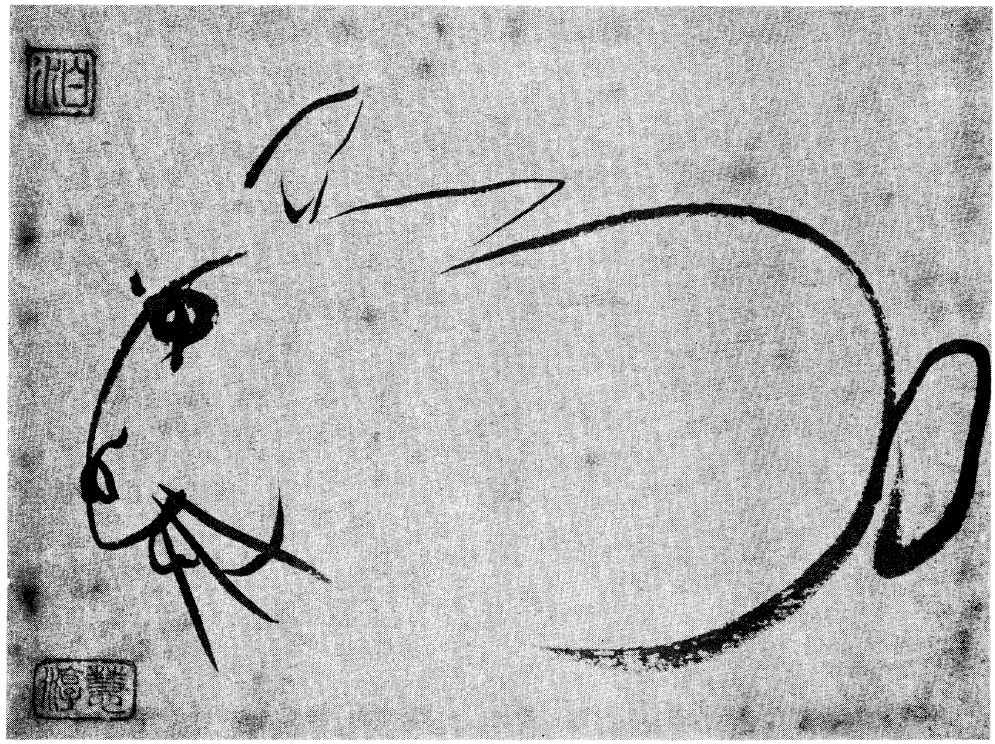


ZEN NOTES



JOSHU SASAKI ROSHI SAYS

*From a taped talk Aug. 28, 1970
at Vancouver Zen Centre, 139 Water St
Vancouver 3, British Columbia, Canada*

Q: Can you describe your first awakening or enlightenment?

R: Many times I have talked about this.

Gisele (hereafter G.) his assistant: When Roshi was fourteen he went to a temple far away from his home.

Q: Why did he leave, why did he go to a temple?

G: To become a monk.

R: (in English): I many times talk.

G: (to R.) But your English is better than mine.

R: Steve, do you know?

S: No, just a little bit.

R: I went into temple when I was fourteen years old. The temple that I went into the first time was located at Sapporo. Sapporo is on the northern island of Japan. Now Sapporo has one million population. When I went into temple there, there were only about 60 or 70 thousand people. I was brought up in a very very rural part, where, in Canada maybe bears will be haunting it every day. So I had been eating things like bears eat. That's why I couldn't be taller than bears.

The same time that I went to the temple, there were two other children priests, one was one year older than me and the other was one year younger than me. And there were two other adults over 21 years. And there was one Roshi. So I was the newest one. And in the morning we all had tea. So then I saw that the sweet being served was something that I had never seen before in my life. I didn't know what

it was, so I was looking at the other people to see if that was to eat or not. Then very good colored tea was served in front of each of us. Then I saw that the Roshi was eating this sweet a little bit, so I decided to eat also. Then, I saw that all the other people had eaten their sweet. So, I thought that the sweet is to be eaten all, so I imitated the other people and ate it all. Then I think that my solar plexus was moving very fast.

