

# ZEN NOTES



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## SOKEI-AN SAYS

### HOW TO PUT ZEN INTO SPEECH

For three or four years I have been thinking about how to put Zen into words, how to explain to Western people precisely what Zen is. I am not quite ready to speak about Zen in entirely new terms, unlike those traditional in orthodox Buddhism, but perhaps I can make an outline that will guide people to the gate of Zen. For before they begin the discipline of Zen they need some acquaintance with this entirely new thing in the West called Zen.

First, I have tried to locate the essence of Buddhism. There are two different ways of approach to truth in the world. One is philosophy, including science in a broad sense. The other is the prayer practiced by the old Saints, kneeling down in the desert sand, or in the woods, concentrating in solitude. I don't know how Jesus found this method in the desert, but afterwards in many places he prayed to his Father in Heaven. He reached there through that device. This happens many times to those of religious experience. Also to artists or musicians--suddenly inspiration comes to someone who is playing the piano, for instance, and he will leap out of this everyday existence, reach some so-called higher stage than that of daily life.

Buddhism, from the Buddha's time, did not take either of these two attitudes, the philosophical or the supplicating, to reach the higher stage, or God. These schools were already in existence. The tantric schools used incantation--though they do not invoke with the lips but with the mind; the Brahman's effort was to go *there* from here, concentrating on the spatial

difference between his own position and the place to which he must reach. The Buddha's attitude was not philosophical and not reaching out somewhere. He tried to face actuality *here*. He tried to find something that was true in himself.

It is not necessary to think in words. You do not need to reason to find your nose. Nor do you need to say, "Oh, Father in Heaven, please help me find my nose." You just find your nose on your face. That is how the Buddha tried to find the truth in himself. I think a Zen student understands this immediately. When you find your true aspect it is not by philosophy or prayer. Your true aspect is not before you or behind you or beside you. It is in you. It is in the place where you are standing and you cannot separate it from yourself. This is a very old way of finding yourself but it is still new.

Philosophy tries to find the truth with words. There is no philosophy without words, you know. And science tries to find it outside. Looking at the world through his microscope, the scientist sees the whole universe in his finger nail, all ridged and val-  
lied, but he sees it as outside himself.

Both philosophy and science are like an old man with a cane. They have no strength in themselves. Buddhism doesn't lean on a cane but stands on its own feet and walks without a cane. It can go through the philosophy place, the scientific place, any place.

From the first page of the sutras, Buddhism is full of logical contradictions. You can say "There is nothing in the universe and there is everything in the universe" at the same time, for logic doesn't mean anything

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MYŌHON ON THE KOAN Excerpt from *THE ZEN KOAN*, by Isshū Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc. New York, 1965.

Zen makes use of three kinds of training in bringing its followers to the experience of satori and maturing that experience: meditation or zazen, the study of koans, and daily life. The Zen manner of employing meditation and daily life is distinctive, but the koan and the methods of using it are unique and to be found in Zen alone..The Zen masters have stated quite clearly what a koan is and for what purpose it is used. One of the best of these statements is to be found in the *Chung-fêng ho-shang kuang-lu*, the "record" of the Lin-chi master Chung-fêng Ming-pên (Chūhō Myōhon, 1263-1323)..When he was asked why the teachings of the buddhas and patriarchs were called "public records," that is, koans, he replied:

The koans may be compared to the case records of the public law court. Whether or not the ruler succeeds in bringing order to his realm depends in essence upon the existence of law. *Kung (kō)*, or "public," is the single track followed by all sages and worthy men alike, the highest principle which serves as a road for the whole world. *An(an)*, or "records," are the orthodox writings which record what the sages and worthy men regard as principles. There have never been rulers who did not have public law courts, and there have never been public law courts that did not have case records which are to be used as precedents of laws in order to stamp out

injustice in the world. When these public case records (koans) are used, then principles and laws will come into effect; when these come into effect, the world will become upright; when the world is upright, the Kingly Way will be well ordered.

Now, when we use the word "koan" to refer to the teachings of the buddhas and patriarchs, we mean the same thing. The koans do not represent the private opinion of a single man, but rather the highest principle, received alike by us and by the hundreds and thousands of bodhisattvas of the three realms and the ten directions. This principle accords with the spiritual source, tallies with the mysterious meaning, destroys birth-and-death, and transcends the passions. It cannot be explained in writing; it cannot be measured by reason. It is like the poisoned drum that kills all who hear it, or like a great fire that consumes all who come near it. What is called the "special transmission of the Vulture Peak" was the transmission of this; what is called the "direct pointing of Bodhidharma at Shao-lin-ssu" was a pointing at this..

