

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE ETERNAL WOMAN There are false growths and distortions in all spheres of life. To understand them, it is necessary to return to the original source, to trace back to the cause.

When I was studying the art of poetry, I asked my teacher why no one word would fit exactly into a certain line. I had tried many words to express the exact meaning I wished to convey but none would work. My teacher looked at the poem and began by changing the first line. Before he had reached the line in question, he found the whole poem no good. A poem must be good from the start.

To return to Nirvana in order to understand the original condition of life was the teaching of primitive Buddhism. In the Deer Garden, when the Buddha first began to turn the wheel of Dharma, he taught the going back to the source of life, to Nirvana. This was the origin of Buddhism.

Western scholars studying this primitive religion mistakenly think all Buddhism is pessimistic. This idea came from the Pali scriptures that King Ashoka, two hundred years after the Buddha's death, sent to Ceylon, for the sutras carried there by the monks contained only the primary teachings of the Buddha. The complete system of Buddhism never entered that island. Mahayana Buddhism developed in the northern part of India, and from thence found its way into China and Japan. So Western scholars, who conceive Buddhism simply as contained in the Pali manuscripts, are basing their judgment of Buddhism on its early form only. I have been speaking of this Hinayana Buddhism for a long time. Now I wish

to say something about Mahayana.

The descriptions of Hinayana Buddhism are in philosophical terms, but Mahayana is presented in dramatic allegory, its meaning hidden in symbolism. If you do not know the meaning of the symbols, it will be hard to step into Mahayana Buddhism. For instance, in a Mahayana sutra, a description might run thus: "The Buddha put his foot down upon the ground and the whole world turned. When the Buddha smiled, all the heavens shone." This is a dramatic, not a philosophical, presentation. We see something of the kind in the theatre when a famous actor steps upon the planks of the stage. You feel a change in the air--a great moment has come--the "whole world turns."

The Mahayana sutras put the understanding of Reality into dramatic feeling: "When the winds of heaven blow, the golden leaves of the jeweled trees make a beautiful sound like many bells in harmony." The words give you the sense of that timeless, spaceless existence not related to the five senses. How can one explain such a description? The skeptic will scan the page with his icy eye and say, "Why, this is not true!"

But it is from this existence related to the five senses that we must contemplate the stage called Nirvana. A dramatic expression of this stage is to place the hand upon the solar plexus. This indicates that there is no inside, outside, here or there. To prove this is not so hard, but if you do not open your Eye you will never see it. We have a method to put you into that stage called Nirvana.

Of course in Nirvana-gharba--in the lotus womb, in English--there are

The ZAZEN WASAN, or CHANT OF HAKUIN ZENJI, as it is titled in Dr. Fowler's translation of Ohasama-Faust's *ZEN, DER LEBENDIGE BUDDHISMUS IN JAPAN*, is my selection to acquaint our readers with this work. This chant, which most of our Zazenkai members have memorized, is the one most frequently chanted in zendos everywhere, including our own. We are using a translation prepared by Mrs. Sasaki. No commentary was made on this by Sokei-an that we have so far come upon, nor do I recall hearing him chant it. As his Dharma Brother, Ohasama was well-qualified to represent his teaching line, so his comments should be of value to us. Another, more extensive comment, appears in *THE TIGER'S CAVE*, by Trevor Leggett, (Rider & Company, London, 1964).

Following our usual form for commenting on a text, we have placed the "Notes" immediately following their subjects rather than together at the end, as they appear in the book. In cases where other "Notes" have been referred to, the manuscript at the Institute may be consulted.

CHANT¹ OF HAKUIN² ZENJI

1. This chant was composed in the Japanese language. It is sung, during exercises, usually before the teacher's sermon, in praise of the Zen viewpoint.

2. On Hakuin (1683-1768 A.D.) see Introduction Pp. 35-37, 53.

*In their deepest being, men are
Buddha*

*As water is ice. And just as there
is no ice*

*Without water, so there is no man
Without Buddha.*

*Woe to the people who seek afar
And know not what lies near at
hand!*

*They are like those who standing
in water*

Yet cry for water.

*Born sons of the richest and
noblest*

*Nevertheless they wander discon-
solate*

In poverty and misery.

*The cause of the eternal round in
the sixfold realm³*

3. The round of births and re-births leads through the six lowest stages of the tenfold realm. (Cf. Introduction p. 46.)

*Is the gloomy path of intrinsic
dullness and stupidity*

*Yet the path becomes constantly
darker and darker around them
In the night of error.*

*When will they free themselves
From life and death?*

*O marvel of the perfect insight
of the Mahayana⁴*

4. Mahayana is the "Great Vehicle" that carries many people across the stream of life and death to the shore of salvation (Nirvana.)