Then, after the tea, Roshi said that "We have three new students this spring so I will give them questions and let them answer." Then I was very upset and I wished that I had not taken the tea at all. Then this adult student that was sitting beside Roshi looked at the new students with pride (condescendingly) and said that the first newcomer should answer the question first. So the first young one answered. The question that Roshi gave was "What is the age of the Buddha?" It is a very difficult question. I think that the first newcomer answered that his age was 2500 years old. Then Roshi said "That is O.K., that is all right." Then this adult student said, "Now the next one." Then I think that the next newcomer answered that the age of the Buddha was forever, but by that time my solar plexus was moving so hard that I don't remember what the answer was. But I was the third, so until my turn came, I had been thinking very much. I think my sternum was down.

Then this adult student pointed to me and said "Joshu." (R's first name). Then I said, "What are you saying? The Buddha's age is the same as my age." The Roshi didn't say anything and then he said, "We can have the

third newcomer for zazen tomorrow." So I was taught zazen and for the first time I participated in sanzen (interview with the Roshi).

Then in sanzen I was given the koan, "Where were you born?" In my registry book I was supposed to have been born on the first of April. But my parents registered on the 22nd of April. But it seems that the exact date that I was born was around the 20th, or 18th, or 19th, or somewhere around there. But somehow it was registered as the first of April. When I was small, my mother told me when I was born, but it was on the moon calendar, so I forgot when it was. So, since I was a child, I didn't make much of my birth date. I didn't care when I was born, because I knew that I could live the same as other people. When the Roshi gave this koan to me, I thought that he knew that I didn't know when I was born and that was why he gave me this koan.

So, I thought that Roshi is a very nasty man. It is true, Roshi is a nasty man. To you, I am also very nasty, and nasty is all right. So next day, I brought to Roshi many answers, but he didn't accept any of them. And next day again he said "No." If I spoke more than necessary, as you do, then Roshi scolded me. I was fourteen, and I couldn't say anything else, so I didn't know what to do.

As a rule of the temple, the newest comer has to make rice in the morning. At that time, we didn't have any gas or electricity. To make fire, first I made a fire of paper, then of hay, then of wood. I am sixty-three and a half years old now, so that was almost fifty years ago, a half century. So, I tried to make rice, and as it cooked, I got

black in the face, and when it was done I was very black in the face and hands. Then if I go to Roshi with those black face and hands, I was scolded by Roshi. For Roshi never said anything like "wash your face" nicely, he only scolded.

To get water, we had to go to the well and first get it in a pail, then we would fill the large vase with water from the pail. If it happened in this modern age, maybe the police would come and tell the temple not to use the fourteen-year-old boy. But there was no law. So every morning I cooked the rice, and cleaned the house, the windows, then after that I did the dishes, then we did some zazen. After having this kind of life, then we can realize the true nature. It is more difficult for you, who live in this kind of world then come to the Zen Centre to do zazen, it is more difficult for you to get satori. The busy people, like busy raising children, or working in offices, the busier we are, the more chance we have to get satori. That is why I say that the jobless people should not come to do zazen. If you have a job, then you can do zazen better.

The first three weeks, the Roshi always said "No." So I was very distressed. It was one day, probably in May, that I decided to clean the windows, so I opened the window. Then I found that it was raining. That time was the first time that I understood when I was born. I thought I knew the answer to the koan, so I thought if Roshi did not accept my answer, then I would try to hit him down, still I would try to convince him of my answer. So I made the answer that I was born in this way. (turn to page 6)

Rinzai Reed

What is Dharma? Dharma is the "law" of soul. The law of soul is not something that has a form, yet it pervades the ten directions and manifests its potency before you. He who has no faith in this chases words and names, tries to surmise Buddha-dharma from writings. He and true law are as far apart as heaven and earth.

Brothers, what law am I talking about? I am talking about the law of the ground of soul.

