellectual process whatsoever. It was, indeed, an experience beyond and above the intellect. Its wellspring, the life-source of every man, lay far deeper in their natures than any mental process they were accustomed to use. To attain the experience each man had to reach that source for himself in his own body. When this happened, and if it happened with sufficient power, the man's nature was completely changed by it and his life thereafter a changed life. Of course, to ordinary eyes, he was the same man living in the same house, but for him, with his newly opened Dharma-eye, never again would he or anything in the universe about him be the same. Forever after "the badger and the white bull emitted a glorious radiance."

This type of experience is, of course, not one limited to Zennists or even to Buddhists, nor is it attainable only within the framework of Buddhist or Zennist doctrines and practices. A study of the mystical experiences of men of other religious persuasions through the ages proves this conclusively. Nor is the experience limited only to religious men. Many people have had it--artists, poets, philosophers, housewives--who were without any specific religious belief or inclination. In the majority of cases in this latter group we find the experience arriving quite spontaneously, for no particular reason, and occasioned by no particular external or internal cause. It seems just to happen. Usually it goes away quite as suddenly as it occurs, and, though leaving for a time at least an exalted feeling or one of extreme well-being, gradually fades into merely a pleasant memory. The case of the religious mystic is somewhat different. With him the experience most often arises as the result of intense seeking and intense practice. It is more vivid, remains with him longer, and leaves a much deeper impression, one that can be as soul shaking and revolutionary as the Zen experience. Also, in his case the experience is apt to happen not once, but many times, and with increasing depth and power. Usually the religious mystic later interprets his experiences in accordance with the doctrines of his own particular faith. It has been said of Zennists that they, also, interpret their experiences in conformity with Zen or Bud-

dhist doctrines. This may in part be correct. But how are we to construe the fact that a few of the greatest mystics of other faiths have spoken of their most profound experiences in terms similar to or identical with those used by Zenists, even though their words were heretical when judged by the orthodox canons of their own faith?

If the criteria for the experience which Zen terms *satori* are not entirely unique, the teaching methods the old masters of Zen devised and present day masters continue to employ are unique and as distinctive as they are unique. These teaching methods have often been misunderstood or misinterpreted by those who have had no personal experience of them. They have been subjected to criticism from within Zen in the past and are being subjected to it now. Attempts have even been made by Zen masters whose mastership was the fruit of this training to simplify it to the point of bypassing it altogether. The fact that such attempts have almost all come to naught, have vanished like tiny trickles of water in a sandy waste while the deep river has flowed on, will become more evident as more of the history of Zen is brought to light. Equally true, however, is the fact that the teaching methods of the earliest days have undergone much modification through the centuries. In the future, in Japan as well as in the West--when and if real Zen does go West--the present forms of the traditional methods will undoubtedly be still further modified. The teachers who devised these methods were men living in given environments in given periods of history; both their personalities and those of their students, to say nothing of their attitudes, actions, and speech, were in part determined by the times and the cultures in which they lived. The principles and aims of the Zen masters cannot be said to have changed, however. When these are changed, there will no longer be any Zen.

The earliest masters seem to have attained their enlightenment with little instruction. The histories of their lives indicate that most had been Buddhist monks, many from a young age, and as such were steeped in the doctrines of the Buddhist scriptures available to them. Many had studied the classics of Confucianism and Taoism as well. Their inability to attain the enlightenment they sought through the study of written words caused them to seek out meditation teachers. Certainly in the earliest days meditation was the method offered them and the method they all pursued. That Bodhidharma's nine years of silent sitting, legend though it well may be, has from the very first been such a powerful force in Zen is proof of this fact. When these monks had reached some profound insight through their meditation practice they went to a master to have their insight verified by his. Or, if they were beset by doubts, they went to him to have these doubts resolved. Many times the master's one word at this point brought them to *satori*. If the master seemed to be *their* master, they remained with him for a number of years; if not, they went on to other masters until they found

the one they recognized to be their own. When their enlightenment had been attested to and confirmed, they retired to the mountains to spend long years in ripening it. Only gradually did other seekers find them out and come to live with or near them. From such a group a new temple might arise, or, if the master's fame had reached the capital, a command might come to take charge of one already established.

Life in a Zen monastery in those days was certainly devoted in large part to the physical labor necessary to produce the daily necessities. Already by the end of the eighth century the regulations for Zen monasteries placed special emphasis upon this point. But there is nothing to indicate that the practice of meditation or zazen, as it is called in the Zen Sect, was ever neglected. Nor is it neglected today. Satori is the heart of Zen, but the main road to its attainment is still that of practicing meditation while sitting in the classic posture made famous by Shakyamuni.

The method of meditation in the Zen Sect is different from that in other Buddhist sects, whether they be of Indian or of Chinese origin. The Sôtô school developed a type of zazen called *mokushô*, sometimes translated as 'silent illumination' or 'serene reflection' meditation, in which the meditator, through bringing his mind to a state of complete emptiness and deepest quietude, finally attains satori. The masters of the Rinzai school developed what they considered to be a more dynamic type of meditation, one in which the intellectual processes are first stilled, then the deeper levels of the mind, which have thus been opened, are presented with a koan to solve. In neither case does zazen include or even permit thinking about or reflecting upon some specified subject, however admirable it may be, as is usual in most other schools of meditation. For the past thousand years and more there has not been a school of Zen in which the essential practice has not been the practice of zazen in one of the forms just mentioned, or some slight modification of them. Through the long practice of zazen is developed a basic state of mind that is deep, still, and immobile, and that is continuously present regardless of fluctuations of thought or emotion that may seem to ruffle its surface. Zazen is as integral to Zen as is satori. (To be continued.)



Ryosen-an

Daitoku-ji

February 7, 1961

Issued with Zen Notes, Vol. VIII No. 3, March, 1961

He is Buddha. He appears in every mind. So Buddha is common to all sentient beings and He is God. We worship him therefore; we join our hands and we bend our heads before Him because He is the only one in whom we can trust. We can depend upon Him. We come from Him and we will go back to Him. He is always with us. He is not concealing Himself from us. We see Him always day and night; and we know His eternity, His omniscience, and His omnipresence and omnipotent power. God is very near to us. We can speak

to Him and He answers us. He guards us. We love Him. He is our father and we are His children. We do not need a temple outside. We are the temple. We do not need a choir to offer Him hymns. Meditation, when the mind is tranquillized, is our hymn which we offer Him. Our religion is plain and simple and true. We do not need any preacher. When we come home and sit down and join our hands in meditation, in tranquillity we realize this crystallized consciousness within us and that is our ritual.

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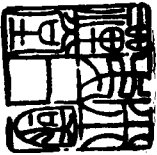
*Himō kore yori e
 Sabutsu mo mata ta ni yoru*

From this time forth
 You can become a beast;
 Becoming a Buddha
 Also depends on yourself.

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

zen notes
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Vol. VIII, No. 3, Mar., 1961
 Mary Farkas, Editor
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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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