

ZEN NOTES



SOKATSU SHAKU

S O K A T S U S H A K U

(1870-1954)

Parts 1 and 2 are by Yuigaku Fuju-an; Part 3 is by Zammai-an, translated by Yuigaku Fuju-an. Both are grandsons-in-Zen of Sokatsu.

RYOMO ROSHI, Tetsuo Sokatsu, was born February 15, 1870, the third year of the Meiji Era, as the fourth son of Kaimin Irisawa, a physician, at Kojimachi in Tokyo. He was called Joshiro ("Fourth Son") as a boy.

His father was so strict and fierce in bringing up his children that Joshiro was trained and educated in literature and the military arts by the very best teachers available at that time. The ancestors of his family were said to be Tokiyori and Tokimune of the turbulent age of the 15th century. Coming of their blood, he was naturally clever and dauntless. He knew everything after hearing only one word; in addition, he studied very hard, improving himself constantly.

When he was nine years old, he was able to give lectures on "*Shiki*" and "*Mogyu*"; the Chinese classics, in place of his teachers; he was indeed an infant genius. His loving mother died of a serious illness when he was eleven years old. The mother said, on her deathbed: "Do not try to become wealthy in the world's riches; try to live as a religious man; polish your mind as you would a jewel; do not trouble others. Do this for my sake. If you remember these words always, I shall never be far from you and shall protect you as long as you live."

Ryomo Roshi, our Sokatsu Shaku, promised his mother that he would

follow her wish and become a new man. During his twelfth year, his father died. Sokatsu was flung into the waves of this world, and lost most of the estate left him by his father in only half a year.

A few years afterward, he moved to his uncle's home. His uncle, Zenjiro Yasuda, was a famous financier in Japan. Zenjiro eventually believed enough in Sokatsu to turn over his important keys to him and desired that Sokatsu become his son-in-law. But Sokatsu did not forget his mother's wishes and went back to his teacher and studied hard. In this period, Sokatsu visited many sects in order to carry out his mother's wish and to sharpen his mind, all with great success. Finally, after his aunt's advice, he went to Kosen Imakita's school. Kosen was the abbot of the Engaku-ji (temple) and one of the greatest priests of Zen during the Meiji Era (1867-1912).

He took part in the Great Autumn Sesshin in the Rinshoin (temple) in Hongo, Tokyo. In this sesshin he practiced Zen with high hope and effort, but his attempts were fruitless. However, his mind was made up that the practice of Zen was the only way to fulfill his mother's wish. Therefore he went to Kamakura to study with Kosen Imakita, and stayed in a small hermitage near the Engaku-ji in Kamakura. He studied Zen questions (koans)

very hard. Here, he could live up to his mother's image by attaining great enlightenment. He made every effort to improve, and the more he improved the harder he tried. He determined firmly that the training of his mind was to be his life work. At the same time he practiced Unkei-sect carving under Master Eisuke Mitsuhashi in Ogigayatsu, Kamakura. In this period he mastered the secrets of this art.

In this summer, he was given the Buddhist name "Sekibutsu Koji" ("Stone Buddha lay-disciple") by his master Kosen. Kosen encouraged him to renounce the world (to enter temple life) time and again. But Kosen already was seventy-four years old and Sokatsu, now "Sekibutsu Koji", was afraid of losing Kosen and could not determine to take this step. Three years later, Kosen came to the end of his life at the age of seventy-seven. Soen Kogaku (Soyen Shaku) the son-in-Zen of Kosen, was elected the abbot of the Engaku-ji and heard "sanzen" for his disciples. Sokatsu also practiced Zen following Soen. At times Soen would walk around Ogigayatsu and visit Sokatsu in his carving room and they would talk about many things together. Gradually they were able to bring their minds together and Sokatsu thought to enter the monastery.

