

# ZEN NOTES



## SOKEI-AN SAYS THE FOX IN THE WELL

Buddhism has existed since the primitive age of India. It underwent many changes, but its profound principle has never changed. The principle of Primitive Buddhism was to retreat into one's own mind, abandoning the influence of one's surroundings.

The primitive sutras from the early times of Buddhism on which I now comment are called the Agamas in Sanskrit, the Nikayas in Ceylonese. You can see some Zen element in these small sutras. If a blind monk translates them, he will eliminate some important truth. A real one will catch it and keep it in the translation. An enlightened monk will see the truth in them.

A monk who lived in a wood near a village in the territory of Kosala attained the supernatural power to read others' minds but was still unable to abandon the afflictions of his own mind. To attain the supernatural power to read others' minds one must attain five supernatural powers.

The first is the power to transform the physical body into many different states at will. One who has this power can pass through a keyhole, walk over the waters of the sea, stop the gong sounding in a faraway temple, stop the boat sailing on the faraway sea, or stop the hurricane, as the Bible relates that Christ did. He can change one thing into five million things, and he can change five million into one; he can seat five thousand in a ten-foot square room. You Christians call these miracles.

The second is the power to see through everything to the end of the universe in many directions at once, penetrating brick walls, stones, and earth.

The third power is to hear everything.

One who has this power can still hear the gong that has been resounding through space from the time of the Buddha. This gong repeats the sutras that were the teachings of the Buddha. One who has this power can hear the recitation and understand its meaning.

The fourth power is to see through the past, present, and future.

The fifth power is to read others' minds. In the past, where were you? Before mother and father, where were you? What were you? In the future, after your death, where will you be? In what stage is your mind, enlightened or not? Were you a horse, snake, cat, or dog mind, human mind, or devil's mind? Such things can be perceived with this power.

These are the Five Supernatural Powers. But to complete the attainment of the supernatural powers one more must be added, the power to understand Emptiness. With this power one can annihilate one's own existence.

A monk in a Chinese temple was pursued by a messenger from Hell. "You must come down to Hell, by the order of Yama, the King of Hell."

The monk said: "Oh, I have been so busy. I have not yet attained enlightenment. Please wait three days."

The messenger, a demon, went back and reported this to Yama in Hell. Yama said, "Go back immediately and seize him! If he is enlightened you will not be able to find him any more."

The demon with his black wings cut through the earth and went to the temple. He searched through heaven and earth, through all the universe, but he could not find the monk, who had disappeared. After he had attained enlightenment, he had vanished completely. No angel from Heaven, no demon from Hell could find him. This is the power to annihilate one's

Dear Everyone:

OUR warm weather has begun, and in another five days the rainy season will be upon us. This is five weeks of almost solid rain, and even when there is no actual rain, the air seems to be made of water only. Sitting in the zendo, even the youngest knees creak and complain.

The other day I was inveigled by my friend Mrs. Iwasa to go with her for a day's holiday. Mrs. Iwasa and her husband are two of our Institute's very good Kyoto friends. They leave shortly for the United States to be present at the graduations of their two sons who have been attending American universities. Mr. Iwasa has large interests in the restaurant business. He owns several small restaurants where special types of Japanese food are served, and his company handles the employees' restaurants for a number of big concerns, such as Daimaru, our largest department store. The Iwasas have a beautiful big Japanese house and garden. One wing of the house they have set aside to entertain distinguished American visitors to Kyoto, particularly those who come more or less as guests of the city government, with which Mr. Iwasa has some connection. The other wing has been at the disposition of such students of our Institute as are staying for a considerable period. Mrs. Coward was there a year ago for nearly nine months, and another of our students, a Miss de Boer from Switzerland, followed her last August and plans to remain for three or four years. Aside from having house-guests, the Iwasas entertain considerably in Japanese style on a rather lavish scale, often with geisha and music, and to these parties their house-guests are invariably invited, much to their delight.

