

ZEN NOTES



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SOKEI-AN SAYS  
THE THUNDERSTORM

Shakyamuni Buddha was in the woods of Uruvilva on the banks of the river Nairanjana struggling to attain the highest awakening. In these woods two sages were dwelling. One was Arada Kalama, the other, Udraka Ramaputra. These sages taught their attainment to the Buddha.

For Arada Kalama the highest attainment was awakening in the state of emptiness, or nothingness, the third stage of the arupadhatu. He taught that man must first come forth from kamadhatu, the world of desire, into rupadhatu, the world of pure sense-perception, the world of seeing, hearing, and so forth, there to observe his mind step by step through all the states relying upon sense-perception, from the tangible outer states to the intangible inner states. Then he must come forth into arupadhatu, the world of non-form or formlessness. The arupadhatu is not dependent upon the senses; it is dependent upon consciousness alone. In the first stage of arupadhatu the meditator is aware of nothing but space. In the second stage he realizes that space is the body of consciousness, that consciousness is the duration of his being. Abiding in this state of consciousness for a long time, the meditator then enters the state where consciousness disappears because there is nothing to be conscious of. Everyone who meditates upon this higher state disappears from his own mind. This was the nirvana attained by Arada Kalama. And this was the attainment he transmitted to the Buddha.

But the Buddha was not satisfied. He left Arada Kalama and went to the other sage, Udraka Ramaputra. I shall not speak now of how the Buddha studied under him, but he was dissatisfied with Ramaputra's teaching also. He thought that the attainments of these two ascetics were still in the sphere of their own egos, that they had not entirely emancipated themselves from their egos. Therefore the Buddha decided that he would attain enlightenment by himself. He desired to transcend himself entirely, to transcend the ego, or the mind, of the human being and to attain Nirvana in the egoless and purposeless state. "Purposeless" is a Buddhistic term. When we say a deed is "purposeless" we mean it is purposeless from the standpoint of the doer; the doer does not exist, nature exists. Then, under the Bodhi tree, the Buddha finally reached the highest awakening.

Forty-nine years passed. Now the Buddha was traveling the road from Vaishali to Kushinagara with his monks on his way to the Shala-tree Garden, where he would enter his final nirvana. Three months earlier when he was meditating in the Bow-shaped Tower, the demon Mara had appeared before him and whispered: "O Lokanatha, the time has come for you to enter nirvana." Ananda, the Buddha's attendant, though he was right there, was not aware of what had happened, but the Buddha knew that the time had come. So he set out for Kushinagara, passing slowly from village to village. In these three months of traveling he gave wonderful teachings to the people who gathered about him every evening at the places where he stayed for the night.

Thus, dragging his body, the Buddha slowly covered the road to Kushinagara. Outside the city he stopped to rest under a tree by the roadside. "I feel severe pain in my back," he said to Ananda. "You had better spread the matting on the ground. I shall rest here for a little." "Yes, Lokanatha," Ananda answered. He spread the nishidana and the Buddha took his seat upon it.

At that time a man whose name was Pukkusa saw the Buddha sitting under the tree. Pukkusa was one of the lay-disciples of Arada Kalama, the first sage who had taught his attainment to the Buddha. It seems to me he was an aged man. He was traveling to Pava from his home in Kushinagara. The name Pukkusa means, in Sanskrit, "garbage man," but Pukkusa was an important official of the city of Kushinagara, the headquarters of the Malla tribe. He was a rich man.

Pukkusa stopped and gazed at the Buddha, at the Buddha's face that was so beautifully balanced, at his expression that was calm and deep. Here was a man who had attained the highest nirvana. His mind was above all samskara, that noisy mind in which most human beings live. The Buddha was living above that mind.

One meaning of samskara is 'life'-- life by itself, the natural force that stays in this body. As long as it stays in this body we are living. When it stays comes to an end we go away with it, leaving our body on earth. Usually this "life" lives in a noisy mind. But the Buddha's life lived in a quiet mind.

