

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

REAL EXISTENCE Buddhism is one of the old religions, with a doctrine which is very simple. It has been explained very plainly; it can be understood very easily. To understand this religion, however, you must come into it through the front gate. European scholars who study it always come into it from a strange corner. It seems to me they have never found the main entrance; they always come in through the chimney or the back gate, or the basement, or the window, never through the main entrance. They have lost themselves in the terms of Buddhism, which, of course, are very queer to European and American scholars.

To explain that which was found by Shakyamuni Buddha two thousand five hundred years ago, it is customary to divide the main principle of Buddhism into two: that which relates to the outside and that which relates to the inside. "Outside" means objective; "inside" means subjective. In my sect of Zen we do not divide this cardinal principle into two parts; from the first we grasp it without making any analysis of it. We just swallow it, or rather, enter into it. But in the Buddhism that must be explained by words we must divide one thing into two parts.

The ancients observed everything very simply. They observed the outside and thought it was a world consisting of four great elements: earth, water, fire, and air. In developed Buddhism, the outside is divided into five elements: earth, water, fire, air and ether--in Sino-Japanese, *chi, sui, ka, fu,* and *ku*. This latter, in Sanskrit *akasha*, can perhaps be translated as "ether." In Shingon, one of the sects of Buddhism--you call it Mantrayana Buddhism--the outside is divided into six elements; earth, water, fire, ether, and jnana. This "jnana" means "consciousness", the "power to know." We think this knowing power is entirely subjective; it cannot be objective--how can it be objective? But the Shingon people think there is no objective existence and that subjective knowing power cannot exist. Shingon, therefore, puts this knowing power into the objective side, and the subjective side has never been explained. This leads to the mysticism of Shingon.

When you consider Plato and Aristotle, you will find that in the Western world also men thought of the objective world as consisting of four elements. Perhaps in ancient times this was a universal view. Today we divide the objective world into many elements and give many names to these, but this plain analysis can be used too.

Now we must talk about how to analyze the inside. I have already introduced to you many theories about how to analyze the inside, or mind. Today you have your psychoanalysis; we have our analysis of mind by meditation. Tonight I shall speak of a theory which I have not previously introduced to you.

This theory belongs to the Hosso Sect, called by Western scholars of Buddhism the school of Buddhist psychology. Hosso--in Sanskrit *dharma lakshana*--means the "appearances of Dharma." In this case, Dharma must be translated as "Real Entity." The things on my table are all "appearances of Real Entities." Houses, the sky, earth, man, animals--all are appearances of Real Entity, Real Existence.

What "Real Existence" is must be understood. I have repeated the theory so many times that I shall abbreviate it tonight. These appearances are temporary appearances, not real appearances. This is combustible, this can be annihilated, this can be destroyed--the entire world can be reduced to ashes, and the universe can be destroyed--but the Real Entity that exists forever cannot be destroyed, it is eternal. Enlightened men can know the existence of Real Entity directly; ordinary human beings can see only temporary existences, so-called phenomena. The Dharmalakshana school explains phenomenal existence and points to Real Existence.

The strange method of analysis I am going to introduce to you tonight belongs to this school of Buddhism. The theory originated in India, but its terminology was developed in China. I shall not state the terms, but shall discuss the theory.

According to this theory, outer existences are of three kinds.

The first is the nature of real circumstances, real environment. The nature of real environment is different from the nature of plain environment. Plain environment is color, sound, smell, taste, touch, and so forth. Real environment is unintelligible to the unenlightened mind. I shall explain it very briefly.

This color red...I asked my mother: why is red red? Because it is red. Why is green green? Because it is green. Today the mother must explain to the child that color is not in the object; it exists on the retina of the eye, just as sound is created on the drum of the ear. Color is the vibration of ether; sound is the vibration of air. Your eardrum co-vibrates with the vibration of air and makes sound. So sound is not Real Entity. Something that is neither color, nor sound, nor taste, nor smell is Real Entity. In the West this is called *noumenon*. You cannot see it, but you know it exists.

As entity, all New York is, therefore, transparent--no color, no sound as you know it. It is created in your sense-organs. We are living in an illusory world, not seeing the real world. We must know and live in the Real World. When we observe this Real World without our five senses, it appears as color, sound, and so forth. But when we observe this Real World by our consciousness alone, without color, sound, without our five senses, then the whole world is just Real Existence, Real Entity. Immanuel Kant called this by the plain word, Reality.

Though we know this is an illusory world we cannot do anything about it. We cannot annihilate the color that comes into our eyes, we cannot refuse the sound that comes into our ears. We have to accept these as unavoidable existences. When we taste sugar it is sweet; we can-

not refuse this taste. When we drink water it is tasteless; we cannot do anything about it. When you have fever water tastes sweet. Of course this taste belongs to your tongue, not to the water; the water doesn't change, your taste changes.

We must understand that such outside things as color, and so forth, are isolated from our desire or emotion because they do not belong to the scope of will power. We say they belong to the scope of our consciousness. But this consciousness does not belong to us, it doesn't belong to the person; this consciousness is Nature's. When you think this way you will change your view of the whole world.