Sometimes Mrs. Iwasa plans all-day excursions to out of the way temples, and it was to such a party that she invited Washino San and me. It was quite an excursion on my part for, as a matter of fact, I hadn't taken a full day's holiday since the New Year. I have been so busy with writing and students and the press of innumerable daily problems that I haven't been able to get away from Ryōsen-an for more than a few hours any one day.

Our appointment to meet at twelve at Mr. Iwasa's tempura restaurant gave me the opportunity to attend to some very necessary banking and shopping matters before luncheon. I expect many people especially those in New York, are familiar now with Japanese tempura. One sits at a long or half-circular counter and is served with shrimp, tiny river fish, plover's eggs, and small pieces of vegetables such as eggplant, delicate pea-pods, ginger roots, etc., that are dipped in a very thin

batter then fried in a deep copper kettle filled with sesame seed oil before your eyes and just before you are ready to pop each piece into your mouth. The wonderful big Japanese strawberries, of a new variety this year called "Sugar-sweet" and really so sweet that to use sugar on them would be an insult, completed our meal.

The Iwasa's car was waiting for us, and, though the weather looked threatening, we started out on the long drive to Jōruri-ji. We followed the main highway about half way to Nara, then took a small side road and drove for miles back into the hills. The highway looks much like our highways in America, with modern gas stations, automobile repair shops, cheap eating houses, roadside stands, all along the road. But once off the highway we were in old Japan. We drove through fields of golden winter wheat just ready to be cut, paddies being prepared for the rice planting that will begin with the rains, through persimmon orchards and vineyards--grapes here are allowed to reach a height of about ten feet, then trained over trellises that form a complete cover over the field--and through small villages consisting of five or six heavily thatched-roofed farm houses on both sides of the road.

Finally we stopped where a narrow path led up the hill. We followed that on foot and, passing through a small and dilapidated temple gate, found ourselves within a lovely old temple compound. Before us lay a large circular pond covered with pink and white water lilies in full bloom and edged with white and blue iris just past their prime. To the left, on a wooded slope, stood an old three-storied pagoda with red painted timbers, and to the right at some distance a long one-storied wooden building silver grey with age. The priest's son came out from a modern building hidden by shrubbery to greet us and show us the temple treasures. Jōruri-ji, or the "Temple of the Pure Lapis Jewel," was probably originally built toward the end of the 8th century, but the present buildings date from 1047. The intention of the builders is said to have been to make a miniature reproduction of Amida Buddha's Land of Bliss. On the long altar that runs the length of the main hall are nine seated Amida Buddhas. The central Buddha is about ten feet high and backed by a carved golden nimbus to which are affixed countless tiny Amida Buddhas. This figure is flanked on both sides by four six-foot Buddhas backed with nimbuses of natural wood carved with figures of devas and flowers in low relief. All the Buddhas are seated in full lotus posture. The hands of the main figure are in the mudra representing the descent of Amida on earth to seek the souls of the dead, those of the eight attendant figures are in the concentration mudra. All the figures are covered with gold leaf.

In addition to the main figures there are a number of other fine old statues, including two Guardian Kings--the other two of the usual set of four are in the Kyoto and Tokyo Museums respectively--and a fine Jizō, or patron Bodhisattva of little children. The temple's greatest

treasure is, however, a very fine and very old carved and painted wooden statue representing Kichijoten, the Buddhist equivalent of the Indian Lakshmi, or goddess of fortune and beauty. This statue, about four feet high, is usually kept in a closed black lacquer painted case, which had been opened for us to see this afternoon. The goddess is a plumpish Japanese lady wearing an elaborate court robe of the Nara period, a heavily jeweled necklace, girdle pendants, and crown, and with a slender golden halo affixed behind her head.

From the Hall of the Nine Buddhas we crossed over to the pagoda, the first story of which is an all-over painted shrine for a golden seated statue of Yakushi Buddha, the Buddha of Healing, of a little later date than the Amida Buddhas. There on the verandah of the pagoda overlooking the broad expanse of the pond, the lawns surrounding it, the silvery old building opposite and the encircling pine forest behind, we imagined how the temple must have looked in the ancient days when the court perhaps celebrated a festival here, and dressed in their colorful and graceful robes, the nobles and their ladies played at spending a day in the Land of Bliss while yet in the world of suffering. I had asked the priest's son to give me a few water-lily roots for my own pond and for a tiny water garden we have made at Zuiun-ken. With these in a basket, we drove away from Amida's paradise in the late afternoon sunshine.