The Buddha looked like a great dragon. What makes a man great is not his brain or the knowledge that he has learned from books or at school. Great men have a great span of life.

Their lives have a greater magnitude than those of others. Today, people try to acquire more knowledge, to read more books, to experience more of this and that, hoping thus to become great men. They attain a kind of greatness but cannot avoid the evil qualities that go with it.

The Buddha looked like a great dragon, or a pool of clear water in which is no speck of dust. Pukkusa was delighted to see him. Good mind was aroused in him. He approached the Buddha and bowed. Then he took a seat before the Buddha and extolled him saying: "All men who renounce their homes have the quality of purity. They love to live in quiet places. Really they are wonderful, they are praiseworthy."

When Pukkusa says "they have the quality of purity," he means that their minds are pure, that they are not living in samskara. They live in a quiet place. It isn't necessary to be in a noiseless place, but our minds should be kept quiet. Pukkusa was, it seems to me, a man who liked to talk. The Buddha looked so serene he did not know that the Buddha was suffering and in pain.

Pukkusa continued: "When my master Arada Kalama was once meditating under a tree on the roadside, between Kushinagara and Pava, at about this very place a caravan of five hundred passed along the road. The noise of the carts was loud, but in his meditation my master did not hear the sound at all.

"Someone approached my master and said to him: 'A caravan of five hundred wagons just passed by. Did you see it?'"

"My master replied, 'No, I did not see it.'

"'Did you hear the sound?'"

"'No, I did not hear any sound,' my master said.

"'Were you awake?'"

"'Yes,' answered my master, 'I was awake.'

"The man became silent. He asked no more questions and presently withdrew. Ascetics are certainly wonderful. Their meditation is so deep and the state of mind they reach so profound that they do not even hear wagons passing before them. My master not only did not hear the sound of the wagons, but heard nothing whatsoever in his meditation."

Thus Pukkusa told the Buddha about his master Arada Kalama. This was Arada Kalama's attainment--akincaya-yatama, in Sanskrit, the state in the arupadhatu where, in the meditation of consciousness alone, one is submerged into consciousness and disap-

pears from oneself, from one's own mind. This, Arada Kalama thought, was the highest nirvana.

Five hundred wagons passing on an Indian road. The rising dust covers everything like a screen of smoke. I have heard the sound of such a caravan in Manchuria. The creak and rumble of the huge-wheeled carts, the bellowing of the bulls that pull them, the shouts of the drivers and the cracking of their whips, the lowing of the cattle, the braying of the mules and the shrieking of the camels straining under their heavy loads merge into one great roar of sound.

In his meditation, Arada Kalama had completely abstracted himself. Many people think this is the highest meditation. Naturally the amateur believes it is the goal to be attained.

The Buddha said to Pukkusa: "I shall tell you something and ask you some questions. If you wish, you may answer. Which is more difficult: not to hear the noise of a caravan passing before you on the road or not to hear the crash of thunder?"

Pukkusa replied: "O Lord, in comparison with the sound of crashing thunder the noise of even a thousand caravans passing by is almost inaudible. It cannot be compared with the sound of crashing thunder."

The Buddha said: "Once I was in the village of Atama living in a weed hut. (It seems to me this was during the period when the Buddha was in Uruvilva, before he had attained enlightenment.) One day, after I had finished my meal and entered the noon-time meditation, strange black clouds appeared on the horizon and a storm gathered in the sky. All of a sudden there was a clap of thunder and a bolt of lightning rent the heavens asunder. Four bulls with their driver were killed in a field, and the driver's younger brother also was killed. A crowd of people gathered.

"About that time I finished my meditation and went out of my hut thinking to take a walk. I heard the clamor of many people and saw a funeral procession passing through the fields. Among the crowd was one who knew me. He approached me and, having paid homage to me, said, 'O Lord, why do you walk here?'"

"I, on my part, said to him, 'Why have so many people gathered here? What are they all doing?'"

"The man said to me, 'Do you not know what happened here an hour ago?'"

"'No,' I replied, 'I do not know what has happened?'"

