

ZEN NOTES



HAPPY BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY

THE GREAT SIXTH PATRIARCH'S TEACHINGS, Chapter III

When Lokanatha, the Buddha, was sojourning in Shravasti, he expounded the converting of the mind toward the Pure Land in the West. It is clearly stated in the sutra that the Pure Land is not very far from here. It is 108,000 miles away. Metaphorically, this means the ten evils and the eight errors that are in ourselves estrange us from the Pure Land so that it seems to be at a great distance. The Buddha spoke of the Pure Land as "far" for those of inferior endowment, but as "near" for those of superior capacity. There are two sorts of humans but not two sorts of Dharma. Enlightenment and delusion differ; awakening takes more or less time on account of differing human capacities. The deluded one who mutters the Buddha's name supplicates to be born in the Pure Land, the awakened one attains his own mind's purity, for, as the Buddha said, "When the mind is pure, the Buddha-land is simultaneously pure."

SOKEI-AN SAYS

In the last part, the prefect Wei Chu had asked the Sixth Patriarch a question about the Pure Land. He had seen many monks and laymen muttering words--the name of Amitabha--with the desire to be born in the Pure Land of the Western Heaven. This made him doubtful. The Inspector General was not convinced by this religion of the Western Heaven, so he questioned the Sixth Patriarch about it.

It is very interesting to observe this Pure Land faith from the Zen standpoint and if you observe any other religion that takes "heaven" as faith, it can be criticized as the Patriarch criticized this Pure Land religion.

Today we have investigated the old scriptures, especially the Four Agamas, and we find no teaching of this type. Of course, some say there *was* some sutra that contained this teaching, but it no longer exists. We do not believe that there was any Pure Land teaching spoken of by any contemporary of the Buddha. However, we take this statement as true for the purpose of noting the Sixth Patriarch's view about the Pure Land teaching as a statement made by the Buddha.

According to our text the Sixth Patriarch's idea must have been that the Pure Land is not far away in the Western sky. One must take a direct way to it as in the koan: "Without using an inch of rope, save the one in the bottomless well." The Zen Master says to the disciples, "Idiot! Who is in the bottomless well?" Someone is dying down at the bottom of the endless well. Some people think that the Pure Land, the land in the Western sky, is very far away. It is like "heaven." No one can reach there with this flesh, but after death his spirit will go there. The Sixth Patriarch said: "It isn't very far from here."

One hundred and eight thousand miles was not intended as an actual number of miles. In ancient days, ten thousand miles was an endless distance, and the mind of man at that time conceived the infinite

in terms of the finite. Therefore, one hundred and eight thousand miles was an infinite number. (As today we say light years away. MF)

In the Lankavatara Sutra, Mahamati asked the Buddha 108,000 questions. If that number of man's notions exists, then on earth there will be that number of religions. In Buddhism it is said that there are one hundred and eight thousand dharmas to save man from this number of his notions. That there are four hundred and four maladies is an ancient notion of the East; therefore there must be the same number of remedies to apply to those maladies. These notions, ideas, words, and mind stuff, estrange man from purity.

From the Zen standpoint, man's mind is a very queer and awkward thing: he does not choose a shortcut or even a direct route, but goes around and around. Man's attitude of thinking is like someone who, wanting to get from this house on W. 70th Street to South Ferry, will go on a boat to the Harlem River, then to the East River, and finally to South Ferry.

When we speak of the original substance, for instance, or use words like the "primary quality of man," Western man takes a microscope and analyzes electrons and protons; then he gathers the elements he has analyzed together and builds up concepts: "Well, this is the primary substance, or quality." Or, when we say, "The primary quality of man's mind," another one will meditate and meditate, trying to keep his mind like crystal. Then he will come back and say: "All those angles of mind are like a prism, the development of the primary quality of mind. So the mind that we are using now and the primary quality of mind are one and the same mind." In such ways men think about the question. Of course the waves and the ocean are substantially the same existence. The Pure Land conception is a round-about way of arriving at a conclusion. In Zen, there is no such lengthy way of traveling. If anyone asks me what is the primary quality, I will slap his face. "Oh, that is it!" In Zen we take a direct way.