From the time long ago when the lotus flower was held up on the Vulture Peak until today, how can there have been only seventeen hundred koans? Yet the koans are something that can be used only by men with enlightened minds who wish to prove their understanding. They are certainly not intended to be used merely to increase one's lore and provide topics for idle discussions.

The so-called venerable masters of Zen are the chief officials of the public law courts of the monastic community, as it were, and their words on the transmission of Zen and their collections of sayings are the case records of points that have been vigorously advocated. Occasionally men of former times, in the intervals when they were not teaching, in spare moments when their doors were closed, would take up these case records and arrange them, give their judgment on them, compose verses of praise on them, and write their own answers to them. Surely they did not do this just to show off their erudition and contradict the worthy men of old. Rather, they did it because they could not bear to think that the Great Dharma might become corrupt. Therefore, they stooped to using expedients in order to open up the Wisdom Eye of the men of later generations, hoping thereby to make it possible for them to attain the understanding of the Great Dharma for themselves in the same way. That is all.

The word *kung* or "public," means that the koans put a stop to private understanding; the word *an*, or "case records," means that they are guaranteed to accord with the buddhas and patriarchs. When these koans are understood and accepted, then there will be an end to feeling and discrimination, birth-and-death will become empty; when birth-and-death becomes empty, the Buddha-way will be ordered.

What do I mean by according with the buddhas and patriarchs? The buddhas and patriarchs have

been greatly sorrowed to see that sentient beings bind themselves to the realm of birth-and-death and sensual delusion, so that, through the countless kalpas of the past down to the present, none have been able to free themselves. Therefore they displayed words in the midst of wordlessness and handed down forms in the midst of formlessness. But once the bonds of delusion have been loosed, how can there be any words and forms left to discuss?

If an ordinary man has some matter which he is not able to settle by himself, he will go to the public law court to seek a decision, and there the officials will look up the case records and, on the basis of them, settle the matter for him. In the same way, if a student has that in his understanding of his enlightenment which he cannot settle for himself, he will ask his teacher about it, and the teacher, on the basis of the koans, will settle it for him.

The koan is a torch of wisdom that lights up the darkness of feeling and discrimination, a golden scraper that cuts away the film clouding the eye, a sharp ax that severs the root of birth-and-death, a divine mirror that reflects the original face of both the sacred and the secular. Through it the intention of the patriarchs is made abundantly clear, the Buddha-mind is laid open and revealed. For the essentials of complete transcendence, final emancipation, total penetration, and identical attainment, nothing can surpass the koan.

An example of a koan from the famous MUMONKAN COLLECTION, which is included in *Zen, the Living Buddhism of Japan*, by Ohasama-Faust, translated from the German by Dr. George B. Fowler.

ENCOUNTER ON THE STREET WITH A PERSON WHO HAS ACHIEVED THE TRUTH.

MUMONKAN 36

Gozo<sup>1</sup> says: "If you come across a person on the street who has achieved truth, you must meet him neither with words nor in silence! Now tell me, how would you meet him?"

On this Mumon says:

"If you can meet him with the right familiarity in such a case, nowhere will you find any hindrance to happiness. But if you are not that far advanced, then your eyes must be everywhere."<sup>2</sup>

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If one meets on the street a person possessing the truth,  
He must be received neither with words nor silently.  
Perhaps you would hit him in the face?  
He who claims to understand everything immediately,  
Well, let him understand this!<sup>3</sup>

NOTES

1. Literally Gozo means "fifth patriarch"; but here the Fifth Patriarch Obai himself is not meant, but the Patriarch Hojen of Gozo (d. 1104). He was the teacher of Eno, author of the introductions, criticisms and "explanatory comments" of the book *Hekigan-Roku*.

2. Then you must still practice truth with greater attention.

3. Only he who experienced the truth itself has the capacity to greet adequately a perfect person. A forceful and brutal solution of this problem, for example by a fresh box on the ear, shows merely that the experience has not yet been attained.

in Buddhism. From the Buddhistic point of view you can say "I do not exist and I exist" and the proof is that you are standing there.

Now we come to Zen. What is Zen? How can we speak about it, using everyday words? Let us take the metaphor of the trinity, the triune body, and apply it to material existence. Water, frozen, is ice, is solid; evaporated, it is steam--solid, liquid, vapor is the trinity of water. If you squeeze vapor you can reduce it to liquid. Crystallize liquid and you cannot find the liquid any more, it will be solid. Once the diamond was gas that became liquid, then a solid. Now it is the diamond. Strange, isn't it? This is Father, Child, Holy Ghost in the material realm.