One day Sokatsu was walking along a muddy road after taking sanzen. He tumbled a big rock down into the mud, and in that moment became enlightened. He returned to Soen's room, took sanzen, solved several koans, and committed himself to be a monk. He said to his master, Soen, "I would like to practice Zen as a monk, but I will not live in a temple." Soen said, "Normally monks live in temples so they

can obtain clothes and food." Sokatsu replied, "If there is no food, I shall eat nothing. I believe that where there is Buddhism, there is food, and where there is no food, there is no Buddhism." Soen said, "That is right. I heard that in the old days a great monk lived in a hermitage. Later it was a temple, so that is right." At this time, Sokatsu presented the following Zen poem to Soen.

Man's care is in vain
Twenty-three years is but a
night's dream

One thing thrown away, all gained
A cool breeze fills this robe

Then he was given the Buddhist name "Sokatsu" ("Energetic") by Soen, and he became a monk, and also the son-in-Zen of his master Soen, and he changed his family name to "Shaku", Soen's name. After this, through hard training, with a strong will to practice Zen, he finally completed his Zen study, and was given the Zen name "Tetsuo" ("A well-practiced person") by Soen.

PART 2

After this, Sokatsu visited India to enter the Wassake Temple and stayed there for two years. During his stay he followed the original Buddhist way of practice, going on a barefoot pilgrimage through the burning sands with Indian monks. With many miraculous experiences, such as a rebirth after death and all kinds of hardships, he returned to Japan. Several laymen and women asked to be favored with the honor of "seeing" him (as a Zen teacher). Then his master Soen specially honored Sokatsu by giving him the Zen title "Ryomo-an" ("a person whose inner and outer exist -

ences amalgamate in clarity") and ordered him to manage the Ryomo-kai, the group of Zen practitioners that was established by Tesshu Yokoyama and Daisshu Takahashi and others under Soen.

With the request and order of Soen, Sokatsu came up to Tokyo, where he attempted Zen teaching for the Tokyo Ryomo-kai, living in the northern part of Tokyo. First, he made a pilgrimage through Tokyo and studied the character of Tokyoites for three years. At last, the time to start his work as a teacher of Zen came and hundreds of people came to him from all over requesting his teaching. Afterwards, through his trips to Nagano, Yamanashi, Ibaraki, Yamagata, Fukushima, Aomori, Iwate, Fukuoka and Miyagi prefectures, Ryomo-kai organizations were established everywhere in Japan.

In a few years, Sokatsu organized the Tokyo Ryomo-kai into the Ryomo Association. In 1906 Sokatsu visited the United States of America at the request of about twenty of his disciples, among them priest Zuigan Goto, laymen Shigetsu Sasaki (Sokei-an), Testurei Hayakawa, lay sister Echoku Tokunaga, and others. He eagerly propagated his doctrine for four years. Finally he established the North American branch of the Ryomo-kai and returned to Japan. Afterwards, he was so busy with Zen missionary work that he never had time to "warm his seat." At this time, he was nominated to a prominent position as the abbot, or president of a great temple, but he did not accept. I think his behavior was based on the promises he had made his mother and his master Soen. When he became a member of the "priesthood" (means "officially" a Buddhist, whether priest or monk, as distin-

guished from lay people) he promised Soen that he would concentrate on missionary work for Zen Buddhism. At this period, someone described him as follows:

I cannot see what his precise significance is, but I think laymen thought of him as a true Buddhist rather than as a Buddhist priest or dignitary, though he was highly esteemed as the greatest member of the priesthood in about five hundred years. He was very earnest and solemn and filled with ardor; his whole body and soul was nothing but Zen Buddhism. His hard practice multiplied his natural brilliance.

When he was at the Engaku-ji for three years, he wore just one robe and slept only a few hours a day. Even in the harsh winter or in the very hot summer, he did not stop his Zen practice, so people were amazed at his firm resolution. Through these hard trials, he finally completed his Zen practice; his whole body and soul were like a polished jewel, and his daily life was Zen from morning to evening. He did not look for ordinary prosperity; he only sought for the truth of human life. People greatly respected him.

