

ZEN NOTES

THE GREAT NATURAL WAY

Pure Land Dharma Lectures, Sermons, and Sayings of Ven. Hozen Seki, Founder of the American Buddhist Academy and the New York Buddhist Church (Selection). Published by The American Buddhist Academy, New York, New York, 1976.

The Teaching of the Amida Buddha is very simple, so Shinran only urges us to experience the unity with Amida Buddha and then recite his holy name.

This invocation always comes from Amida Buddha to us. That is called *Tariki*--the Other-Power. We have Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature means that some day we will be enlightened. This enlightenment is the purpose of the Buddha's teaching--escape from birth-and-death, the suffering of this world.

Take a watch or clock: winding it starts the telling of time. Until then, there is no movement, no telling of time. Winding and clock come together, and there is time-telling. So when we hear Amida Buddha's calling, from that moment there is the beginning of unification, of enlightenment. Thus we shall say the Nembutsu, which is like the ticking of a clock. Through Amida's winding, we enter into the Pure Land.

This was a revolution in Japanese Buddhist history. Many appreciated this teaching and recited the Nembutsu. But some told them, "Your recitation is of no value without study." However, learning and Nembutsu are different. The principle of salvation is to hear, to appreciate, and to recite. *Shinjin*--sometimes called "faith"--does not lie in our power; it is unification, coming from Amida Buddha.

At the conclusion of the *Ryogemon* we read of "being true to the rules laid down before us." In Rennyo Shonin's time certain people were using the all-compassionate Vow as an excuse for all kinds of evil and mischief. The Nembutsu followers were thus open to the accusation that the teaching was a kind of anarchy. So Rennyo Shonin said, in effect, that our Nembutsu lives, so full of gratitude, should inspire us to be all the more responsible in the discharge of our personal duties and of our duties to others. But these "rules" are merely what we would call *common sense*. In the Amida's teaching there are, in fact, no "rules."

THE GREAT SIXTH PATRIARCH'S TEACHING, Chapter III

Perfect Wei questioned: "Your disciple always saw that the monks and the laymen invoke Amitabha Buddha because of their wish to be raised to the Western Heaven. I implore Osbo to expound for me whether this is possible or not. This must be solved." The Master said: "Your Lordship, listen carefully and I, Hui-neng, will expound it for you."

SOKEI-AN SAYS

Amitabha means boundless life and boundless light. Amitabha is the Buddha of the Western Heaven. In Buddhism there are many heavens. This heaven refers to the beliefs of the so-called Pure Land Sect. If you go to Tibet, you will hear the same chant. I am told that recently (1936) the Tibetans use electric power to repeat it.

In Japan, when the old mother is dying, she will have this chanted and the children will say: "Please don't die now, we haven't yet recited the chant one thousand times, so you couldn't go to heaven!" And the grandmother will hold with her teeth to the edge of the bed until they have finished the chant. Queer isn't it? If you just call the name of Amida, you can go to heaven. This Amida is the god of the Western Heaven.

The name Amida was not written in the old scriptures spoken by the Buddha. We cannot find it, and from our study of Pali and Sanskrit, we realize that it is impossible to find it. Amida came into Buddhism about the first century A.D. The Sutra of Amida, in three volumes, is in a style of technical terms showing that it must have been written about eight hundred years after the Buddha's death, the 3rd century of the Christian era. Amida means "boundless light", the sun. Preceding this Amitabha, light worship was probably a star-worship. He was a "looking-down lord." I don't know how to translate this exactly, but it means "looking down on the world from a high heaven."

The Western idea of religion from the beginning was sun-worship: Isis and Artemis, in Egypt and Greece, and then it came into Shinto worship. They all worshipped the sun, and then this Western sky-worship was carried into Buddhism, concentrating into the setting sun. His shrine was in Southern India. I think there was also a shrine of Avalokiteshvara. Sunshine came into the world--into fish, into monks, everything. Of course in the beginning it was the image of the sun, and we think perhaps that this Avalokiteshvara worship was brought from the Western world. In Persia it was very important before it came into Buddhism.

The empty sky is the god, the father. The sun is the son of the god, and it falls to the ground, to arise once more in the morning. In Shinto, the sun is considered the daughter of heaven and the mother of the world because it produces and creates.

In Buddhism you will find almost all the elements of all religions in the world, and they can be explained without any superstition.

So Amida originated in sun-worship. Now it is the Pure Land Sect.

My Zen sect has nothing to do with the Pure Land Sect. However, to promulgate Buddhism through this Pure Land idea, is not so bad.