The "Small Vehicle" (Hinayana), on the contrary, takes only a very few, mostly only a single person, and brings them to the shore of "empty" nothingness. Hitherto in Europe positive Buddhism, as interpreted by Schopenhauer, has usually been known and designated as the great vehicle (Dai jo) and

negative Buddhism as the small vehicle (Sho-jo). (Cf. Note 56 to the Shōdōka, pp. 142-46).

Which is exalted above all praise!

All virtues: doing good and faithful obedience,

Every good act: giving praise to the Buddha,

Repentance and exercises

All empty themselves here!

For him who completes one single meditation⁵

5. "Single sitting" here means the perfect contemplation of zazen that is attained in a short time according to a definite method. (Cf. Introduction p. 11.)

The sins which have accumulated beyond measure disappear.

Where, then, is there to be found

A place of exile⁶ for evil, when

6. With this vanish the six realms and the entire round of births in which evil could perhaps still have found lodging.

The Pure Land lies so near?

Who only once comprehends this praiseworthy truth

And feels sacred bliss,

Immeasurable happiness becomes his;

Still more, when he devotes himself to it

And experiences his own nature without intermediary

Then is his own being nothing else

Than the nature of perfected nothingness

And it is exalted above the play of thought.

Wide opens the gate of oneness

Of cause and effect;

And the only way opens, straight onward.

No second and third.

Who walks it, takes on as form

The form of the formless⁷;

7. Under the formless is to be understood the absolute, i.e. not "empty" but "perfected" nothingness, which is simultaneously all and the identity of the one and the many.

And neither his going nor his coming Are strange to it.

He accepts as his thinking the thinking of non-thinking⁸,

8. The Japanese designated "Mu-nen" (not-thinking) the thinking of perfected nothingness, i.e. not an unconscious preliminary stage, but the overcoming of all thinking limited to particulars.

And his singing and also his dancing Are voices of the truth.

The heaven of samadhi⁹

9. Samadhi signifies undistorted apprehension (somewhat as in a mirror), complete gathering of the mind, observation concentrated on being.

Is stretched out unhindered

And the full moon of fourfold wisdom¹⁰

10. The four wisdoms are:

1. The wisdom of a perfect mirror, i.e. the equality of the absolute. The symbol for this stage is the Bodhisattva *MONJU* (Mañjuśrī). (Cf. Twenty-ninth Problem, First Stage.) (On the functions of a Bodhisattva, cf. Note 56 to the Shōdōka, p. 146.)

2. The wisdom of the equality appearing as nature. The symbol for this "wisdom of difference" is the Bodhisattva *Fugen* (Samantabhadra). (Cf. Twenty-ninth Problem, Second Stage.) He understands the unity of equality and difference, since all creatures possess the same Buddha-nature, generally, to be sure, without having any consciousness of it. Therefore he already has the wish to save all creatures. But his position is nevertheless still inactively con-

templative and acts only as a model and example, not as active help.

3. The wisdom of marvelous insight, i. e. the combination of the two first stages with social activity. The symbol for this stage of the union of contemplation and activity is the Bodhisattva *Kvannon* (*Avalokiteśvara*). (Cf. Twenty-ninth Problem, Third and Fourth Stages.)

4. The wisdom of perfected deeds, i. e. perfection and uselessness. In this stage the three earlier stages have been abolished. The symbol for this wisdom of the highest Nirvana is the Buddha himself. (Cf. Twenty-ninth Problem, Fifth Stage.) The first two stages of wisdom assure one's own salvation by pure absorption in contemplation. But the two subsequent stages of wisdom that place one's own redemption in the service of the salvation of others by means of social activity are higher.

The form of the essence of Buddha (*Dharmakāya*) corresponds to the first stage, the second the form of the Buddha who attained perfection by exercises (*Sāmbhogakāya*), the third and fourth the form of his revelation (*Nirmānakāya*), i. e. his perfect freedom, which can assume various visible forms. The fourth wisdom is so exalted that the wise man, after he has reached the most perfect Nirvana, can neglect every external indication of his perfection. He kneels not merely before the Buddha, but also before a child. For in him is joined the most perfect humility with perfect majesty. He cannot do otherwise than esteem himself, for the Buddha-nature which he possesses is the highest truth. He cannot be other than humble, for he finds this Buddha-nature immediately, not only in

himself, but in all creatures, without having had to search long for it.

On this account the perfect sage appears outwardly like a child and often indeed like a fool, as if he had never experienced Nirvana. Precisely here it is revealed that the most perfect wisdom fulfills his deepest essence and that it belongs to the consistency of the soul that cannot be lost. Precisely by this he is qualified to save numerous fellow men.