SOKEI-AN SAYS Little of the Buddha's Dharma has been recorded, for in his day what he said was recited by his monks to others from memory, passed from lips to ears. Two hundred years later, Maharaja Ashoka ordered the monks to engrave some of the important doctrines of the Buddha on stone and copper. We can still see these engravings in India. However, it was five hundred years before the Buddha's teachings were written down in Pali and Sanskrit. When Ashoka's son went to Ceylon with many monks to spread Buddhism there, these teachings were written down, but of course they did not come direct from the Buddha's "golden" lips. The teachings we have come from the sutras told by disciples of the Buddha or of his disciples.

Buddhism is a very simple teaching. Primitive Buddhism is like a big tree with not many branches. The Buddhism that developed in Central Asia and China is very complicated. In the 9th Century in China, Buddhism reached the highest point of metaphysical teaching, but to understand its meaning you must use the brain instead of the heart. Buddhism had come to an impasse when the Zen school of Buddhism made an opening and led Buddhism into a new road. Many famous Zen masters con-

tributed to this, and Rinzai is one. His teaching has some of the characteristics of the Buddha's own Buddhism. Rinzai cut off all the branches and shows us the main trunk of the tree of Buddhism. He did not teach philosophy to his disciples; he taught them real existence. If anyone came to him asking questions about Buddhism, Rinzai would say, "What do you want?" "I am trying to understand the philosophy of Buddhism." "Oh, get out!" He was such a teacher.

If we have a foundation in life we know what to do, what our aim is. But if we do not know the foundation of our soul, on what base can we build our lives? Someone told me, "I have been studying Buddhism for five years, but I do not know what to do." I asked, "What do you want?" "I want to do something better than what I am doing, something out of the ordinary--beyond this human life." If anyone has such an idea, it is not necessary to study religion. Religion is what takes you back to your own ground of soul, the foundation of life. If you wish to do something out of the ordinary, it is better to study science. Modern science certainly produces wonderful things. But religion is quite different--it takes a completely opposite

course, returning one to his own ground of soul.

The Sanskrit word "Dharma" is difficult to translate into English. European scholars often translate it "law" but Dharma is not always used with that sense. Sometimes it means Reality, the nature of man, conscience, compunction, commandment, scientific law, sometimes nomenclature existence as distinguished from phenomenal existence. Here Dharma is the law of the soul. It is easy to say, but for it the Buddha threw away his kingdom as he would sandals, and lived on one bowl of rice a day. He suppressed all desire and meditated in the woods for six years. Of course he was not always in meditation--he asked the sages questions--but it was at the end of six years of meditation under the Bodhi tree that he enlightened himself. Many Buddhas before Shakyamuni had struggled to attain the true Dharma just as he had. We call this the law of the soul. Soul is not a good word, but we use it here in the sense of consciousness, mind, heart, as these words are commonly used for that something within us that masters daily life. Perhaps it could be called cosmic consciousness, cosmic law.

In Sanskrit there are three names for soul: amara, hridaya, citra. The first means the soul in elemental existence--fire, water, sea, moon, stars--the pure soul of the universe. The second is the soul of sentient beings--trees, weeds, insects, man. The first includes all beings, sentient and insentient; the second includes only sentient beings. This can be expressed in English as heart, but not brain. A tree has no brain, but it has a "heart" that breathes, exposing itself to the sunlight, purifying the water from the root and bringing it out into the branches and leaves. When we sleep and are not conscious of ourselves, we are on the same level as the tree. The third is the faculty of mind. When Rinzaï speaks of the law of soul, he includes these three meanings in the "soul." This law is unwritten. It has no particular form, but if you pour water on fire, you can read it; if you touch your face, the skin feels it.

The "ten directions" mean all directions, all the senses of the body--not just five. The Buddha said that the body has eight million senses. Each spot has a different feeling. The whole universe is one body and one soul.

It manifests its potency before you. This is the chitta. Crying, angry, glad, regretting--from morning to evening--what you feel is the law. Perhaps it is not operating as the true law--superstition or misconception may be misleading you--but the true function of the law is always in you. Finally you will feel the real law written in your inmost heart. Agony is your unconscious effort to operate the true law.