October 31, 1949

A message from Ruth Sasaki that reached us early in October 1949 was of more than casual interest at our quiet Wednesday gathering. She had stopped off in San Francisco on the way to Japan where she was immediately engaged in a whirl of social activities. Here is its gist "...Mrs. Matsumura...took us to meet the Abbot and Lady Otani at the Nishi Honganji where a big reception was being held for them. It was during that evening that I invited them to visit the Institute when they reached New York... At that time, they expressed themselves as very much surprised and interested to hear for the first time that there was a Zen Institute in New York, and that there were American people interested in Buddhism. They were eager to verify this with their own eyes."

It was pretty much the first time after the war anyone from Japan had taken notice of our continuing existence.

Count Kocho Otani, the abbot of "the magnificent temple called Higashi Honganji in Kyoto" (according to a recent travel guide) is one of the hereditary heads of Japan's most radical branch of Buddhism which is also, curiously enough, the most closely related to the Imperial Family. One of its radical aspects is a marrying "clergy." Another is that women may take active part in preaching and so forth. Abbot Otani and his wife are living examples of these aspects, seeing that she is none other than Princess Satoku, sister of the present Empress of Japan, and also an active participant, with her husband, in the promulgation of Japan's most popular (democratic?) of the five Buddhist schools. So, though Japan was thought of as one of the most backward of countries in its characterization of woman's role in a man's world, in this branch of Buddhism, it was the most advanced, and even today may take credit for having had in effect for centuries what the Western churches are still unable even to discuss peaceably. For an account of the Pure Land Schools, some of whose doctrines will be reviewed in our coming commentaries on the Sixth Patriarch's Chapter III, see *Japanese Buddhism*, by Sir Charles Eliot, published by Barnes and Noble, New York, 1935.

During Ruth Sasaki's four-month absence from her New York house at 124 East 65th Street, we were holding our Wednesday meetings there as usual. At that time, this meant we would have meditation in the big room, in chairs or on cushions according to our sitting preferences, then one of us would read the lecture (prepared by collating the notes taken by members of Sokei-an's talks, then repair to the library (see centerfold) for tea and conversation or whatever. On the first of the evenings of Ruth Sasaki's absence, (she left New York October 4), when the other members, upon arriving in the library and taking their accustomed seats, all turned their faces with one accord, to me, and waited for me to tell them what would come next, I clearly saw my personal responsibility, and from that moment began to steer our tiny craft, the chart for which was only dimly present in my

mind. From my personal point of view, then, this tiny incident has historic significance. Well, here we were quietly minding our own business in Ruth Sasaki's elegant library, and into our laps was dropped this little sentence: The Otanis are coming. Actually, word on the actual date (4PM, Oct. 31st), came from Miss Yoshida, who had it from Rev. Yoshikami of the New York Buddhist Church.

The small group of us who, out of loyalty to Sokei-an, were endeavoring to carry out his uncompleted mission to carry Zen to America, had vowed that we were ready, willing and able to undertake whatever might be required of us, but we hadn't imagined the "problems" we had so zealously undertaken to cope with would take quite this form. Church and state, Pure Land teachings, Amida, the Nembutsu--we knew nothing of such matters. We had been listening to Sokei-an's stories of his country--of Zen--but it was far away and long ago, a world away. Buddha and his country and his problems were even farther. We had been very comfortable with Sokei-an. What we were beginning to hear of the actuality of Buddhism in Japan was a culture-shock for some of us. Did it have anything to do with us? Was the Buddhism of Japan that Ruth Sasaki was beginning to describe so vividly in her letters something different from what had drawn us to Sokei-an?

The Otanis were part of that Japanese world the war had, as Sokei-an predicted, brought closer to us. Of course we knew Reverend Seki, of the New York Buddhist Church and the American Buddhist Academy. He was the only Japanese religious leader in town, and a friend of Sokei-an's, who, it seemed to us, naturally led the Japanese Buddhists in our city, but so far as we knew, *we* were the only American Buddhists around at that time, at least on the East Coast, so any steps we took should be clearly straight ahead on our Path. Reverend Seki and his charming and capable wife would be the official hosts of the Otanis and their party. Reverend Kubose, of the Buddhist Church of Chicago, we were told, would act as interpreter. Miss Onuki, who had visited us while Sokei-an was alive, was in some way involved in the arrangements. She had a studio next door to the New York Buddhist Church on West 94th Street. Old timers will remember her as the Irish-Japanese opera singer who in Sokei-an's time once threw her teacup across the room in a fit of temper and had to be pacified. Miss Haru Yoshida, Ruth Sasaki's invaluable assistant, took care of our arrangements.

Eleanor Watts and her children were living in the house in Ruth's absence, but she didn't often take part in meetings. Her relation to the Zen Institute was more of a social nature.

