

ZEN NOTES



Rinzai Reed

One who claims to have given up worldly ways (the householder's life) must exert himself to acquire the insight to discriminate between Buddha and Mara (evil), true and false Dharma, and the secular and the sacred. When he can do this, he deserves to be called a world-renouncer. But if he is unable to tell Mara from Buddha, do not call him a recluse; he has merely left one worldly house for another. Call him a karma-maker, not one who has renounced the way of the world.

SOKEI-AN SAYS

We must know about what is called the Buddha's "great cause." That Shakyamuni Buddha renounced "home life" and became a recluse is not the important point to us. To us "renouncing the world" means to know our original nature. This is the foundation of our lives.

When you take sanzen, your master will give you the question: "Before your father and your mother, what were you?" When you think and philosophize to answer this, your answer is a concept you have manifested to identify Reality and your original nature, not original nature. Therefore you must find your original nature by a method entirely different from philosophizing. Original nature is not a concept. It is, to use another word, Buddha-nature (Sanskrit: dharmata).

This "question" was the great cause for which the Buddha renounced the world. Were you there or not? If not, you could not be here; if you are here, you must have been there. If you think you were there, what were you? In Buddhism, our study from the beginning to the end, from the time of entering the temple as a novice to the time of coming out as a teacher--whatever we study--is reduced to this one point: to know our Buddha-nature.

A monk in China asked Joshu, a famous Zen master: "Does a dog possess

Buddha-nature?" Joshu shouted: "MU!" If you try to understand this by reasoning, you will never understand. It is just one word, but it includes a million meanings, all reduced to this one word, "NO!"

In the legend, Brahmadeva created the first word--the diamond word--"AH!" (In Sanskrit none--negative--no). The Shingon priests of the Mantrayana say that "AH" was never created, that no one created it, that "AH" is in every word, that it was there when God was there, and that it will always be here. A Zen master may ask you: "What was before, 'AH'?" All these questions point out original nature. Buddhism is not hard to study; it is as simple as your hand, clear as the sound of a silver bell.

In the Buddha's time, one of the great questions was "What was the cause of the universe?" Today we know that the earth is round and how the solar system was created, but in the Buddha's time it was thought the earth was flat, that the stars were the spirits of dead men having some connection with the souls living on earth, that the sun was no larger than the earth and that the moon was not a dead planet. They thought that water supported the earth and that the water was supported by a whirling wind. In the water was Mount Sumeru, the sun and moon circling it, and the water

dammed up by the iron mountain. This was the concept of the world at the time of the Buddha. But the Buddha thought the world was one of a million worlds.

Today when we observe anything we analyze it into atoms, into electrons, and prove the original substance materially. We know that all the varied forms of the sentient and the insentient reduce into one essential substance. We have no doubt of this. Even primary school children know it. If we compare this with the belief of the Buddhists, we can find no difference between them.

In the future a religion based purely on scientific thinking will be created. Even now, if the scientists would grasp original nature as a living substance rather than dead, they would be in agreement with us. But I fear that when the future faith comes to the human being he will have forgotten to love and to worship. Perhaps that will be the sign for the Buddha of the future to appear--Maitreya, the Buddha of love.

If a Buddhist has no understanding of original nature, he is a mere toiler, a man of the world, not a real recluse. But the one who understands, though in the world, is a true recluse, a true renouncer of the world.

It is our task to find the first great cause of the universe and of man. How to live, to teach, to cure, are just branches of this creative "Law." When one understands Buddha nature, he renounces two secular "homes." Our one body is living in two "homes." One is that relating to our relatives--father, mother, wife, and so forth; the other worldly home is our mindstuff.

Mind and mindstuff must be discrim-

inated: mind is fire and mindstuff is a lump of coal. Of course if there is no coal there is no fire, so without mindstuff we cannot prove the mind. If you discriminate mind from mindstuff, you will know Buddha-nature. It is very simple to know. Mindstuff is home and mind is master, so mind without mindstuff is Buddha. There is no fire if there is no wood, but wood and fire are not the same thing. When wood is reduced to ashes, the fire expires; when mindstuff is annihilated, you return to Nirvana, to total annihilation. Then you will understand Buddha nature--"Ah! I see." You need not take a long time; understanding can come in a moment. But you must do it yourself. It is not necessary to sit in meditation long, just pay attention, and at any moment--"AH!" Like the monk who swept a pebble against a bamboo trunk, and in the sound of the striking--"Ah! Yes, I understand!" Another monk sat in meditation all night long, and at midnight he heard the gong. Waking up from his deep meditation--"Ah! I understand real substance--that is it!"

If you exterminate mindstuff, the first mind returns to you. In that moment--"AH!"--you have renounced the physical home and the mental home; they are two dead houses.

