

ZEN NOTES



南
na
無
nu
歸
ki
依
e
僧

Sō
Sangha

南
na
無
nu
歸
ki
依
e
法

Hō
Dharma

南
na
無
nu
歸
ki
依
e
佛

Butsu
Buddha

Namu is the Japanese equivalent of the Sanskrit *namah* (Pali *namo*). The characters show the sound; they do not indicate any meaning. As to its definition, Soothill says it is: To submit oneself to, from to bend, bow to, make obeisance, pay homage to; an expression of submission to command, complete commitment, reverence, devotion, trust for salvation, etc.

Shibayama Roshi, in "An Outline of Zen" (ZN Vol. VIII, No. 1) says: "In Buddhism the word 'kiye' (a variant romanization for *kie*) is used as a term corresponding to 'faith' in the West. 'Kiye' means 'to return to the fundamental truth and trust wholeheartedly in it.'" The dictionary meaning is: conversion or commitment; to return to and rely on.

In English the expression "take refuge in" is frequently used to convey the general sense of this threefold formula.

Namu kie Butsu
Namu kie Hō
Namu kie Sō

I take refuge in Buddha
I take refuge in Dharma
I take refuge in Sangha

SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE THREE REFUGES

BUDDHA Buddha is, in your term, "God." But the Buddha who was in human form is not a god. He was a teacher who found the God of Wisdom; through his meditation he reached the state of universal Wisdom. Therefore we call him the Buddha, as Christians call Jesus the Son of God.

In Christianity you describe what God is: you say that no one has seen God; no one can hear his voice; no one can imagine his attributes. I think these are the words of St. Paul, somewhere in the New Testament.

In Buddhism we do not say anything about this universal Wisdom. Once a monk asked Shakyamuni: "What is Tathagata?" The Buddha sat in silence. He did not express his answer in words--he sat in silence. He said neither no nor yes. Some monks asked him another question: "Is Buddha nescient?" "Nescient" means "beyond perception or conception--unknowable." The Buddha's answer was: he sat in silence. He did not say either yes or no.

Some Christians say that God exists outside our world of sense, that God exists outside human knowledge.

The Buddhist says that the state of the Absolute is the state of Nirvana, nonexistent in the realm of human life. We don't think of Buddha the Absolute as being of any shape, either that of

man or that of beast. We don't call this state by any term of man's conception. The philosopher Hume said in criticism of Immanuel Kant's theory of Reality: "If it does not belong to human knowledge, it does not exist. Why do we have to think about it?" Hume absolutely discarded Reality in Immanuel Kant's terms! If a religious teacher were to do this he would fall into agnosticism, he would not believe in the existence of God or of Buddha. But we can take refuge in Buddha. Buddha is our first refuge.

Many times I have heard Western people say that Buddhists are atheistic. We refuse to accept this criticism from Western people. The state that does not belong to our senses, yet that has omnipotence and omnipresence, exists. Calling it Buddha, we don't have to say anything about its attributes and we don't say anything about it at all. We have this immense space of the sky that produced the earth--without this space this earth would not exist. Our consciousness exists only by virtue of the immense state of non-existence or Nirvana, or God, if you wish to call it that. Without its protection our consciousness cannot exist.

Therefore Emptiness or Nirvana is the foundation of our consciousness or thoughts. You join your hands and kneel down and offer prayer to your God. We lay our hands one upon another. You are trying to reach God through your prayer. We try to realize Nirvana in our meditation. We cannot think

of it by any term, so we don't think about it. Without any thinking we are one with it. The knowledge within us that is the link to this immense empty state of Reality is called, in your term, "soul," or, in Buddhism, "alaya-consciousness." Through this alaya-consciousness we take refuge in Buddha.

DHARMA Dharma, the Law, is written in your mind. Buddha appears in your mind as Law. I touch fire; I feel heat. I don't eat; I feel hungry. Winter comes; I feel cold. Summer comes: I feel very hot. This is the Law. If you want to see Law in material existence, observe fire transforming water to vapor; cold transforming vapor to moisture and causing it to fall from the sky as rain.

The Law exists in the human mind. I beg, "Please give me some potatoes." I take some potatoes from someone, and he comes at me with a knife. I kill him, and then someone kills me. This is the Law.

The Infinite Law is manifested in finite existence. We observe this law; we take refuge in this Law. We don't know much yet about the manifestations of this Law in nature, but we shall discover them; we don't understand all the infinite phases of appearance, but we shall understand them eventually.

Science, in the Western World, is the search for understanding of this law of nature. The law of waves of light, of heat, electricity; the law of the physical structure of man; the law of the physical structures of all forms of life

on earth. Amoebae, tadpoles, insects--one day on the sand and they die because their moisture is dried up by the sun; then gradually life itself understands a way to preserve life, and produces those hard-shelled creatures gliding over sand and water...

We take refuge in the Law and then this Law is applied to society, to you and me, to everyone.

SANGHA I pile up money, never spend it, but my children, my brothers, have nothing and beg from me. So I say, "I will not give you all my money, but something I will give you. So a little to you and you and you..."

It seems to me that the removal of the soul into coin was the first error of this civilization! Don't send the human soul into those gold coins! In not-so-ancient days money was merely a symbol of human power. Before money existed the workers would come to the marketplace at evening to stand before the priest. A worker came, the priest clapped his hands; "All right, give him two pounds of rice and one big cabbage!" Another came. "Two--three? No, not three pounds of rice..." Another came, who could not work because his mother was sick. "All right, give him two pounds of rice and one big cabbage." Then this became too inefficient for the growing community so they went to the sea shore and gathered sea shells and put a sacred mark on their shell money. Then the government made copper money with the image of a god stamped on it.

法

僧

Once money represented human power. Today money is master and we are its slaves. Sunday is your rest day, but if you are five minutes late tomorrow morning the boss will fire you. The boss is not the master, money is the master--not only in the United States, but in the whole world.

Perhaps you are a farmer. You plough one hundred miles a day, sow rice in Sacramento Valley, then--over-production. The crop must be stored while you are starving. What law is this? The real Law is clear. Those who are studying these things from all sides discover government law, military law, but they don't find *this* law. The vegetable-sellers think of this Law by themselves. But often you just look up toward God, go to church, that is all. You'll never know anything about Buddha or God in this way.

Well, we cannot find the error in this human society. We must go from the First Law to the Second Law and then to the Third.

The prince of a Near-Eastern country came to New York. When he tried to drive his car in New York he could not move one inch. In the Arabian desert he could drive in any direction, but in New York there is a one-way law. We must know this law or we cannot get a license! We who live in this world think we are self-licensed, so we commit many errors.

We Buddhists take refuge in Buddha, the First Law; in Dharma, the Second Law; in Sangha, the Third Law. So we know what is right, and we know what is wrong.

*From the words of Sokei--an
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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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