The four stages of wisdom are not at all isolated among themselves but mutually interpenetrate each other. The perfect sage constantly participates simultaneously in all four phases in the everlasting round. For example, in the first phase he invariably is mindful of the first. He recognizes the same single Buddha-nature in everything, even in those persons who are apparently only at the first stage. The everlastingness of this spiritual life of fourfold phases, which is forever repeating itself within itself, is compared to the revolution of the sun which likewise is without beginning and without end. Just as the "inexhaustible light" of the sun lavishes life and warmth on the whole world, without itself suffering a lessening of strength, so the perfect sage exerts a beneficent effect upon his surroundings by the natural freedom of his being: all unintentionally and without any conscious purpose. Hence perfection is similar to purposelessness and unprofitableness. Also, and in the same manner, the sun, the moon, the trees and, finally, the Buddha himself, indeed, speak without ceasing--purely and simply by means of their silence. They do not address a person nobly at first when he has not endeavored to hearken

and to open his ear to them. Therefore, most persons do not hear this deepest speech, the sermon of silence. On this account Confucius says: "I should not speak any more, for the sky is silent, because it limits the course of the four seasons and nourishes and supports all creatures." And once the Buddha said: "I have preached about the truth for forty-five years and yet spoken no word about it." Perfect truth cannot be explained by words, but must be found immediately. Other persons can at most be granted a certain assistance for this self-experience. But even the most fully given information can never be more than a mere pointing out and a mere imitation. Therefore every person, finally must save himself by immediate experience.

Without personal experience the meaning of sacred scriptures cannot be apprehended. They, then, remain dead letters and mere paper. But whoever has attained the perfect experience, for him, even all seemingly "dead" things, like the dust of the street or a stick of wood, become living and transcendent heralds of truth.

Shines forth.

What is still lacking

Where Nirvana¹¹;

11. Nirvana is to be understood here and throughout not as a transcendental reality. It is not beyond, but the most immediate here and now; it is the perfect, absolute, and highest truth itself. Nirvana is "Buddha-nature", substance of the universe, all-encompassing totality of "Being" and "Not-being".

reveals itself?

Here is none other than the lotus-land

And this very body is none other Than Buddha!

Published with ZEN NOTES

Vol. XII, No. 7, July, 1965

*In their deepest being, men are Buddha
As water is ice. And just as there is
no ice*

*Without water, so there is no man
Without Buddha.*

*Woe to the people who seek afar
And know not what lies near at hand!
They are like those who standing in water
Yet cry for water.*

*Born sons of the richest and noblest
Nevertheless they wander disconsolate
In poverty and misery.*

*The cause of the eternal round in the
sixfold realm
Is the gloomy path of intrinsic dull-
ness and stupidity.*

*Yet the path becomes constantly dark-
er and darker around them
In the night of error.*

*When will they free themselves
From life and death?*

*O marvel of the perfect insight of
the Mahayana*

*Which is exalted above all praise!
All virtues: doing good and faithful
obedience,*

*Every good act: giving praise to the
Buddha,*

Repentance and exercises

All empty themselves here!

*For him who completes one single meditation
The sins which have accumulated beyond
measure disappear.*

*Where, then, is there to be found
A place of exile for evil, when*

The Pure Land lies so near?

*Who only once comprehends this praise-
worthy truth*

And feels sacred bliss,

*Immeasurable happiness becomes his;
Still more, when he devotes himself to it*

*And experiences his own nature with-
out intermediary*

*Then is his own being nothing else
Than the nature of perfected nothingness*

*And it is exalted above the play of thought
Wide opens the gate of oneness*

Of cause and effect;

*And the only way opens, straight onward
No second and third.*

Who walks it, takes on as form

The form of the formless;

*And neither his going nor his coming
Are strange to it.*

*He accepts as his thinking the think-
ing of non-thinking,*

*And his singing and also his dancing
Are voices of the truth.*

The heaven of samadhi

Is stretched out unhindered

*And the full moon of fourfold wisdom
Shines forth,*

What is still lacking

Where Nirvana reveals itself?

Here is none other than the Lotus Land

And this very body is none other

Than Buddha!

many different stages.

The lotus flower has eight petals. This number eight is everywhere. The crystal has six surfaces and top and bottom--eight. Color has seven, but with no-color--eight. Sound has seven, but with no-sound--eight. There are eight sources of natural existence--sun, moon, thunder, water, metal, wind, fire, and vapor, all symbolical--eight. Human beings have positive, negative, and the six senses. In Chinese numerology, of these eight, five are manifested and one is the root of the manifested. The eight are symbolized by the lotus and the seeds within.

In the lotus womb all are one. All life is one and also many. I am one, as life, but if I count my life at every moment, it is many lives; my individuality changes at every moment. Your skin gives you a different sensation at each spot. All life is like a drop of oil on water; shake it--there will be many drops of oil. But this is just one stage--all life is in that condition. This womb stage can be called Sambhogakaya, our original stage not related to the five senses--not embodied in form and color, but like the seed in the stage of the lotus womb. We can trace back even deeper. The white elephant, the complete body with no differentiation, symbolizes the stage of the white lotus womb.

