

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE THREE BODIES There are several fundamental terms in Buddhism. One is very important--*the Three Bodies of Buddha*. At the beginning of our meetings we always say: I take refuge in Buddha; I take refuge in Dharma; I take refuge in Sangha. These Three Refuges refer to the Three Bodies of Buddha. The names of these bodies are Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Nirmanakaya; or they may be called the Trikaya--the Triune Body. When we observe Buddha as a "person", we observe him in these three attributes.

While the Buddha was in the flesh no one spoke of his Three Bodies. But after his death, when his disciples could no longer see him, though there were his teachings (the Dharma), and there was his community (the Sangha), there was no Buddha; they had lost the First Principle. The Dharma was the Buddha's mind; the Sangha was the Buddha's actions of daily life; but they had lost the master, the soul.

The disciples of the Buddha attempted to find a new master in the Buddha's teachings and the Buddha's community. This new master must not be a theory, a doctrine, a fiction, an image or personified idea; it must be actually living, must be a reality--as real as what could be seen with their eyes.

Of course the disciples of the Buddha failed to see Buddha with their physical eyes. They had to find some other eye by which to see Buddha in his invisible state. When with their inmost eye they saw him in his original state of physical and mental existence they called this Dharmakaya Buddha.

The Buddha's physical body was scattered to air long ago, but we can trace back through time, through two thousand five hundred years, and on top of the Eagle Mountain near Rajagriha in Magadha in India, we join our palms and worship him as Buddha. This



And what's wrong with a bird-brain?

Buddha is still existing. All his thoughts, his mind, still exist in our minds and his Reality, his real body, Dharmakaya, is omnipresent, and we can find access to him when we open our Dharmachaksus, the Eye of Dharma, the Eye of Law.

The minds of the

disciples of the Buddha are eased when they find the Three Bodies of Buddha, so as a true Buddhist you must know the true meaning of these Three Bodies.

The Three Bodies are mentioned by many scholars. Their words have been translated into many languages and commented upon by many scholars, and these terms appear in many Buddhist dictionaries. I have glanced through many books since I first came to this country but I have failed to find one that spoke truly about these Three Bodies.

Dharma is a Sanskrit word with twenty four meanings. European scholars translate it as "law" or "way" or "religion." I accept the translation of Dharmakaya as "Body of Law" but note that in "Law" there are three grades.

The first grade is that which we can reach by meditation. It is timeless, spaceless, bodiless. Here consciousness fails to conceive its own existence. There is no center of consciousness because there is no space or time. The human mind cannot attain any concept of this First Law.

Christians describe IT as outside the universe. They say that the region of "God" is outside the universe and that IT created each of us. Physically, we cannot comprehend "outside of the universe" for the universe is endless, spaceless, infinite. We cannot imagine anything outside space. But, mentally, we must admit that a state where the power of cognition is annihilated, a state where we cannot cognize the existence of time, space, or motion with our own awareness, our own consciousness, is "outside the universe."

One cannot have faith in this because it is incomprehensible, because there is no way to explain it. Of course philosophically it is explained, but though

the philosophers completely explain it, they cannot reveal IT to the mind of man. Immanuel Kant said that Reality is indemonstrable, that there is no way of demonstrating this First Law to the human mind. Sages meet there, but, though they know IT, they fail to explain IT. Christian teachers say: "Just have faith; do not try to reason or argue about IT. IT can be attained only through faith." We Buddhists use a different word--meditation. We say: "Attain IT through meditation."

In meditation there is no idea, no word or name, no vision that symbolizes IT. There is just the pure transparent essence of mind that grasps this existence of Absolute Law, this Dharmakaya.

Every religious man, no matter of what faith, must open this door and enter it, must unveil the mystery that is Dharmakaya. When you think with mind, with words, when you look for it outside with your five senses, you may find some molecule or atom through your microscope's lens, but you cannot find the Dharmakaya. Words, philosophy, lead you to the gate, but words or philosophy or symbols or doctrines cannot send you in the gate. You must walk in by yourself, taking off all the vestures that are on your mind.

In ancient days sages, hermits, and ascetics left home and fasted in the desert, not speaking, not using human concepts, and entered immediately. Shakyamuni Buddha attained under the Bodhi tree and thought he could not speak about this, that it would be better to enter Nirvana immediately. According to the legend, the god Brahma appeared and entreated him to stay in the world and promulgate the meaning of the Dharmakaya or illustrate the true state with metaphors. The Buddha illustrated the true state with metaphors for forty-five years.

