

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE FOX CRYING IN THE NIGHT

Sunday Series 1938

Thus I have heard. When the Buddha was sojourning in the Karanda Venuvana he heard a fox crying in the deep night. The next morning he took his seat upon his nishidana before the monks and said, "Did you hear a fox crying in the deep night?" The monks answered, "Yes, Lokanatha."

The Buddha said, "It is a mangy fox. It cries in pain. If anyone should remove this pain, it would never forget his kindness. Here, however, is one who does not know the other's kindness and does not know how to requite the other's kindness. Do you not think he is foolish? Therefore, O monks, you should learn this lesson. You must know the other's kindness and must requite it. You must requite the other's kindness, even if it is very slight, to say nothing of great kindness." Thus the Buddha gave this teaching to the monks. Having heard this the monks were all delighted and vowed to uphold the teaching.

the zen

ON THE AGAMAS

THIS Agama sutra is very short. It is or twice you will not understand it, into the true meaning concealed here. Agamas like this one; and there are many stories about the Fox. Studying all the Fox sutras, we know what was in the Buddha's mind when he said this to the monks.

very simple. If you read it only once for you will not be able to penetrate

There are many short sutras in the Agamas like this one; and there are many stories about the Fox. Studying all the Fox sutras, we know what was in the Buddha's mind when he said this to the monks.

The great Mahayana scriptures are impressively elaborate, but everything is written on the surface. The ancient Hinayana scriptures are as simple as a broken tile or a pebble rolling on the street. A Mahayana sutra is like brocade or a peony. A Hinayana sutra is somewhat like a dandelion on the shore of a lake where anyone may tread on it. You can find Buddha's true mind in these small scriptures.

Thus I have heard: When the Buddha was dying, Ananda asked him how to begin the scriptures. The Buddha answered, "Thus I (Ananda) have heard." So this "I" is Ananda repeating the teachings of the Buddha after his death.

When the Buddha was sojourning in the Karanda Venuvana: The Sparrow Bamboo Garden was in the southern part of Magadha, in central India. It had been offered to Shariputra, one of the Buddha's great disciples, by Bimbisara, the King of Magadha. According to Monier Williams one must translate *karanda* as "sparrow," so I translate it in this way. It is not actually a sparrow, however, but a small bird with a long tail and a melodious voice.

The Buddha loved this garden. It was a very deep bamboo thicket, with cool streams meandering through, dark even at noon. Many monks were in the habit of meditating beside the streams in this grove.

Once a little monk, a novice of about twelve years, was meditating on the bank of a stream in this dark Venuvana. He saw yellow smoke rising from an ant heap. He came back and asked the Buddha what was in the ant heap. The Buddha said, "Go back there again and dig up that heap and find out what is in it!" Of course it was the little monk's own mind that was residing in the ant heap and it was from his mind that the smoke was rising. There is no connection here with the sutra we are discussing but the story of the young novice, which I have told you many times, gives you the atmosphere of this place, which is the scene of many incidents described in the sutras.

It is also told that at the end of Buddhism in India, one of the great disciples, Maudgalyayana, when attacked by heretics who from a hill rolled boulders that crushed his bones, managed to drag his broken body as far as the gate of this Venuvana and died there--an incident very famous in the annals of Buddhism.

The Venuvana had been given to Shariputra, not to the Buddha, but it was just the same as if it had been given to the Buddha himself, though the master of it was Shariputra.

He heard a fox crying in the deep night: I think you have not heard a fox crying--the fox has a very hoarse, high-pitched voice. When it comes near the temple and circles about, nosing around and crying, all the monks wake up hearing it, then cover their ears with their

quilts. I was in Montana for quite a while before I came to New York. In the snow of midnight I heard a coyote outside our home howling in the night. It was a very lonesome sound. Perhaps the fox felt lonesome too.

The next morning he took his seat upon his nishidana before the monks and said: The nishidana is the cloth on which we sit on our heels in formal posture. Only Zen monks use this nishidana in Japan, not the monks of any other denomination. To spread the nishidana and bow our heads to the ground when we seat ourselves in front of the teacher is not included in the early commandments. Perhaps this custom originated in China.