"'Where were you then?' asked the

man. 'Were you sleeping?'  
"I was here," I replied, 'and I was not sleeping. I was meditating.'

"The man said, 'In your meditation did you not realize that there was a furious thunderstorm, that a thunderbolt struck four oxen and two men and killed them? Did you not hear the crash of that terrific thunderbolt?'

"No, I did not hear anything.'

"The man was terribly surprised. He looked at my face and said: 'No one but the Buddha himself can practice such deep meditation.'"

A thunderbolt rent the sky striking down four bulls and two men and killing them. But the Buddha did not hear the sound and did not know what had happened. This was the Buddha's answer. This was the Buddha's attainment.

What do you think about this kind of meditation? You cannot measure this kind of meditation with the rule that you have for your human meditation, you cannot measure this with the mind that you have. You can imagine Arada Kalama's meditation, but you cannot imagine this kind of meditation. How can anyone meditate thus? To do so one would have to be dead.

But the mind is not dead in nirvana. The mind in nirvana must be kept awake. Nirvana is not deep sleep. Deep sleep is not enlightenment; deep sleep is not the attainment of anything. Human beings alone can attain deep meditation, but their mind must be kept awakened. If the Buddha had kept his mind awakened, he would have heard the clap of thunder, you say? You must realize that the Buddha was speaking about something else, something entirely different.

The Buddha's idea of "NOTHING" is different from the common idea of "nothing," different from the idea of nothing that human beings can imagine in their minds. As long as human beings are not living in the hridaya mind, the mind in the heart, they are not living in the amala consciousness, the consciousness of the earth and the sky. They are limited to the citta mind. People think that by annihilating the citta mind they can attain emptiness. You can practice the annihilation of the citta mind any time. It is not necessary to stay in the woods for six years to accomplish this. The Buddha's mind did not stay in the citta mind. He was living in the greater universe, and did not hear all those sounds.

If you understand the meaning of the broken earthen pot or the wooden pillow, then perhaps you understand the Buddha's standpoint.

BUDDHA-WISDOM is not the informed knowledge that grows from your intellect. This Wisdom that is intrinsic is the Knower. It is strange that only we human beings have this knowledge. Of course vegetables have it, but it is dormant, sleeping. If you cut a branch, the tree does not feel the pain. But if you cut a branch of the human body--how it feels!

And then we are always gathering thoughts, thinking something. What is this thinker? In what part of our body is it located? Where is the location, the root of this function? You may say, "In the brain." What part of the brain? Where is the throne of this Wisdom that we call Buddha? You know this Wisdom is in you, of course, but you do not know how to localize the Thinker.

How could you see if you did not localize your eyes? I can see that the sky is blue, the flower is red, the grass is green. But what does this? I do not know. Some function that is unknown to me is in myself, and it sees, but I cannot localize it.

Your Wisdom thinks, your Wisdom knows, your Wisdom gathers thoughts, your Wisdom reasons. But if you never see this Wisdom, you can never localize it clearly.

Before I found the real figure of my Wisdom I had my own experience. All those many, many years my Wisdom acted, but it did not act accurately, for I was intoxicated.

In the Zen school, you first find the universal position of the self, then you localize Wisdom, and finally you realize Nirvana. These are the three gates. First you find Nirvana, then it must enter you. After six or seven years, you say, "Oh, this way." You find the eye of the mind, and with this eye you can look at pure, clear emptiness, Nirvana. The only eye that can see Nirvana is the eye of Wisdom. Once you find this, in two or three years you will find the eye of Nirvana. Then slowly you can free yourself from all bondage. And then, in about ten years after finding Nirvana, you will find Pratimoksha, your own salvation.

True religious experience takes time. When you sow the seed of a peach tree, it will take three years before the tree bears fruit. When you sow the seed of a persimmon, you must wait eight years for the fruit. For attaining the fruit of Buddhist experience you must wait quite a long time. Wise man or idiot--all who enter the way of religion--must wait about thirty years for its fruit.

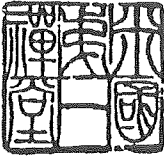
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