The mind is always stuffed with many names. For instance, when a student starts to make a poem, he thinks he has to use all the adjectives he knows. When he wants to describe a mountain, he thinks he must say: It is soaring into the sky--green, rich, high, and shining in the rain. Why doesn't he just say "the green mountain"? So too, when he wants to describe Original Nature, he thinks he has to use all those technical terms to say one thing. Of course he makes that thing very far away! By expounding it, he estranges himself from pure mind. Deeming it far away, he makes it so.

To think that we cannot reach heaven now but that after death we go there is just a notion. Contradictory to this notion, it is said, "Let the heavenly kingdom come to earth." How can one pull the heavenly kingdom down to earth? With what rope?

At any moment, if you lose your notions, you can build heaven on

earth. Anyone who supplicates God to make the heavenly kingdom come to earth should know that heaven is on earth and not in the sky. It was the prayer of Christ: "Thy kingdom come."

But today people try to make this heavenly kingdom on earth with charity institutions, shaking tambourines on the street corners or beating drums. The Buddhist attitude is different. Go back home and meditate, and the kingdom comes immediately. Don't give away food or stop eating for one day; don't beg for the kingdom to come. Just meditate. To save people en masse is not the Oriental way; there is no mass-production of salvation. The Oriental tries to convert one by one; he doesn't want a machinery religion.

And to him the nearness of it is evident.

When you prove to yourself what you were before father and mother, you prove IT. The Pure Land is immediately upon the tip of your nose, your lip, your eye. You are standing face to face with the Pure Land.

What is in you before father and mother is the Pure Land, the pure Dharma.

There are two kinds of religion but only one Dharma. Zen and the Pure Land are One Dharma.

One may take a long, long time to pass a koan. Another will pass it at once and chatter, chatter, chatter and forget it. Which is better? One is like an ox that drags a stone, very slowly step by step with long breath and strong pull, as he gains a foothold. The other is like a prancing pony, gallop, gallop, gallop. This koan business is like washing your hands with soap. With the koans you destroy all erroneous notions and clean up your mind. Then with that original quality of mind, something flashes through your mind and you are awake. Bodhi, Awakening, Satori. These words are really important, as is the Wisdom that awakens, Prajna. Awakening is the most amazing experience of human life. But, there are many different kinds of awakening. It is the same with the awakening to sex which comes to all. The human being scientifically awakens to sex, but this is to awake only in one direction. He may still be sleeping in many other directions. Awaken in all directions.

Awakening comes at different times, for there is the slow nature, the quick, the shallow, and the profound nature.

When I started to study Buddhism, and I was studying koans, Zen and Buddhism seemed from my height of view the size of the whole universe. Today I really confess Buddhism and Zen are just some old furniture in the corner of my mind. I, a man at the age of fifty-five, really enjoy my own mind today from morning to evening, more than Zen and Buddhism. But this was a gift from Buddhism so I appreciate the kindness of Buddhism. This (touching his heart) is important. We must have something that is original, natural, that is not Buddhism or Zen, or

science, religion, or philosophy. It must be natural. I did not find it for a long, long time and Buddhism and Zen were a hard burden. But now I speak about Buddhism and Zen in lectures, but when I am alone I do not speak or think Buddhism. I enjoy something that has no name but is quite natural. Perhaps you call it the Pure Land. It is quite wonderful, the Pure Land. Someone asked me to go for a vacation to Nyack for one month, but I refused. I just stay here and live in my own pure mind.

A NOTE ON PURE LAND BUDDHISM

Pure Land Buddhism has been among the most popular variants of Mahayana Buddhism in the Far East. In China, it never constituted a separate school as such, but referred to a group of practices and beliefs that became a common property of all the leading Buddhist sects, including Zen. Central to all aspects of Pure Land Buddhism, is the figure of the Buddha Amitabha (CH: *A-mi-to fo*, J: *Amida*), one of the "eternal" Buddhas of the Mahayana pantheon. Early Pure Land Sutras, possibly of Central Asian origin, describe how the Bodhisattva Dharmakara vowed not to enter the realm of absolute Buddhahood unless he established a Pure Land (CH: *Ch'ing-t'u*, J: *Jodo*) in the west, where all sentient beings who invoked his aid would be assured of rebirth. In turn, Dharmakara's subsequent manifestation as the Buddha Amitabha is proof of the efficacy of his vows, by which he transferred the merit he had accumulated over countless ages of practice to all those who placed their faith in his saving power, particularly at the moment of death. The calling of Amitabha's name--"Hail to the Buddha Amitabha", the formula known as the *nien-fo* or *nembutsu*--was widely practiced in China and Japan, as were various other forms of meditation on Amitabha, including visualization of his massive features. Also widespread among Pure Land devotees was the belief that in the Latter Age of the Buddhist teaching, no Buddhas could appear on earth, that man no longer had the capacity to realize enlightenment by his own efforts but could only aspire to salvation through complete reliance on the saving power of Amitabha's vow, which was termed "Other Power" as opposed to the path of "Self Power," which advocated individual striving for attainment, through meditation, good works and so forth.