Sokatsu wanted to spend all his life in "Zen practice" (as differentiated from administrative work) but after his pilgrimage to the United States of America, he was appointed to be the first-class instructor and abbot of the Engaku-ji by Soen. Furthermore, he was advised by Soen that he should obtain a government clearance to keep a Zen school, so he got permission from the government in 1925. Then he established a Zen Institute, naming it Ryomo-kai and was elected

to the presidency of this institute. He put on the gown of the presidency and the robe of Zen master. The Zen masters who completed their Zen study were given the Zen master's name "Ango" by him. At this time, the main hall (headquarters) of the Zen Institute was presented by a layman, Taiko Tanaka. This hall was located at Yanaka in Tokyo, and was called Ryomo-an. Before long this hall was moved to Ichikawa-Yawata, then later to Ichikawa-Kokubu-niiyama. Here a new hall was built by the hands of all the students. In 1943, he established the Ryomo-Zen Institute and became its president. Sokatsu was a person of natural sensitivity of mind, and made every effort to fulfill his aspirations for the benefit of his own and others' peace. He determined to forget his sensitivity, rather devoting his body and soul to his lifework of attaining the great Buddhist Law--Dharma--the aim of Buddhist practice.

Later, he was afflicted with severe diabetes and a stomach-ulcer, but he recovered from these in two years through dietary and physical treatment. This was entirely due to his faith in Great Compassion (*Daijishin*). For example, Sokatsu took part in sesshin even while he was ill. He lived concentrating his whole body and soul on everything he did, such as "one-character writing," "one-picture drawing," "one-word speaking" and "one-action taking." He never went against his firm faith by giving in to his emotions. His advanced disciples were trained perfectly and strictly. He did not take an easy-going attitude in training. The daily life of Sokatsu was quite beyond the ordinary person's comprehension. His

daily life, I suppose, was all for his mother's last wish, "you should practice to reach Buddha's life, not only throughout your whole life but also throughout eternal life."

PART 3

In December, 1947, Sokatsu dissolved his Ryomo-Zen Society because of changing circumstances, secluded himself from society and entered the Ryomo-an in Yokaichiba city of Chiba Prefecture. During the last years of his life, he was healthy and happy, for he had finally achieved the perfect maturity to enjoy his own mind. In this period, he trained only the advanced disciples, enjoying his last years. Sokatsu closed his life on the 6th of July in 1954 at the Ryomo-an. He was eighty-five.

Although the Ryomo-Zen Society had been broken up by the order of Sokatsu, "Zammai-an" ("A person who concentrates himself into every activity in which he is involved")--Takudo Oki--his son-in-Zen, continued his master's Zen life, re-establishing the Ryomo-Zen Society December, 1955.

I should like to write one more thing, about the treasures left behind him in the Ryomo-an, treasures such as brush-pen writings, drawings, paintings, carvings, china-ware, poems and other articles made and used by him. About these treasures, there is the following episode:

Many years ago Sokatsu was practicing Zen through painting and drawing at Wekiri-kutsu, Sanshu-kyo and the Zammu-So in Tada-ward of Hyogo Prefecture. All day he continued to work on white paper. During this sesshin he had eye-trouble, so his doctor prohibited him to use his eyes more than fifteen minutes a day, but he did

not follow this advice, and completed his work as planned. He recovered from the eye trouble. Afterward his art works were photographed and compiled in *Rokudo Yugeshu* on the offer and effort of his disciples. Sokatsu did not wish this to be done, but accepted its being done because of the strong determination of his disciples.

Now, what is the true meaning of Sokatsu's Zen at all? I would like to answer that the life of Sokatsu is the same as Rinzai's. That is, "The whole universe was thunderstruck." We never forget that the first visit of Zen Buddhism to the United States of America in August of 1893 was made by our great-grandfather Soen Shaku, who visited the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. He was only thirty-five years old when he boarded the Empress of Japan on the fourth of August of that year. His steamer crossed the roaring waves of the Pacific Ocean taking about ten days, and anchored at Vancouver on the 16th of

August. He spent five days by train to reach Chicago, and attended the World Parliament of Religions which continued twenty-seven days from the 11th of September of that year. His lecture on "The True Meaning of Buddhism and the Law of Causation" deeply impressed the whole auditorium. He returned to the Engaku-ji on the 29th of October.