The "Institute," was rather elegantly housed by Ruth Sasaki (to preserve our integrity, we paid token "rent" of \$35 a month as we had very little regular income--that month it was \$35.50). Our first problem came when we were let know that it would be appropriate to supply a limousine for the Otanis and their party (it turned out not to be necessary). We were prepared to do it, but it would have meant digging into our reserve or getting it from Ruth. Fortunately, we had no responsibility for the upkeep

of our quarters, immaculately groomed by Ruth's skeleton crew even in her absence.

The one incident that sticks in my mind is that I asked Mr. Tsunoda, an elderly Japanese professor from Columbia University who was a friend of the Institute, how he thought it would be best for the people to be seated. He looked at me with a wry little smile. "When I lived in Japan, as a young man, I never would have been in the company of such persons. But everything is different now. There are no rules that apply today. So you'd just better do whatever you think best."

When the party came upstairs to the library, and politenesses were completed, everything went swimmingly. Lady Otani handled herself pretty much as our current presidents' wives have come to do. Informality and ease were quite natural to her. Before we knew how it had come about, she was preparing to sing us some songs of her own composition, rather like Christian hymns, as I recall. The only off-key note occurred when a pushy, red-faced guest rushed up as she was about to begin, and offered to accompany her. "I happen to be an accomplished pianist," he declared. But she gracefully evaded this.

A little later, I found myself alone with her, (perhaps on a tour of the premises) in Sokei-an's room. We were able to exchange a few words. In such moments, what really interests women can be mentioned, and is always the same--men. Did I have a husband? What was he like? What was an American husband like was the question, of course. "Oh, but he isn't American. When he was in Japan, the Japanese told him, 'You are our relative. Hungarians are very close to Oriental.'" And I mentioned a few details.

Some years later, in Japan, when I visited Lady Otani, her first words, after polite greetings were, "How is your husband?"

She is a fine example of the old-fashioned modern Japanese woman of this century, whose truly admirable qualities shine through all the adversities of the world and change their men made.

Once Sakiko Farago, a long-time friend, told me when I was praising another Japanese friend: "You think Japanese people are wonderful but it's because you don't know many of them." "Not true," I told her. "It's that I can recognize their especially Japanese qualities from those I know from knowing you and Sokei-an." Everybody knows what is meant when I say "A Japanese Woman," but it couldn't be described in an encyclopedia.

Oct. 31, 1949

Kocho Otani 大谷克暢 Kyoto, Japan
Satsko Otani 大谷幸子
Gyomay McKibben 5487 S. Dorchester, Chicago

NOTED IN OUR GUEST BOOK





日本國名都 七十二變 弘治 刻書

道教

Getting Angry

A certain monk said: "I'm innately short-tempered all the time, and though my teacher has scolded me severely for this, I'm unable to do anything about it. I realize myself it's bad, but since this is my innate character, no matter how hard I try, I can't correct it. What shall I do to put it right? I hope that by receiving your Reverend's instruction, this time I can somehow cure it. If I could go back having cured it, I'd finally be able to face my teacher, and it would change my whole life, so I am anxious to receive your teaching."

The Teacher said: "Well, you've certainly been born with something interesting! Here right now, have you got any 'short-temperedness?' If you have, bring it out here right away and I'll fix it up for you."

The monk said: "Right at the moment I haven't any. At certain times my bad temper just appears."

The Teacher said: "In that case, your short temper's certainly not innate. You're 'just producing it' *yourself* in response to conditions at certain times. Even at these times, if you didn't produce it yourself, how could that short temper exist? Because of your self-centeredness, you attach to whatever is happening around you, trying to have your own way, and having gone and created all this yourself, you then claim it's your 'innate character'--a grossly unfilial act that makes groundless accusations against your own parents! What all of you received from your parents at birth and intrinsically possess is the Buddha Mind alone--there's not a thing else that you innately possess. Without your creating delusion yourselves, there's simply no delusion to be found. Everyone gets this wrong and while they themselves, deluded by selfish desire, are busy as a result of bad habits, stirring up things that are not at all innate, they imagine these things to *be* innate, so that they can't keep from being deluded about everything. And it's not only you. When I listen to what the people who come here to my place tell me, they all go wrong exchanging their Buddha Mind for notions, unable to keep themselves from piling one thought on another until they end up with ingrained bad habits--and then they come telling me these are 'innate' and there's nothing they can do about them! So understand this clearly, it's most important. Let one instant of delusion descend on you unawares and they *all* descend, like a torrent pouring down a valley till you're swept into the Three Evil Realms, and then there's no going back again!