Primitive Buddhism stops *there*, but Mahayana observes from there to here. You could say that Hinayana comprises from earth to heaven and that Mahayana returns to earth. In the stage of the lotus womb, you have no superstition, no impurity in your life; everything you do from this stage is pure. It is because we do not under-

stand this stage that we hate, kill, steal. In the white lotus womb, where all is one, to kill is to kill one's self--not the other. If I think something is *mine*--it is stealing. This is so with love also. Coming from that stage to life on earth--all is pure and wonderful. Nothing is separate from yourself from any point in the circle, the whole circle belongs to each. Everyone is mine and I am yours.

There is a story told of a student of Manjushri, the teacher of the doctrine of infinite existence. He never related to the five senses and was called Shidankara ("the boy who has many treasures"). Everybody is Shidankara!

After Shidankara was enlightened in the highest stage, he started to study life. He traveled from one teacher to another covering fifty-three points. To understand Buddhism, we say there are fifty-three points, going into the disembodied state and returning to this life.

There was a teacher, a very beautiful woman. In his wanderings, Shidankara came to her country which was surrounded by steep hills. He remembered Manjushri's words: "In a country surrounded by mountains, there is a beautiful woman teacher. He went to the most beautiful city in the mountains and enquired of a man concerning her. The man looked at him, wondering why this young man wished to see her. He looked so naive -- as if he had really dropped all the desires of man. Looking deeply into his eyes, the man saw that Shidankara's soul was a great ocean of wisdom. His voice came from a deep mind and a pure heart. Again he wondered why this youth wished to meet the woman he was seek-

ing. He asked, "Why do you have this wish? The woman you seek is indeed beautiful, but we do not respect her and no one considers her to be a wonderful teacher; she is not holy."

Shidankara answered, "I must see her." "Well then, go north and you will come to her palace." So he went there. Her palace was surrounded by deep blue water. All the eaves were hung with jewels. Striking one against the other at the caprice of the wind, they made wonderful music. A verandah led him into the depth of the palace. There he saw her! He could not judge her age--she might be young and she might be a million years old--she was ageless! Sometimes we see a woman like that: she is not a child--she is matured but not old. We cannot trace her age, for she is not living in her skin; she is eternal.

Her eyes as well as her hair were a deep aquamarine, like the dark blue in the Indian paintings. Her skin was golden and she wore jewels hanging from her shoulders and breasts. She was all dignity and loveliness, yet she was guarded in manner as she looked at Shidankara. He had to bow down and put his brow upon her feet. This is the way we show deepest respect for a teacher in the temples.

He said, "I have been paying visits to one teacher after the other. Manjushri, my teacher, told me about you. Please open your honey gate and tell me of your Dharma."

She answered, "If anyone comes to see me with earthly desire--he will be emancipated from it." This power is sometimes found in a deep and pure woman. "Anyone who looks into my eyes will be emancipated from all ugly thoughts. Anyone who steps upon

my altar and sits beside me is emancipated from the agony of life. Anyone who embraces me will find the great body of unity--not on earth but in the light that shines in heaven. He who touches his lips to mine will be restored to eternal life and will be emancipated from all questions of the Dharma." That was her teaching!

When you embody in the white lotus blossom and observe life in this world, everything is pure as snow--silver snow. Then you can live purely, live wonderfully, and you will understand that superstitious purity is not purity at all. This is a wonderful allegory of the Mahayana.

Reconstructed by Vanessa Coward and Mary Farkas from the notes of A. Kepner

THE MIND OF BUDDHA Buddhism depends absolutely upon your mind. There is no Buddhism that depends upon a God existing in the sky. There is no Buddhism existing upon some symbol--triangle or square. Buddhism is built upon the mind, the mind of Buddha, the mind of everyone. The Buddha found Buddhism from his own mind. Therefore we follow the Buddha. Following him, we find Buddhism from our own mind. We don't care about the Buddha's mind; we find Buddhism from our own mind. So in Buddhism there is no practice but meditation. Meditation is the only method. We kneel down to the Buddha's image because he was the first one who opened this avenue and told us: "You had better find the truth from your own mind. Don't listen to anyone else." What he said is true.

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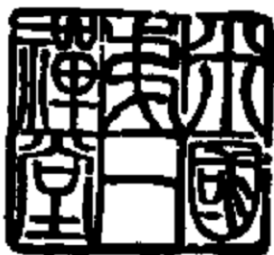
THE FIRST ZEN INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, INC.,
113 East 30th Street, New York, NY 10016

Vol. XII, No. 7, July, 1965
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