The Buddha said, "These two homes are a corpse, with no living soul, no understanding of Buddha-nature." Such are the "living dead" of which Christ also spoke: "Let the dead bury the dead." If you renounce these two homes, then it is no matter whether you wear robes or clothes, no difference whether you recite the sutras or read a newspaper--if you find original nature

(concluded on last page)

SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE EIGHTEEN EMPTINESSES

I have been explaining the Eighteen Emptinesses (Shunyatas). I shall continue from Number Seven.

7. Creative purpose is empty.

8. Purposelessness is empty.

9. The conclusion is empty.

These three are very important terms in the doctrine of Buddhism.

7. Creative purpose is empty (*Samskrta*). The literal meaning of *samskrta* is "to put together." This word is quite familiar to you as the name of the Indian language, Sanskrit (as it is spelled in English). *Samskrta* means "words purposely arranged for use in rituals or scripture." There is another language - Prakrit - for secular use. The word *samskrta*, here, however, has nothing to do with the language, Sanskrit. *Samskrta* in English means "doing" in common parlance. Accordingly, "doing is empty." Whatever you do, philosophically, comes to a conclusion, which is empty.

Nagarjuna, a famous Indian philosopher, explained the Eighteen Emptinesses very carefully. I wish I could translate his writings into English, but it would be a tremendous task. However, I shall speak a little on his commentary.

Why is "doing" empty? There are two answers to this question. First, in this "doing," *Ego and the position of ego do not exist. Nothing whatever is permanent in this "doing," therefore it is empty.* Second, *the law of "doing" is ungraspable, unattainable, therefore "doing" is empty.* A Buddhist commentary is always just a short note. You must use your brain to solve the question.

In this "doing," ego and the position of ego do not exist. When you do something, who is "doing" this? Of course you think *you are* doing it. Philosophers think about this. If you didn't eat, you couldn't "do" it. If you didn't sleep, you couldn't "do" it. If you were not born, you couldn't "do" it. So, after all, this "doing" is not you. *You* do not digest your food. Who does? You would perhaps say "Mr. Nature." Then who is this Mr. Nature? He is the son of God. Then he must be Christ. Who is God? No one knows. God knows! So "doing" is not *your* doing.

It is very clear. You are looking at something, but *you* are not looking at anything. Something without a name is looking at this. It is very strange when you come to this place. You can get into the swamp of religion immediately if you think about this. *Who* is looking at that light? You cannot make any answer.

Ego and the position of ego (gasho, in Chinese) do not exist. Or, (pointing to an electric light globe) electricity comes into this globe, so the globe is the position of electricity. Without the globe electricity would not be here; without the electricity the globe would not be lit. Take the position away, can you prove electricity? Position and that which is in it are really inseparable. In Buddhism, when one talks about soul, one talks also about position, soul and place of soul. Subject and object are always expressed at the same time. Both are empty; both do not exist. Now you think: the man does not exist but nature does. You believe there is no ego but there is nature. The Buddhist tries to catch this nature.

The law of "doing" is ungraspable. We are always talking about "law." "You shall not drink wine--it is bad." So America made the prohibition law. Then "Wine is bad, but you can drink beer." Now you can drink anything. Laws were made and abolished from time immemorial. You cannot make any "substantial" law to rule human life for two or three thousand years. There is nothing substantial in law.

We see the moon now, far away, but in a million years the moon may scrape the surface of the earth and shower debris--then all the laws of the solar system will change. Our life is so short that we cannot see the mutability of the law of the universe. What is law? In its intrinsic nature, it is ungraspable. This tells us that the "law" of the universe has no ego, that no God made this law and rules the universe with a purpose. Since, according to Buddhist doctrines, there is no fixed plan or purpose in the creation of the universe, "doing" is empty.

To see, hear, smell, taste, touch are all "doing." But I am not "doing" anything. The twelve nidanas--the chain of causation--are also samskrta. A seed of consciousness is planted in the bosom of your mother, you grow up, come under the sun and see and eat and, so performing, die--all samskrta. All the shadowy worlds of sense perception, the inner scale of consciousness are included in this samskrta. Doing, seeing, hearing are not ego, so they are empty. The whole universe is mutable; nothing is fixed or stays to form a permanent appearance. All nature is but clouds in the sky, changeable, without substantial ego, empty.

8. Purposelessness is empty. (*Asamskrtashunyata.*) I translate *asamskrta* "purposelessness." This part is stiff for beginners or strangers, but it is real Buddhism and very important.

Asamskrta is always negative. Literally, it would be "not prepared" or "not established for any purpose, for 'doing' anything." Nagarjuna gave a commentary on this. I will briefly translate it: "One attains Reality and liberates himself from being born, existing, and perishing."