"When having created bad habits through selfish desire, others then speak harshly of those things about us that are connected with these selfish bad habits--such things being wrong from the start--we get angry, blindly insist on our own position and try to turn around whatever is said to make it favorable to us. Or else when people speak well of those things that *don't* fit in with our selfish bad habits--such things being obviously

good--we wonder, 'What's so good about *that*?' and still answer them back rudely. It's like this in every situation. If you let yourself go on creating delusions, you end up like (the man in love, for whom even) a missing nose looks like a (charming) dimple; in this very life you fall into the realm of beasts, and after death you'll perpetually die and be reborn in the form of birds, beasts, insects or fish, till afterward, falling ever lower and lower, you land in hell, (from where the opportunity of) rising back to your original human birth will be even more difficult to come by than an Udumbara tree in bloom. All of you here are fortunate indeed to have received the unique opportunity of human birth, so pay close attention to my teaching. Besides me, there's no one else who teaches as I do that what is unborn is the Buddha Mind, the Buddha Mind unborn and marvelously illuminating--so your being able to hear this teaching is *also* (as rare as) an Udumbara tree in bloom! Having yourself created delusions from your self-centeredness and then bad habits from your delusions, to go claiming these things to be 'innate' is a great error. So this time get a clear and conclusive realization and abide always in the Buddha Mind so that you won't delude yourself any more. Still, since you set such store by your delusions, you exchange your One Buddha Mind and become deluded. Once you realize instead the preciousness of the One Buddha Mind, even if you *want* to be deluded, you won't be able to be. Understand this well. Not being deluded is Buddha, not being deluded is enlightenment; apart from this, there's no 'Buddha' or 'enlightenment' to be realized. So draw close, listen carefully, and take in clearly what I've got to say."

The Teacher then went on to instruct the assembly, saying: "Astonishing your temper, when someone rubs you the wrong way and, finding they don't act as you wish, you try to have things as *you* want them, getting all involved in other people's business, you create your own bad temper for yourself. The proof that you didn't receive this from your parents at birth is that right here at this moment you haven't any bad temper to show. What's more, if it were innate, you'd expect that, even if you tried to correct it, it couldn't be corrected. The proof it's *not* innate is that when you try to correct it, it *gets* corrected. The Buddha Mind, since it's unborn, doesn't arise or cease, so there's no need to 'correct' it. Your bad temper is something you produce yourself when, from time to time, as things (outside) come to the attention of your senses, you get involved in other people's business and try to have your own way because of your self-centeredness... And it's not just with this (matter of anger). With all delusions, you become deluded as a result of self-centeredness. So when you're not self-centered, you won't create delusion.

"Now listen well: What your parents gave you at birth is the Buddha Mind alone--there's nothing else you innately possess. (Nevertheless,) from the time you were small, you became accustomed to seeing and hearing people lose their tempers, with the result that you developed the bad habit of being short-tempered yourself, so that from time to time you'll suddenly

lose your temper and then imagine this to be 'innate', which certainly is foolish. If you realize the errors of the past and from this point on cease to create bad temper, you won't have any bad temper to correct. Instead of attempting to correct it, you've got the short cut of just not *creating* it. Isn't that so? The business of creating it and then correcting it is certainly a lot of unnecessary toil and trouble! When you don't go creating it (in the first place), there's no need to correct it. And when you've clearly understood this, you'll see that, as regards this question of losing your temper, all your other delusions are just the same, so that even if you *wanted* to be deluded, you *couldn't*. That's why, when you abide only in the eternal Unborn Buddha Mind, there's nothing else at all (you need to bother about). When here, today, you live and function with this Unborn Buddha Mind, all things are smoothly managed; that's why my school is called the School of Buddha Mind, and why we also speak of living Buddhas *here and now*. A wonderfully direct thing, isn't it!"

APROPOS of The Year of the Monkey Issue, in preparation by Vanessa Coward. Secki Shapiro asked: "When does it begin?" Farkas: "Feb. 16." Vanessa: "And then we will begin monkeying?"

CONVERSATIONS WITH FARKAS (A Continuation) Noted by Hackney

I do have an inclination to be more interested in those leading adventurous, dramatic and often violent lives. I have the idea that this is more desirable. I suppose I got it from the type of literature I read as a child, but that was my selection.

The world of proper school and conventional education seemed to me very dull. I didn't go against it or fight it--in fact, I was pretty good at it. It just didn't interest me at all. I went to NYU to become a teacher. I did it for a degree as you needed one to do anything, not that the courses were interesting or valuable. I did it and as fast as I could.