The legend of Dharmakara-Amitabha was, and continues to be, interpreted metaphorically as a parable of the enlightenment experience, and the *nembutsu* itself was often used as a meditation technique, employed as a kind of dharani or, at times, even a koan. Nevertheless, by contrast with other sects of Buddhism, such as Zen, the emphasis of much of Pure Land practice was not on Buddhahood here

and now, but on rebirth in the Pure Land after death. The moment of death itself figured prominently in Pure Land thought, and individual practice might focus on preparing the mind for this crucial juncture, when sustained concentration on Amitabha could insure rebirth in his Western Heaven. Another frequent component of Pure Land teaching is an image of man as crushed helplessly beneath karmic burdens of sin and evil, from which only total surrender to Other Power can grant release. Honen Shonin (1133-1212), founder of the Japanese Jodo School, compared man in his sinfulness to a rock which can only cross the sea of birth and death carried on the boat of Amitabha's vow. Yet, rather than the militantly repressive spirit we associate with such religious attitudes in the West, this aspect of Pure Land seems to have fostered instead a sense of humility and compassion, a strong feeling for the equality of all human beings. This is especially evident in the most radical of Pure Land teachers, Honen's disciple Shinran Shonin (1174-1268), revered as founder of the Jodo Shinshu sect. Shinran's insistence on total surrender to Amitabha's Other Power led him to reject all forms of religious practice, even the celibacy of the priesthood, which he viewed as merely another vain "contrivance" by which man, in his pride, sought to effect his own salvation. In this sense, Shinran observed, an evil man is even better suited for redemption than a good one, since he cannot hope to rely on his own accumulated practice or merit, but must place himself entirely at the mercy of Amitabha's Other Power. While his teacher Honen had stressed the simple, sincere repetition of the *nembutsu* and was said to have repeated it himself some 60,000 times daily, Shinran stressed faith alone, regarding the *nembutsu* as merely an expression of gratitude for Amitabha's saving grace. Life's central experience, for Shinran, was not the moment of death, but the moment of "conversion" when we turn wholeheartedly from Self Power to Other Power. And even this "awakening of faith" is not of our creation, but the working of Amitabha within us.

However, rebirth itself remains something distinctly apart from earthly life, something very much beyond the tomb, and Shinran rejected as heretical ideas that the Pure Land actually exists in one's own mind, or that one's own true being was Amida. Such beliefs, nevertheless, remained popular outside Shinran's school, in the Tendai and Shingon sects, for example, and, at times, in the Zen school as well, despite the opposition of figures like Daito and Hakuin. In China, the synthesis of Zen and Pure Land practice seems to have begun from an early period and increased steadily in popularity from the Yuan dynasty, becoming a standard component of Ming Zen. When, at the close of the dynasty in the mid-seventeenth century, Ming priests arrived in Japan bringing the last transmission of Zen from the continent, it was this "Nembutsu-Zen" they carried with them, a Zen teaching incorporating many Pure Land elements.