When I went to Boston, a young man, Mr. Robert Treat Paine Jr., asked me: "Do the Orientals believe that the outside is not real existence?" I said: "Mr. Paine, we have nothing to do with it. Believe it or not, it is so. Logically, it must be so." "Perhaps, logically, it is so. But we cannot believe it; we cannot accept it." We both laughed, but I was a little surprised. We cannot accept it, perhaps, but it is so. What can we do about it? The outside exists in our sense organs.

This is the principal thing to us. The Hosso people say: "This is the nature of real environment."

Now we find something entirely different from this in our mind--"sheer notion," so-called "absolute existences." A notion is a plain and absolute existence within the human mind. It never existed outside; it was never introduced from the outside; and nothing is combined with it. It is plainly the production of the human mind, like the "Ideal," for instance. Plato talked of the "Ideal." He thought that the most

good, the most beautiful, the most true is the Ideal. He explained it with the metaphor of the chair. Every chair is an imperfect chair--nothing is perfect in the objective world. But behind this phenomenal chair is the "ideal" chair, which is perfect. Before that ideal chair all these temporary chairs must be ashamed. By living on this earth as human beings and repeating this life, sometime we must reach the state of the Ideal.

Of course in Western civilization we can find this type of "Ideal" in everything everywhere. When I came to this country from the Orient I saw the Western garden. A fountain in the center, white flowers in a circle, pink flowers, red flowers, dark flowers, yellow flowers in exact balance. The Western "idea" of a garden is a perfectly symmetrical arrangement. Our "idea" of a garden is just to fence around a bit of woods and call it a garden. We don't do anything about it. It is nature. We accept nature as nature by itself. Of course later we imitated nature in our small backyards and transplanted trees and made ponds and streams and spread pebbles on their beds. But this is just imitation of nature. Of course some materials are arranged to produce a balance, but there is no special symmetrical arrangement.

The Ideal, therefore, is "sheer notion." Of course we can imagine many things that could never exist in the world. For instance, angels and Bodhisattvas, which never have been and never will be existences. "Sheer notions" have nothing to do with Reality, but they have their own position, their value in human life; human beings are greatly affected by them. Without these notions we could not create those things

that give enjoyment to our intellect. This sheer notion--the "lone-shadow or impression"--is a shadow in the mind, which has no real root on the outside and is entirely separated from any real circumstances.

The third kind of circumstance comes between the other two; it is that which is affected by our notion yet has its roots in Reality. Such as dreams. There is no idea in a dream. We cannot control our dreams. They take their own way. A dream is like a stream that flows by on its own way. I am trying to go somewhere in my dream and all of a sudden the street turns into a woods and I am walking through the woods and I come to a house. It is my house. A succession of accidents happen in a dream. To a degree we are controlled by these shadow-like notions, in the same way that we stay in our emotional life. We can control the emotional, but we are always affected by it. It can be controlled, but not absolutely. We are always controlled by our emotions. The nature of emotion is like the nature of a dream.

When we meditate upon these three circumstances, or environments, we can see clearly how our mind is made up and of what it consists: The real outside that is related to our five senses; impressions of this outside that are concealed deeper in our consciousness and that appear as dreams, day-dreams, or thoughts; these thoughts and dreams distilled, if I may use that word, and become notions. We meet a beautiful woman in the flesh; then we dream about her; then this impression is distilled some more and creates art--an angel, for instance, that is sheer notion.

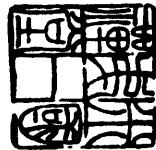
As Buddhists, we must understand this notion as merely a notion. By this notion we cannot change or control Real Existence. Of course you will object: 'By 'sheer notion' we are changing our world. Franklin invented electricity and with it we are smoothing off the mountains and making the whole world a vegetable garden. Why do you say 'sheer notion' cannot change the world? Why do you say it cannot change the outside?' We say: "Perhaps you can take away a mountain; you can even

shave off all the mountains, but you cannot change growing." You say: "The world can be wiped out by electricity forever." We say: "You can destroy all the world, but you cannot wipe out Reality, you cannot change Reality."

We base our view of human life on this unchangeable Reality. We observe these circumstances of human life and meditate on the many changes in human life, upon the real material that we have stored in our minds during many incarnations. A queer word--"incarnations"--but our forefathers invented it, so we use it. Then we think: "What shall we do about this matter?"

Buddhists do not deduce anything from an idea, saying: "This must be so!"--first making categories and then trying to fit everything into them. In the past your grandparents thought a woman's shape should be a certain way, something like a beetle. So your grandmothers put on pads and corsets to walk out on the street. Notion created that shape, not nature. An "idea" controlled it, not woman's real shape. When you think about it, the morality we accept is also a notion, an idea into which we try to shape ourselves. The more this morality becomes stereotyped the harder it is to adapt ourselves to it. Buddhists think differently. They try to adapt themselves to unescapable Reality. We measure the inside of a square box with a square measure; we try to make it accurate. We do not use the human idea, the human measure, to measure the outside. We make a measure to measure the outside. The idea cannot measure us. Whether the idea controls us or we control the idea is a great problem to the human race. We have been struggling with it since we were born on this earth. We Buddhists think the moon is not always perfectly round. The reflection of the moon on the water changes its form a million times. Sometimes it is flecked with fish-scales, but a moment later it can be gathered to the amorphous state, to suggest the perfection of the shape of the moon. We take the attitude of depending on Real Existence that is not notion.

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