The monks sat on the ground and perhaps the Buddha spread his nishidana upon soft weeds and sat down upon it. It was the early way. Today the teacher is seated upon a highly decorated chair. But the Buddha simply sat on the ground and asked a simple question: "*Did you hear a fox crying in the deep night?*"

The scriptures say the fox's voice was very melodious. Of course this is not a fox crying outside; the Buddha meant the fox inside the monks' minds--afflictions, anxieties, desires. When you are busy you forget these, but when you go to bed at night, you spin them out as one spins a thread from cotton-- "Five years ago I loaned a man I thought honest a quarter. He didn't pay it back." And you call him up one night at midnight. You become angry and there is trouble. Next morning at your office you shout at your employees. That is the fox. And the employees at home that night shout at their wives and the wives next morning shout at the grocery man and then all New York is shouting.

The monks answered, "Yes, Lokanatha."

"Lokanatha" means "Lord." European scholars translate this as "Venerable One." But Buddhist scriptures must be translated into simple language; must not be complicated or overdecorated. The Hindu monks translated these sutras into Chinese in such simple language a child can read them. But European scholars make it elaborate, poetic, dramatized; they do not grasp the real meaning so we cannot extract anything from their translation. These scriptures should not be translated that way. The style should be simple, as when one makes a fine garment. The outside is very plain. Only afterwards one notices the beautiful lining.

The Buddha said: "It is a mangy fox: The Buddha loved to walk outside at midnight. I had a friend who visited one of the gardens where the Buddha used to walk. The stones are there that measure his walk, placed edge to edge in the garden. Walking there at midnight he saw the fox. Another scripture says that when the Buddha saw the fox the fox disappeared.

Our true Wisdom finds out the fox in the mind. By true Wisdom in meditation we observe all the useless "fox" minds handling us. In Buddhism these useless minds are regarded as evil spirits. Each such mind is an evil being; these evil beings engender other evil beings, multiplying evil powers. One can read in the scriptures that in meditation gods and demons stand before you. This is a description of the sphere of the subjective mind.

We have two worlds, you know: the objective world of space and time and weight, and the subjective world. The subjective world is larger. It has space but no weight. In the subjective world all things exist in the same place, but

this place is immeasurable--you dream of all things but you cannot find the place in which they exist.

There are really three worlds, visible, semi-visible, and invisible, the kama, rupa, and arupa dhatus--the tri-dhatu. We are living in these three worlds. Do not think you are living only in the visible world. In the semi-visible world many gods and demons hold converse with you, enchant you. There are many who live in the deep dark forest of the Fox, all mangy and crying.

If anyone should remove this pain, it would never forget his kindness: "Anyone" is Buddha, the Buddha within your own mind.

Here, however, is one who does not know the other's kindness: Buddha, Intrinsic Wisdom, made a promise to us before creation, according to the way of speaking of Mahayana Buddhism. This Intrinsic Wisdom is in your own mind. Nature has the intrinsic mission to remove man's sickness, to bring him into peace, to destroy his darkness and give him enlightenment, to give him comfort for his poverty, to make the best of things. Nature is fighting decadence, so that it may fulfill its highest potential. It is in nature to do this--Intrinsic Wisdom performs this function. We call this function Buddha's Intrinsic Promise. This Buddha is not Shakyamuni Buddha. Shakyamuni Buddha attained Wisdom so we call him *the* Buddha, but when we speak of Buddha it is of the Intrinsic Wisdom of the Universe. It is latent everywhere, even in material existence. In a broken-down barn in the country I saw ivy that had sprouted in the darkness and after months had reached up from the soil, stretching out thin sprouts toward the sunlight. This too is a manifestation of the intrinsic promise to carry things

from darkness to light.

And does not know how to requite it: To "recompense" or "requite" in Buddhism is to think within, to introspect. Everyone uses Intrinsic Wisdom to carry on his daily life but never returns It to itself. We must by meditation gather our scattered thoughts, unravel their dishevellement, and bring It back to its own profound source. This is "requiting the other's kindness."

Do you not think he is foolish? When you compose yourself, gather all those strings to yourself, are you not being filled? Then you come back

生 死
著 脱
冬 夏
月 天
襖 衫

to All Nature. When you send It out to all creation, like a radio, you become empty. You must gather It again and refill yourself by meditation. There is no other way.

Reconstructed by MARY FARKAS

LAST MONTH we neglected to note that the first page ink-painting is reproduced from an original, supposed to be a dragon, created by Vanessa Coward. He also delayed us by getting upside down while being printed. Now there are some six hundred of him locked in a closet.

*Shi shite wa dassu katen no san
Ikite wa tsuku togetsu no ou*

At death I take off my summer gown,
At birth I don my winter robe.

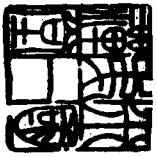
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Founded in 1930 by
Sokei-an Sasaki

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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會 協 禪 一 第 國 美