Anyone who attains Reality can comprehend this emancipation--that he is liberated from life-and-death--"being born, existing, and perishing." No one can be free from the law of the three phases of existence--being born, existing, and perishing. It is the law of all the phenomena of the universe. But one who attains Reality liberates himself from this. Strange. But what is Reality after all? When he attains Reality, he experiences that he is free from the three phases of phenomenal existence and proves Nirvana by that experience. This is called: *Asamskrta is empty.* (I like Nagarjuna very much--his theory is so crispy, like eating Japanese rice cake.) In the dharma (law) of Reality, there is no graspable appearance of purposelessness, so we say, "Purposelessness is empty."

In the law of Reality: What is the law of Reality? One talks of Reality, but in Reality one cannot grasp purposelessness. (This is terribly high-blown Buddhism. It is almost impossible to explain this unless you take sanzen.)

Reality is the first thing to think about. Those who take sanzen will understand. Reality is boundless, timeless, immeasurable--no shape to grasp,

no color to perceive--but it exists from the beginning to the end of the universe. One who attains Reality--that is, really your intrinsic nature--liberates himself from the three phases of external law (being born, existing, and perishing.) In short, if you attain Dharmakaya you are not bothered by the law of Nirmanakaya. In Nirmanakaya law, Mr. Smith takes wine, Mr. Jones doesn't. In Dharmakaya law, Mr. Smith takes wine, Mr. Jones gets drunk. Queer, isn't it? When you send a telegram, the telegram must go through the wire from America to Japan. But if you broadcast by radio, it will spread in waves in all directions.

In Reality, in this moment (strikes gong) there are one million years, and one million years doesn't exist. In this you are eating, drinking, breathing, yet you have not been born, you do not exist. Philosophically, that is.

Of course, in that Reality you can free yourself from being born, existing, and perishing--and in the freeing you understand what is Nirvana, not only understand, but you can realize it. Dharmakaya is purposelessness, but you cannot grasp it. If there is a bit of purposelessness in it, it is not Dharmakaya but a notion of Dharmakaya. I was in purposelessness for six years, and one day I said: "This is just a notion," and I got out of it. True purposelessness is empty.

9. The conclusion is empty. (*Atyantashunyata*.) *Atyanta* means *limit*, *long end* in Sanskrit, but I translate this "the conclusion is empty." Why is the conclusion empty? It is empty because "doing" is empty. Deny "doing is empty," and it will carry you to purposelessness. Deny this purposelessness, this inactivity of Dharma-

kaya, and it takes everything from you. Take your last penny away and you feel poor, but you are still rich, for you have poverty. Take that poverty away and what do you have? *The conclusion is empty*. This is the place for the monk. He is neither rich nor poor; he is in the conclusion of human life. If you understand this part of Buddhism it is very interesting.

Reconstructed by Wm. H. McPheters, Jr.

BOOKS *CHRISTIAN ZEN*

by William Johnston

Harper and Row, NY, 1971

An Irish Catholic priest who has lived in Japan for over twenty years supplies a rationale for adopting and adapting "Zen" to the needs of continuing Christians.

An example of its lively style and content: "I suggest that you read the Scriptures as *koan*. Walk into them as you might walk into the psychedelic glory of Expo 70. Put aside for a while your critical faculties of reasoning and arguing. Stop asking whether Jesus did or did not walk on the waters, whether there was or was not a star to guide the Wise Men. Stop asking what it all means; because what it means is less important than what it does to you. Forget all the complications and let the words enter the visceral area of your body, where they will finely and delicately begin to act, to live, to change you. Let the words of Scripture enter into you like the body and blood of Christ to give you warmth and love and life. Let them live at the psychedelic level. Get the kick those Semitic writers are trying to give you. Then you'll find that the Scriptures are food and that they are life." Mary Farkas

JOSHU SASAKI ROSHI SAYS

ATOP A HUNDRED FOOT POLE

It seems that it has gotten a lot hotter. I got up at 3:30 at Mt. Baldy this morning, and the sky there was very clear and there were lots of beautiful stars. It was about 5:20 when, after sanzen, we started to come down the mountain. The Zen Center is located at about 6,200 ft. When I came down to 3 or 4,000 ft., gradually the sky began to get cloudy. Claremont was covered with dirty fog and you could hardly see. I felt a little depressed thinking that I had come down from the clear mountain towards the dirty air city; but when I thought of you, then I was encouraged. When I came down to Claremont, then it was completely foggy, and I couldn't see at all. A rabbit crossed the road. When we came down from the mountain, though the air is not very clean, we can see lots of things because there are more things in cities. I arrived here about 6:30, and at 6:45 I started sanzen. Now after sanzen, I am again meeting you.