He who has no faith in this chases words and names, tries to surmise Buddha-dharma from writings. Such a splendid law you carry--yet have no faith in it. You run to the writings, try to grasp the meanings of the words. "Reality," "Nirvana." That is Buddhism, Christianity too. You think they are telling about different laws, but the one true law cannot be located in such a way.

Brothers, what law am I talking about. Here I, Sokeï-an, have been speaking about Buddhism for three

self to the sunlight, purifying the

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years. One of you asks a question--and I feel that the three years of effort is reduced to nothing. We have to know what we are thinking--talking about--that is the most important thing. Why study religion? For what reason? To invent something useful in daily life one must study something other than Buddhism.

I am talking about the law of the ground of soul. From the ground, trees sprout and flowers bloom. The Buddha was teaching for forty-nine years. The 5048 volumes of the texts of Buddhism all sprang from the ground of soul. Where is it? In the stomach, the brain? Where is this soul?

The second patriarch of China came to Bodhidharma saying, "I feel that my soul is not emancipated." Bodhidharma said, "Oh, you are asking me to deliver your soul. Where is your soul -- show me." That is the Zen school--no philosophical explanations. If anyone speaks of soul--show me! If they speak of Reality--show me! You cannot show Reality. It is inconceivable. With what do you conceive phenomena? With the five senses. Well, are the five senses phenomenal or noumenal? The five senses are the connecting point between phenomena and noumena. Oh, so the connecting point is the five senses? Show me that connecting point. How can you explain this? If the conscious point is not in your eyes, where is it? If there is nothing outside, how can you prove consciousness? Well, without consciousness you cannot prove it.

When you are asked, "Where is your consciousness--outside, inside?" You can get lost in a maze of philosophy. Talking makes it more complicated. Without talking, we can know the truth

--the ground of soul.

The ground of soul is not created by anyone--it exists, has existed, and will exist forever. If one asks you, "Before father and mother, what were you?" how do you answer? Though the conflagration at the end of the kalpa destroys all phenomena, the ground of soul will exist forever--not mine, not yours, but the soul of the universe. You cannot keep it privately. If you say, "It is mine," you are violating the commandment, "you shall not steal."

The ground of soul exists forever; its manifestation is as changeable as a cloud in the sky. When one thousand years equal one minute, as you watch, it will decompose and disappear. You cannot adhere to anything. If you do, you will always be struggling. Why attach a name to it, why call it God, Buddha, Allah?

If you do not know the ground of soul, you cannot understand the true meaning of commandment.



(JOSHU SASAKI ROSHI SAYS *continued*
from page 3)

Then Roshi said, "Then, I ask you, where is your home?" For example, what is the age of the Buddha is not a koan. But "When was the Buddha born?" makes a right koan. I don't know when I got satori. I'm just telling you what kind of experience I had before. So, if you are really serious, then some day you will get the answer, you will really realize yourself. So this will be the end of the story today.

THREE GATES There are three gates to Buddhism: by way of mind, thoughts and body. We Buddhists draw a distinction between mind and thoughts. When we say mind, we refer to the activity of mind, its essence, not thoughts. If you analyze thoughts, you discover they consist of pictures and visions. When you dream, you dream men, women, animals, and words. (I dream English, Japanese, Chinese words and characters). But mind itself does not consist of this stuff. Thoughts are mind-stuff, the paper on which words and characters are printed. To teach a type of religion like Zen, we do not drive thoughts into your mind. There are types of Buddhism that depend on thoughts, such as the Tendai School. The Vinaya School of Buddhism has to do particularly with the body. These three gates not only lead into Zen but through them you can enter all other religions also. According to our nature, we select the religion by which we can attain freedom of thought and body. There is a type of man--very conscientious, always afraid of committing a crime or a sin--who enters religion through the sense of sin. There is another type; he is philosophic; he is careless about deeds but tries to understand truth; he tries to grasp the key that opens all the mysteries of the universe. Such a one always inclines to the religions into which one can enter through thought and mind. These two are clearly illustrated by the different sects of Buddhism and their two tendencies are realized by two types of discipline for Buddhist students.