If we use this metaphor to think about our thoughts, there are solid thoughts, liquid thoughts, and atmospheric thoughts. Sometimes we say people living in New York City are really living in matter, between bricks and stone, cement and concrete. But if you go to the cement maker, you can speak with him about cement, but not about New York. If you go to the brick maker, you can talk with him about bricks, but not about New York. You can see stone in a mountain quarry but New York is not there. For New York is not bricks, stone, cement, or concrete. New York is thought expressed by matter. All around us are buildings, bridges, subways, brass musical instruments--all solidified thoughts, thoughts expressed by solid matter, solid thoughts.

This *hossu*, this horsetail brush, is wood and hair, but when I hold it, it is my thought cast in solid matter. Some people prefer Nature to the city

but I myself prefer human thoughts expressed in matter to the unformed thoughts of Nature. I see Nature in them. Of course our attitude is different from yours. I objectify this brush which originally was in an unformed stage, and the Patriarch, seeing people as so many trees on the mountain, observed their movement as the movement of Nature.

You can objectify your thoughts into liquid form also. The liquid expression of thought has no solidity of form. Yet, flowing from the lips to ears, it makes waves and whirlpools.

What was it that happened in Russia? It wasn't just words, was it? Bolshevism was like a tornado, ocean waves. Fascism, too, was like a wave of dense liquid, stronger than words.

All you think with words might be called liquid thought. Its consistency is like strawberry ice cream. Pictures are not quite solid, not quite liquid. They stand between these two. Sculpture is solid.

Atmospheric thought cannot be put into words, into form. It is lost when it is put into words. The poet understands this very well.

Perhaps music is liquid thought, but it is atmospheric, too. You cannot grasp any meaning in it. Its meaning is tangible but not definitely expressed. And religion. When you say God, Buddha, Allah, or when you put it in half liquid matter, it is just G O D and conveys no meaning to your religious experience. Christ strove three years to try to explain it in words, but he could not do it. And then his disciples through two thousand years tried to put it into words. But it cannot be carried by words. You can feel the meaning but it cannot be

conveyed in words. Atmospheric thought--that is the wonderful part of religion.

A Japanese friend who lives in the suburbs came to visit me. He said: "Your place is under the elevated and on a noisy street, but it is very quiet. In the suburbs where I live, there is no noise, yet it is very noisy. How do you get it so quiet?" I told him, "It is my thoughts that are quiet." When I was sitting here and he was sitting here, there was something that kept his thoughts relaxed and it was quiet--as quiet as a temple in Japan.

And now we come to the Zen "atmosphere." We cannot express that by any words but you feel a million words that are unspoken. All religion is here. It is the same as poetry. It is the whole triune body.

Not only Buddhism but almost all religions are atmospheric thought. Philosophical thought is liquid; art is semi-solid and semi-liquid thought. When you have a thought that is atmospheric you have to press it to make it into a liquid and then compress it and make it solid, concrete. The tendency of man's mind is to begin with the liquid form. When you taste this, you become intoxicated and go both ways, solid and atmospheric.

Now I am going to tell you how a Zen student develops the triune body of thought.

When you have been given the first koan, "Before father and mother, what were you?" by meditation you conceive an atmospheric thought first. You think about it. But it cannot be put into words. It is beyond space and time. If you put it into solid form immediately, one million years in one second, well, all right. This is past,

present, and future, beyond time and space. You have gone direct from the atmospheric to solid physical matter.

But if you bring a liquid thought as an answer, the Master will slap you to bring you to a solid. For, hitting you, he hits the whole universe. Of course, his hitting is not personal, not to satisfy his own anger.

After you have proved your answer, the Master may say, "Express it in words. But if you say, "It is beyond time and space," the Master will answer "R-i-i-ng" with his bell. Your answer must show insight.

A man asked me: Why do you stay  
in the Green Mountains always?  
I smiled but I did not answer.  
A peach blossom follows the  
stream a thousand miles.

This is a famous poem. To taste such a poem you must have the highest kind of thought, the endless feeling of Zen.

So, first, atmospheric thought; second, put it into a solid; third, bring it back to the liquid.

In ordinary life, usually your thoughts are liquid first, then they go through the atmospheric stage, then solidify, for this is the Western way of thinking. But, it is first atmospheric, then solid, then liquid. If you really think about this, you will be able to understand how to make a Zen answer. Once you understand Zen it is easy.

*Reconstructed by M. Farkas*

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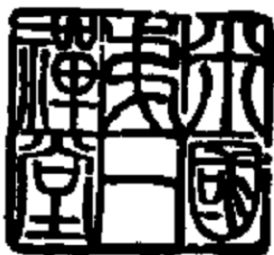
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