Our next objective was a half hour's drive back in the direction of Kyoto to Ikkyū-ji, a temple founded by Ikkyū Oshō, a famous Daitoku-ji priest of the 15th century, and considered to be the founder of Shinju-an, perhaps the most beautiful of the sub-temples in the Daitoku-ji compound. Though belonging to the imperial line, Ikkyū was an eccentric. On New Years Day he was accustomed to walk through the city streets in a tattered old monk's robe, holding a staff to the top of which was affixed a skull, and admonished the people that sooner than they thought they would become no different from the dried skull. Another story is told of Ikkyū's arriving in response to an invitation at the gate of a great feudal lord dressed in his shabby robe, and being refused entrance by the gate keeper, who did not recognize the famous priest in this guise. Ikkyū is said to have returned to his temple and donned his most elaborate robes. When he reached the feudal lord's gate the second time he was received with the utmost obsequiousness, and ushered into the lord's presence. When the dinner was served, Ikkyū excused himself and went into the adjoining room. He returned arrayed in his underclothing, holding his gorgeous robes in his hands. These he placed before the lacquered dinner tray and said: "It is my robes you have invited, so let them eat the dinner."

Ikkyū-ji, which Ikkyū Oshō also founded, is a serene, dignified, even severe Zen temple. A life-sized wooden statue of the Master is seated behind the altar in the main hall. This and an identical statue

in the main hall at Shinju-an were made immediately after Ikkyū's death, and show him as an elderly man -- he was 87 when he died -- of power and force. The statues are dressed in the full robes and tall hat of a high Zen priest, and that of Shinju-an has inserted around the mouth the actual wispy hairs of the Master's beard and moustache taken from his body at his death.

The main hall of Ikkyū-ji has lovely fusuma (sliding wall panels) by Tanyū. The front garden is a broad and simple white sand garden with a high stone wall at the back planted with pink azaleas, now in full bloom, between the stones. The rear garden is an arrangement of all kinds and sizes of fantastically shaped rocks placed close together, with the same pink azalea plants scattered through it. Standing on the verandah overlooking this "Garden of the Sixteen Rakans" -- the stones are arranged so as to provide seats for these sixteen worthies -- we could look across the long plain to Kyoto and Mount Hiei rising behind it.

The old priest presently invited us to have tea with him, and when he heard that I was from Daitoku-ji, we settled down to a good gossip, for Ikkyū-ji is a sub-temple of the Daitoku-ji Honzan.

The heavy black storm clouds over Kyoto urged us to hurry on our way to our final destination, the Obaku Zen temple of Kaihō-ji, or "Sea Treasure Temple." By the merest chance we somehow missed the cloudburst that the black clouds had augured and reached Kaihō-ji just a few minutes after it had passed there, leaving the handsome gardens soaked and dripping and the maid who greeted us at the entrance still nervous from fright at the storm. This temple, like others, has now become a restaurant. Its second priest, a Chinese who came over in late Ming times, had brought with him the secrets of Chinese vegetarian cooking, and these have been handed down in this temple during the ensuing generations until today. I'm afraid we all found the food more attractive to the eye than to the taste. But the temple had a series of beautiful fusuma by Jakuchu, who specialized in birds, especially chicken, and to see these was well worth enduring an unpalatable meal.



Ryosen-an  
Daitoku-ji  
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own mind without changing one's physical or mental body. This is a strange supernatural power. When this power has been won the study of Buddhism comes to an end. Until that time one cannot say he has attained enlightenment.