One tries to attain Buddhism by his deeds and by observing the commandments, while the other seeks to attain by mind or thoughts. The vehicle of thoughts and mind is called the jhana vehicle. Zen belongs here also. There are students who wish to observe commandment and there are those who wish to attain wisdom; some try to attain both. There are those who are not careful with either shila or jhana: they are no good. Their attitudes even though they are Buddhists are not the same as Vimalakirti's, the famous lay Buddhist, a contemporary of the Buddha, who tried to attain with wisdom rather than commandment. There are many arhats who do not care for wisdom but painfully observe the commandments. In schools, you will find those who always take baths and have perfect manners but who do not study their lessons; then there are those who are nasty-looking, but who study everything deeply. These two types always blame each other. If you understand these phenomena in the religious field, you can avoid much suffering for yourself and others. The United States is not a Buddhist country, yet already there are quarrels and arguments between Buddhists because of just such differences of emphasis. Shariputra told his students: There are five ways of observing, angles, to attain commandment:

1. There is one whose body is impure but whose mind is pure. Ignore his impure body and observe his pure mind. Then you will avoid agony from your mind.

The famous yellow robes for monks are really the color of excrement. A monk went to look for a piece of cloth with which to make a garment. In the India of his time there were piles of

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refuse and ponds of excrement. Attempting to fish out a piece of cloth with a bamboo stick, he slipped into such a pond. When he came out, holding the piece of cloth in his hand, his friends ran from him. Mortified, he weeps, but his mind is pure.

Shariputra is speaking allegorically, of course, of the first way of observation of commandment.

2. There is one whose mind is filthy but whose body is pure. A traveler takes a trip under the baking hot summer sun. There is no water or shade. He is panting like a dying fish, and spouting greasy sweat from all 84,000 pores. As he nears the outskirts of a village, he sees a pond. The surface of the water is covered with dirty straw, dead rats and cats, but, as it is sheltered from the sun, the water is cool though it has an obnoxious odor. The traveler opens the straw that covers the surface of the water and drinks to allay his thirst. Everyone says: "Nasty man. He drinks filthy water." He would have reached the village in a half-hour walk, but his mind attached to immediate relief. However, by resting, purifying his body and relieving himself from the agony of heat, he could attain something later.

3. There is one whose body, mind and thoughts are filthy, but somewhere in his soul, purity remains. This one is traveling through a desert where there is no shelter, no water, no oasis. His throat raw from thirst, panting, he sees a mirage and grasps at air. Then he sees the track of cows. In the hollow formed by a cow's hoof print in the dung that has dropped in the track, there is a tiny bit of liquid. He throws himself flat and, pressing his lips into the cowdung, sips the

water. By taking it, he tries to save his life so he can go on to attain.

4. This traveler has been even less fortunate than the third. Having come a long way, still far from the village, he is attacked by violent illness. Sitting beside the road, vomiting, he calls to those who pass: "Save me! Help, help!" But, though they see he is dying, they refuse, fearing his disease. "The plague!" But if someone would approach him, wash him, give him food and medicine, perhaps his life could be saved and he could attain.

5. The fifth traveler comes to a beautiful pond where the sand is white and shining in the sun. Flowers are blooming around it. You can drink the water and bathe with it. Here mind, thoughts and body are pure.

In the sutra, these stages may be applied to the monk's way.

1. There is the monk who detests all women, and would not touch one, but all day long thinks about this.

2. Mind filthy, body pure. The monk thinks this and that, recites sutra, talks, always involving the mind. However, even doing this, he can carry his body into a pure place.

3. Body, mind and thoughts are filthy, yet by meditating he tries to get to the depths of his soul where he finds the pure, great Nirvana.

4. He is dying; his body is decomposing; his mind is scattered--nothing is left. But through Buddha's great love and compassion--his true medicine, true food, true clothing--even such a one can be saved. But Buddha will save him with the love that is not created by, nor related to the human being, the compassion that is not expressed by the human heart.