Of course, the mountain is very nice, but if I were alone on the mountain I wouldn't be able to live there for a month or two. I would come down, but maybe you would not come down. It's a common thing in the world, for example, if a husband goes on a trip for a week, then the wife who is left behind gets hysterical after a week or so, and starts to complain that the husband is late returning. Or, if a wife goes to the movies and comes back one hour late, then the husband complains. So, it is nice to be on the mountain, but it is also interesting to live in the world.

So, people will have things to complain about and things to be angry

at, but still the world is not too bad; that's why they don't want to die. Sometimes people say they don't want to die; maybe they mean they don't want to leave this interesting world. They don't mean religious death. Religious death means to be really free; free from death or life. Zen says, let us manifest the world of death while we live happily in the world.

About 750 years ago in China, there was a Zen master called Sekiso. In the *Mumonkan* is a story of Sekiso. Today I will talk about Sekiso's words to his students. Every human being has a purpose in life. If he does not have any purpose, then he might look like a human being, but he is not a human being. So, Sekiso said that man's purpose is like climbing to the top of a hundred foot pole. He says that the top of this hundred foot pole must be man's purpose. The purpose of Buddhism is to manifest non-self. So this hundred foot pole of which Sekiso talks is the same thing as the Buddhist non-self. And Sekiso advised his students that everyone who wants to learn Zen has to climb up to the top of the hundred foot pole. When a man climbs to the top of a hundred foot pole, then how does he manifest himself? As he is on the top now, he no longer has a purpose. Since he does not have any purpose, he is the same as God or Buddha. If Buddha or God have purpose, then Buddha or God are still unripe. Buddha and God must have no purpose in life or death, and no purpose in going or coming. So, in Buddhism, such a thing is called non-self or KU. In Zen it is called MU. When a man climbs to the top of a hundred foot pole, he is selfless. When he climbs up that hundred foot pole, then he doesn't

have to climb any more: 'How do you manifest yourself' is not different from 'how do you manifest yourself as MU, or as KU': it is the same.

For example, if you have a hundred million billion dollars, then you do not have to earn any more money. If someone wants to have more money, then it is because he thinks there is more money than he can earn; it means that he has not yet earned enough money. This is just an example, but when he does not have the purpose of earning money, then how does he manifest himself? Maybe he wants to use the money. So, if a man earns money, and doesn't know how to use it, then he is the man who stays on the top of the hundred foot pole. So, if he holds the money with him on the top of the hundred foot pole, and stays there for a while, then when it snows, he may be covered by this snow. There are some rich people who earn money and never use it and die. When a man achieves his purpose, he has to share his experience with other people. We have to teach some people that when they earn a hundred million dollars, then they should use this money for other people.

If a man achieves the top of the hundred foot pole, and stays there, then he will die from the coldness of snow. The same thing with religion; if he stays at the same place in the religion, then he will not do anything with it. So, some religious people want to stay on top of the mountain or want to live on an isolated island. But, that is not the right attitude. He should come down to the world with the smog, and share the money that he has earned with other people.

I like Mt. Baldy. But I have to come down to the world. So, please

don't say that Roshi should stay up on the mountain. When I come down, please love me.

This is the end of my talk for today: I have to be back at Mt. Baldy by two o'clock, so please excuse me.

Cimarron Zen Center, tr. Maya Koizumi
RINZAI RECORD (cont'd from page 3)

you are a real recluse. The Buddha taught that this was preferable to withdrawal into the mountains. But one who leaves the physical home to enter a temple, but does not leave his mental home is a recluse of the body but not of the soul. There are four kinds of renunciation. He may shave his head and wear robes, but keep his wife and children in the temple and keep his mind stuff. Such a one will never know Buddha nature--he is just an undertaker, that is all. There will be an army of donkeys in his temple!

If you understand Buddha nature, you will discriminate easily between Buddha and evil, because Buddha-nature is pure. We all come from the root of Maya; we are all children of Maya the creatress. As her children, we did not pass through man and woman, whose nature is animal. This is the meaning of "virgin birth."

SESSHIN: Dec. 1-7

Jan. 27-? (with Joshu Sasaki Roshi)

NOTE TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

We are striving to complete the payment of loans contracted to members eleven years ago by the end of this year. We are late in keeping our promise to pay for two reasons: (1) We pushed the payment of the bank first to save increased interest rates; (2) a very few persons we have depended upon to pay us have not kept their promises. Thank you for cooperating patiently and/or forthwith. MF

gan-rotas

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PUBLISHED MONTHLY
1971

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The First Zen Institute of America, Inc.
113 East 30th Street, New York, N.Y. 10016

Vol. XVII No. 11, Nov. 1971
Mary Farkas, Editor
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