But one day he mounted upon the lion-throne (in the allegory) and plucked a lotus and held it up in his hand. He showed it, not with intention, but held it casually as I hold the hossu (fly-whisk) in my hand--and kept himself in silence. Do not misunderstand. There was no throne and there was no golden-haired lion. There was just a tree-stump on which the Buddha sat. He picked a lotus and held it just as I hold the hossu, and kept silent. And all the arhats looked at him and could not understand as the Buddha kept the silence, holding the stem of the golden lotus, his eye calm. But Mahakashyapa, the great, the giant Mahakashyapa, understood the Buddha's attitude and smiled. The Buddha pointed to Mahakashyapa: "You have grasped the secret meaning of the highest law. Hereafter you, Mahakashyapa, uphold this and do not lose this and transmit this through the generations of the future." This was called the first transmission of Zen.

Some European scholar translated the sutra in which this was described, the *T'ai I Chin Hua Tsung Chih* in Chinese, calling it "The Secret of the Golden Flower", and vitiated it with his own mind. This was not a Buddhist sutra, but a Taoist sutra, embracing the Chinese dualistic philosophy of I Ching. This scholar put his own theory into it so it has nothing to do with the Buddha's true meaning of the holy lotus.

We do this attaining-practice of Dharmakaya, then show the hand instead of the lotus.

There is a story of a monk asking his teacher: "What is the true meaning of Dharma? Please explain the true meaning of Dharmakaya." The teacher said: "If you work all day in the rice field, in the evening I shall give you the

true answer." So the monk worked hard all day, along with the other monks, thinking that in the evening he would be given a wonderful lecture, that the master would speak in the highest terms of the Buddhistic vocabulary, using words like "omnipotent" and so forth.

Evening came. The monk washed his feet and went to the temple to meet the master with the rest of the monks. The newcomer took his seat. The master came in (he, too, had been working during the day), went to his place, and sat down. "Now, master," the new monk said, "please explain the true meaning of Dharma." The master extended his arms with open palms and smiled. That was all. That was the end. Strange? Not at all strange if you see with your inmost eye. You can see it also with your physical eye. The eye must open from the inside.

Sambhogakaya is our own consciousness. Some European scholar translated Sambhogakaya as "Body of Enjoyment." Body of enjoyment! Yes, *sambho* is "enjoyment", but this word must be translated as unity or connection or yoga. Consciousness cannot exist by itself, alone. It must make contact with outer existence. Really our own bodies extend to the outside. For instance, a cat playing with its tail forgets that its tail is its own body. In the same way we forget. When we observe the outside "substantially" we call it electrons, or something; when we observe it as a spiritual existence, then it is the objective experience of subjective mind. The outside is an extension of our consciousness. The outside and consciousness make unity in meditation, that is, yoga with Dharmakaya. With the physical body, with active mind, yoga is made with the entire universe; including all the thoughts of the human being we make yoga

with all to realize our own existing Sambhogakaya. You can see Dharmakaya with this Sambhogakaya. With present consciousness you can see the inward body; you see Dharmakaya with this Sambhogakaya, and also the outward body--you also see Nirmanakaya, the body of transformation. The many different shapes--man, woman, tree, animal, flower--all are the extension of the source, Sambhogakaya.

Thus we complete our conviction that we take refuge in Dharmakaya, we take refuge in Sambhogakaya, we take refuge in Nirmanakaya. Christians say Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We say Buddha as an existing body in Dharmakaya.

The First Law, then, is omnipresent. The Second Law is like light

or heat. It has extension and pervades the fourth dimension--all over, at once. The Third Law is that of Nirmanakaya. We cannot go in all directions at once, we have to choose one way; it is like a one-way street. It does not extend like a wireless message but like a cable, in one line.

We take refuge in Sangha, group life and the union of sentient life, all sentient life--water, fire, air, earth we cannot see in a material sense, but all that exists in this wonderful sphere is life, nothing but spirit itself.

This is the Trikaya. Thus we take refuge in Buddha. I think I have explained the basic faith of Buddhism through the Trikaya -- the Three Bodies. Reconstructed by M. FARKAS

For other articles by Sokei-an on the Three Bodies, see Vol. VI, No. 11; Vol. III, No. 9. On the Three Refuges, see Vol. VIII, No. 5; Vol. II, No. 5. For the meaning of "vestures", also described as "wrappings", see Vol. II, No. 2.

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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 '禪' (Chán), top-right is '一' (Yī), bottom-left is '院' (Yuàn), and bottom-right is '第' (Dì).

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