Sokatsu, my grandfather-in-Zen, also visited San Francisco in August of 1906. He was followed by some twenty disciples. His second visit to the United States was in October of 1908. Through these activities, the First Zen Institute of America was established by Sokei-an Shigetsu Sasaki. I would like to complete this essay emphasizing our indispensable mission to keep our lineage of Zen straight, never forgetting our ancestors' hard and serious practices of Zen, and trying to create our Zen life as it should be rather in this universe than in this world.

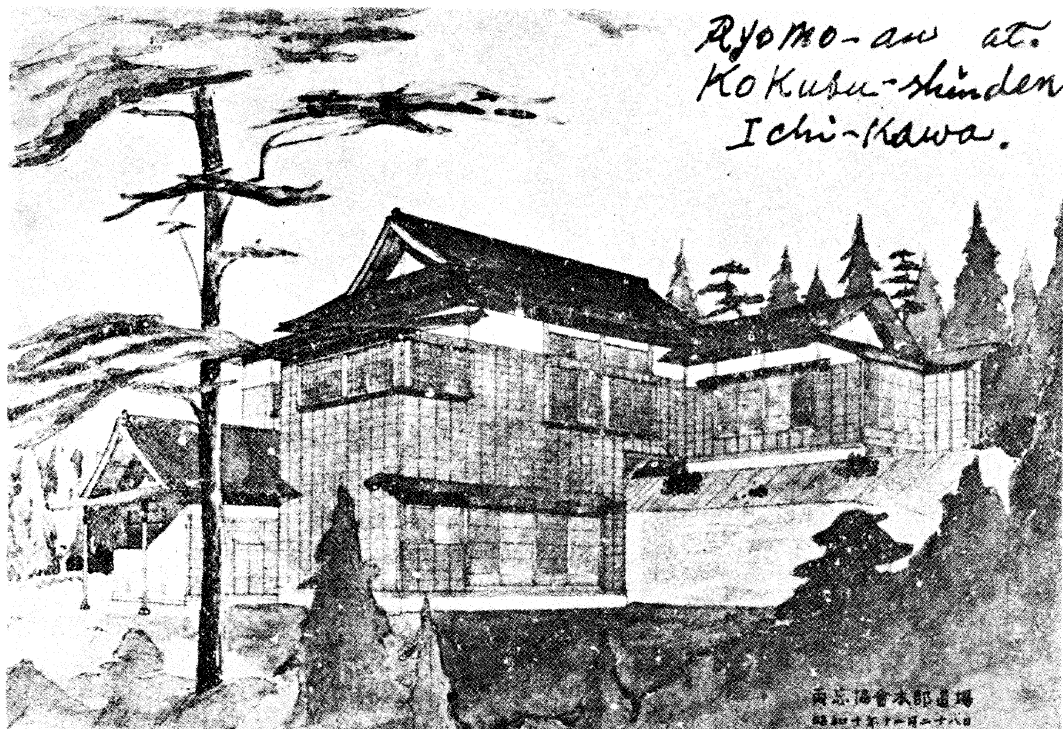


不受菴 唯岳

Yuigaku Fujuan



Zammai-an Genjyu



RULES FOR THE RYOMO ZEN SOCIETY'S MEMBERS

This Society declares Shakyamuni Buddha as its religious master and Dharma, the Great Priest, as a religious founder.

The Society's rules are to dispel darkness and promote enlightenment; its precepts are participation and self-realization.

The members of this Society never discriminate against men or women, priests or lay people, taking the Four Vows as their own, living by wisdom, accepting each other like drops of water, joining never-diminishing devotion to the everlasting stream of time.

The members of this Society must always make every endeavor to further the progress of this religion, cultivating friendship between people based upon Buddhist customs.

The members of this Society must expect to uphold traditional customs, to dispel evil illusions, to exalt the genuine teaching and to propagate the cardinal principle.