But when I was a child and learning to read I found abominable the children's books given me. I couldn't imagine anyone wanting to read them. My father would read to me before I started school and afterwards too. He would read Dickens especially, which he liked. As a "self-made" man who had run away from school at the age of twelve, he had a good library. His interests were those of a more educated man. He had collections of the classics which he actually read. He read Kant (not too successfully), Proust, De Maupassant, Dickens, Dumas, etc. I read all of these too, but my favorite was Dumas. He was my real love. I especially liked the villains. As a villain you had to be able to fight--I thought of it as sword fighting at that time. However, I wasn't really thinking of fighting with weapons or fists. One can fight in other ways--games, diplomacy, etc. It was not rebellion either. It was different. Fighting in the war to my generation was not dirty or a wrong thing to do. It was considered by many admirable and heroic--like Beau Geste. Your generation sees it differently.

MR. MONEY TALKS

A SHOW OF ZEN SPIRIT from Mr. Money from whom we hadn't heard for awhile, came in answer to a letter I had sent him apologizing for various delays in keeping "up with it" due to various circumstances that I however, was trying to "catch up," etc., a kind of letter he might well have answered with a GET WITH IT or somesuch. But instead, here's what he wrote:

'80, Thursday, Feb. 14

Dear Mary Farkas,

Enclosed are two money orders, a thousand dollars for the Institute. Hence a little explaining may be due. I received your letter. And I return it so that you may know the contents. Your line "...though we are not caught up yet," may have caused me to consider my status. I had eleven hundred dollars in my savings. This place takes care of me fully. I have my own private cottage, meals, clothes bought for me--even tooth paste, ribbons for this machine, razor blades, etc., etc. So what need I of a savings account? I told my grand-daughter to draw a thousand \$'s from my savings. She did. She is a nurse and on her way to work, she brought me the money. No hassle.

I do not need the money. I would gather that the Institute can use it. I think you folks have done an excellent job. When you write me, you can return the letter. I usually keep such materials in my files. All is well!

Sincerely, yours in Zen.

Harman Money

Isn't that just like Mr. Money? If you were looking for a model of an American Zennist of the 20th Century, you couldn't do better than Mr. M.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Journal

Summer Seminar on the Sutras, June 2-20--An intensive program co-sponsored by Cornell University, Department of Asian Studies, and Beech Hill Pond Meditation Center of Rinzai-ji, West Danby, N.Y. 14896.

Program:

- Joshu Sasaki Roshi June 2-20 Rinzai Record, Sutra of 3rd Patriarch
- Prof. H.V. Guenther June 2-6 Kasyapaparivarta Sutra
- Prof. Wm. LaFleur June 9-13 Lotus Sutra
- Prof. Luis Gomez June 16-20 Sutras and Sudden Enlightenment
- Prof. Koshiro Tamaki June 2-20 Excerpts from the Pali Canon

Credit four hours--Tuition \$400.00--attendance on a daily basis possible at reduced tuition charge. All seminar participants are welcome to take part in daily Zen practice at the Seminar Program House during the session. Joshu Sasaki Roshi will conduct Dai-sesshins (intensive meditation retreats) before and after the seminar. For further information contact:

Summer Seminar on the Sutras
Cornell University, 105 Day Hall
Ithaca, N.Y. 14853

SESSHIN with Joshu Sasaki Roshi at the First Zen Institute co-sponsored by The New York Zen Center of Rinzai-ji, Inc., L.I. Begins Sunday, March 30, 4:00 AM, for seven days ending April 5.

CELEBRATION April 6, 11AM at The First Zen Institute. Birthdays: Buddha, Joshu Sasaki Roshi, Antony Tudor, The First Zen Institute of America (50th). Families and friends welcome.

JOSHU SASAKI SAYS (3/15/75)

When one enters a Zen monastery, one sings one's greeting like chanting a tone--*iano mimasho*--and bows one's head. The densu replies with similar chanting tone--*do-ri*--then one is allowed to come in. The reason for using the chanting style is that the Zen monastery is a life of poetry, where few words are spoken. Since I am living in the United States I would like, someday, to build such a monastery in order to repay and thus to contribute to American cultural enrichment...If we were to build a Zen monastery, life must be expressed in poetry and the movements of the body must be a dance...Although many Zen centers have opened in America (and this is true of both Mt. Baldy and Cimarron Zen Centers) and their life tries to emulate the real Japanese monastery, still the life of poetry, as revealed in Japanese monasteries which are so free from attachment, has not yet been brought about in America. American Zen Centers reek of the human element--arguments and controversy. Wouldn't it be better for you to enter the world of birds or trees...

It is a popular thing in America today to say whatever you cannot understand is Zen, but I call that American Zen.

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