The monk had not attained this final enlightenment, but he had attained the Five Powers. At sunrise he went out of the woods to a nearby well. Approaching the well he seized the rope to pull the pail up from the water. It was heavier than usual. He looked in the well and in the darkness saw something in the pail with two green eyes looking at him. He was frightened. What was it? A preta? A demon? An evil spirit? He looked very carefully into the dim light and discovered that it was a fox. In the night the fox had come to drink water. Its weight had carried it down to the surface of the water when the rope passed over the wheel at the top of the well. The fox had tried to get out of the well but failed. It thought: "Now the sun is rising; the farmer will come and find me. He will be afraid of me and injure me, kill me." And it looked up at the monk's face: "You also are afraid of me. You cannot drink the water so long as I am here. Why don't you rescue me from the bottom of the well and let me go?"

The monk read the fox's mind and he made this poem.

The sun of Wisdom, Tathagata, is rising.

It has left the tree tops and now speaks Empty Dharma.

For a long time I have been afraid of my own mind.

Now I let it go.

Then he pulled on the rope and let

the fox go. When the fox went the monk attained final enlightenment and became an arhat. This is all that is written in the sutra. This primitive sutra is quite lovely. The Mahayanists later would take one hundred pages to explain this poem but this sutra is just nine lines and that is all. If you have attained you can see through this sutra. If you have an enlightened mind you certainly can understand it.

*The sun of Wisdom:* In Mahayana Buddhism Buddha is symbolized by the sun, Vairochana. The physical sun shines daily but Buddha, the Universal Sun, shines day and night. It is Wisdom, Tathagata, the Reality of all existence. It is your enlightenment. *Is rising:* Shakyamuni Buddha was born and now is rising to teach us to destroy our darkness of mind.

*It has left the tree tops:* As the sun rises from the wood, as Shakyamuni rises from darkness, my own enlightenment leaves the tree tops and now speaks *Empty Dharma*. "Empty Dharma" means Buddha's Buddhism, Shunyata, Emptiness.

Without physical change one can change one's physical shape, can annihilate oneself. In deep sleep one's self is annihilated--someone else can see you there but you yourself are nowhere. Of course this is not enlightenment, for you are asleep. But with your enlightened mind you must grasp it at that very moment. This is difficult, of course. When you awake you are not asleep. When you sleep you are not awake. How do you combine these two states in one and grasp it? This, of course, is the profound principle of Buddhism. The Sixth Patriarch explained that it is like the light of the flame and the body of the flame. The unconscious state is the flame itself, and Wisdom is the light of the

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flame. The flame and the light must be one but you think of it as two, so you cannot grasp that moment. When you do, it is Empty Dharma. When you enter the body of the flame you realize this Empty Dharma. While you are looking at the light from the outside, you find only the term, the word, *empty*. It is not real Emptiness, but a vision, a dream. You have to destroy the vision of Emptiness, the dream. It is not Reality. Scrape off that *empty* and you can take the real attitude of the Zen student. Don't think of Emptiness. Forget that Emptiness. Then you come very near Emptiness. *Now speaks Empty Dharma*. The sun in the sky leaves the tree tops and is shining brightly, preaching a universal sermon of Emptiness, radiating through all space and time.

*For a long time I have been afraid of my own mind.* There was something in his mind--ego, self-consciousness, selfness. He could not annihilate his own existence.

"I" is like a big spike of iron from throat to tail! The monk feared this. It must be annihilated, but through his meditation he could not crush this I-ness; therefore he could not go through the last entrance. But when the monk let the fox go, in that moment he abandoned self. *Now I let it go!* He attained enlightenment. This is a short sutra but precise and accurate.

Reconstructed by BRIAN HEALD

### EDITOR'S NOTES

In the last issue we committed what might, with apologies to the Freudians, be described as a Buddhist slip. For "external," on page 2, column 2, line 13, we wrote "eternal." Habit, we suppose.

"Afflictions", on page 2, column 1, line 22, probably refers to the usual klesha, as Sokei-an often translates klesha with "afflictions."

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Founded in 1930 by  
Sokei-an Sasaki

A square seal containing stylized Chinese characters in seal script. The characters are arranged in a 2x2 grid. The top-left character is '禪' (Zen), the top-right is '美' (America), the bottom-left is '會' (Association), and the bottom-right is '一' (One).

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