DOCTRINE OF THE RYOMO ZEN SOCIETY

Ladies and Gentlemen: The enlightened state belongs to neither wisdom nor un-wisdom, and neither increases in Buddha nor decreases in an ordinary person. Buddha's Eight Understandings and Buddha's Six Recognitions exist in your mind; Buddha's Three Bodies and Buddha's Four Wisdoms exist completely in your body. Never step out of your mind to seek for the enlightened way. It is difficult to be born into the world so as to be able to hear the Buddha's teaching. If it is impossible to live completely in this world, it is useless to ask how to live completely in any other world.

Ladies and Gentlemen: If you think it necessary to practice Zazen, you should throw away everything else. How and what should you throw away? Throw away your Buddha's Four Elements and Buddha's Five Secrets and countless and endless human egos, and go into your own inside. What is this principle you attain? In zazen practice, one must hurry as you would to put out the fire if your hair were burning. Arouse your spirit and do not forget even for a moment. Seek directly and endlessly the non-understandable state of the universe. Then, all at once, you may find the brightened heart that will shine everywhere. We know this is the truth. If you get this state in your heart and grasp it with your hands you can transform this world into a golden paradise, and change a dirty stream into pure water. Why not live free from anxiety? Never obey words or phrases, never discuss Zen nor seek the way in books. The path to Zen is not written in them. The virtuous ancients came to the way through hard training. How can you be a special case?

You must remember the diligence of the Second Patriarch, the "arm-cut" and of Ummon, the "leg-broken." Practice! and Practice!

Written by Sokatsu in Japanese



Gathering at Ryomo-an for Sokatsu Shaku's Seventieth Birthday Celebration April 1939



平 沙

原 嶺

秋 暮

掃 鐘

色 聲

古園光宗居士

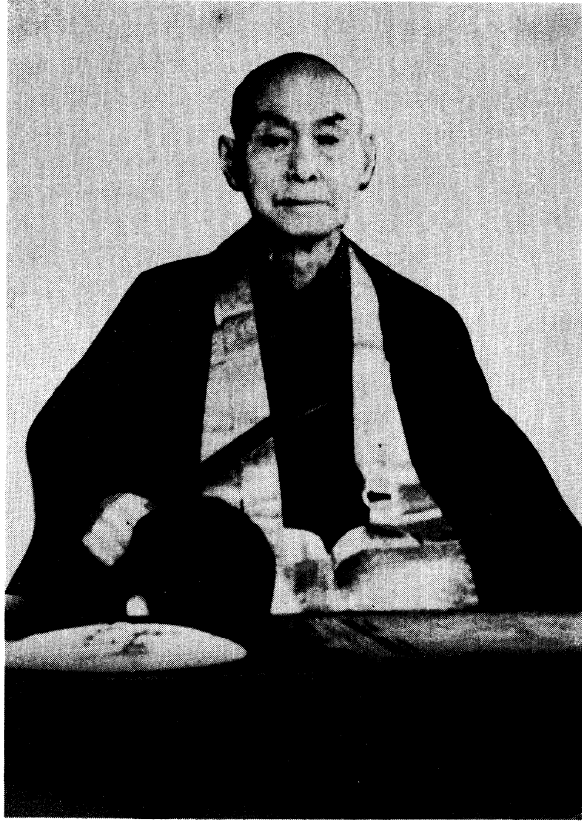


*Heigen shuju no iro
Sharoku bosho no koe*

Sokei-an's rendering
of poem brushed
by Sokatsu

The autumn trees glow
Along the desert plain;
Over the sand-hills creep
The evening bells.





The life of a man from beginning to end is like taking a long journey bearing a heavy burden on the back.

Don't hurry.

If one thinks that to live inconveniently is usual, one is not dissatisfied.

When you feel dissatisfied, recall to the memory the days when you were in distress.

Patience is the foundation of a safe and long life. Consider anger as your enemy.

If a man knows only how to accept success and does not know how to accept defeat, he runs the risk of being harmed.

Blame yourself; do not blame others.

Too little is better than too much.

Translation by
Somei Tauji

Written on a fan
by Sokatsu
at age 81