The Teacher said: What everyone receives from his parents at birth is the Buddha Mind alone. Yet since your parents themselves fail to realize this, you *also* become deluded, and then display this in raising (your own children). The wet nurses and nursemaids too lose their tempers, so you bring up (children) exposing them to every sort of deluded behavior, including stupidity, selfish desire, and the anger of fighting demons. Growing up then with deluded people surrounding them on every hand, children develop a first rate set of ingrained bad habits, becoming quite proficient at being deluded themselves and turning one who is *abiding* in the Buddha Mind into a first rate unenlightened being! This is something which all of you will know from your own experience. Your parents didn't give you any delusions whatever when you were born--no bad habits, no selfish desires; but afterward, once you'd come into the world, you picked up all different types of delusions from those around you, so that these then developed into ingrained bad habits of your *own*, and you too couldn't help becoming deluded. That which you *didn't* pick up from those around you is the Unborn Buddha Mind, and here no delusions exist at all. So while the Buddha Mind is marvelously illuminating, you pick up things from those around you, even to the point of thoroughly learning all sorts of deluded behavior. But because it's marvelously illuminating, when you hear this teaching, you'll resolve not to be deluded and from this day on cease to create delusion, abiding in the Unborn Buddha Mind just as it is; (just as before) you applied yourself skillfully to picking up delusions and became deluded, (so now) you'll listen skillfully to this teaching and in this way realize the preciousness of Buddha Mind. Since there's nothing else whatever that can take the place of this precious Buddha Mind, even if you *wanted* to be deluded then, you wouldn't be able to be deluded any more. Because you fail to realize the preciousness of Buddha Mind, you indulge in self-centeredness, creating delusions that cause you harm; so precious are your *delusions* to you that you actually *want* to become deluded, even at the risk of your own (true) self. Foolish isn't it? ... Meanwhile, everyone insists that the way they like to (behave) is their innate character, so they can't stop doing it; but they'll never tell you how, actually, they indulge in self-centeredness due to their selfish desires, keeping (those kinds of behavior) they *like*, and then trying to sound clever and talking about how it's all "innate." To falsely accuse one's parents like this of something which they *never* gave you at birth is to be a person of terrible unfiliality. Is there anyone who's *born* a drunkard, a gambler or a thief--who's born with *any* sort of vice? No one is born that way. Once you pick up a taste for (liquor), it promptly develops into a bad drinking habit, and then, because of your selfish desire, you just go along unable to stop yourself, without realizing how you've become deluded. It's just foolishness. So you've no cause to go claiming it's "innate" and slandering your parents. If all of

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you, when you hear this, from today on abide in the Unborn Buddha Mind just as it is--the Unborn Buddha Mind you received from your parents at birth and intrinsically possess--you won't go creating delusions about anything at all, and then, since no delusions will remain, you'll all be living Buddhas from today forever after. There's nothing more direct than this, so it's essential that you all realize it conclusively.

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Charles Luk, in *Cb'an and Zen Teaching, The Dharma Treasure of the Altar Sutra*, lists the ten evils, fn. p. 40: killing, stealing, carnality, lying, double-tongue, coarse language, filthy language, covetousness, anger and perverted views. The eight heterodox practices (errors) are: The opposite of the eightfold noble path.

DIFFERENT LESSONS

Hackney Speaking

Recently, I enrolled in a "Self-Defense" course. The course, which could be better labeled "NYC Street Fighting," prepares students to deal with any unpleasant situation they might encounter in the street, subways, halls, etc. The student trains with a sixty-year old ex-marine who, in spite of his slight size and unimpressive exterior, is fully versed in what it takes to survive in street combat. Most of his students are strong, large and intent males, generally in their thirties. We practice vigorously various death-dealing blows and maneuvers on each other with great gentleness and greater enthusiasm. We smile and laugh often and comment how we would deal with this or that thug we read about daily. Practically no one in the class has ever had to involve himself with the types we train against.

Feeling strong and happy after a few weeks of calculated mayhem, all of which I described to Farkas, she told me of a meeting she had just in the last week. On a Sunday afternoon, when going across town, she was approaching the subway stairs to a lower level. Coming to the mezzanine, a vast empty area, she turned to start down another flight, when she was accosted by a young man considerably larger than she (she is five feet tall and one hundred pounds) in front and another behind him. The front male said "I want that bag. Gimme that bag!" and put out a hand to take it. She said, "At once such a pure anger filled me and as I was wearing my boxing mitts (her large winter mittens) I immediately hit across at his hand with great force and hollered at him, 'Get away from me!!' He fell back quite confused and not a little surprised, and probably somewhat scared. I moved on down the stairs. Again, but more weakly, he said, 'Gimme that bag.' I turned and shouted to both, 'You had better not mess with me or I will put the Evil Eye on you!' This did it, and they turned and were gone, happy they had escaped such a threat."

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