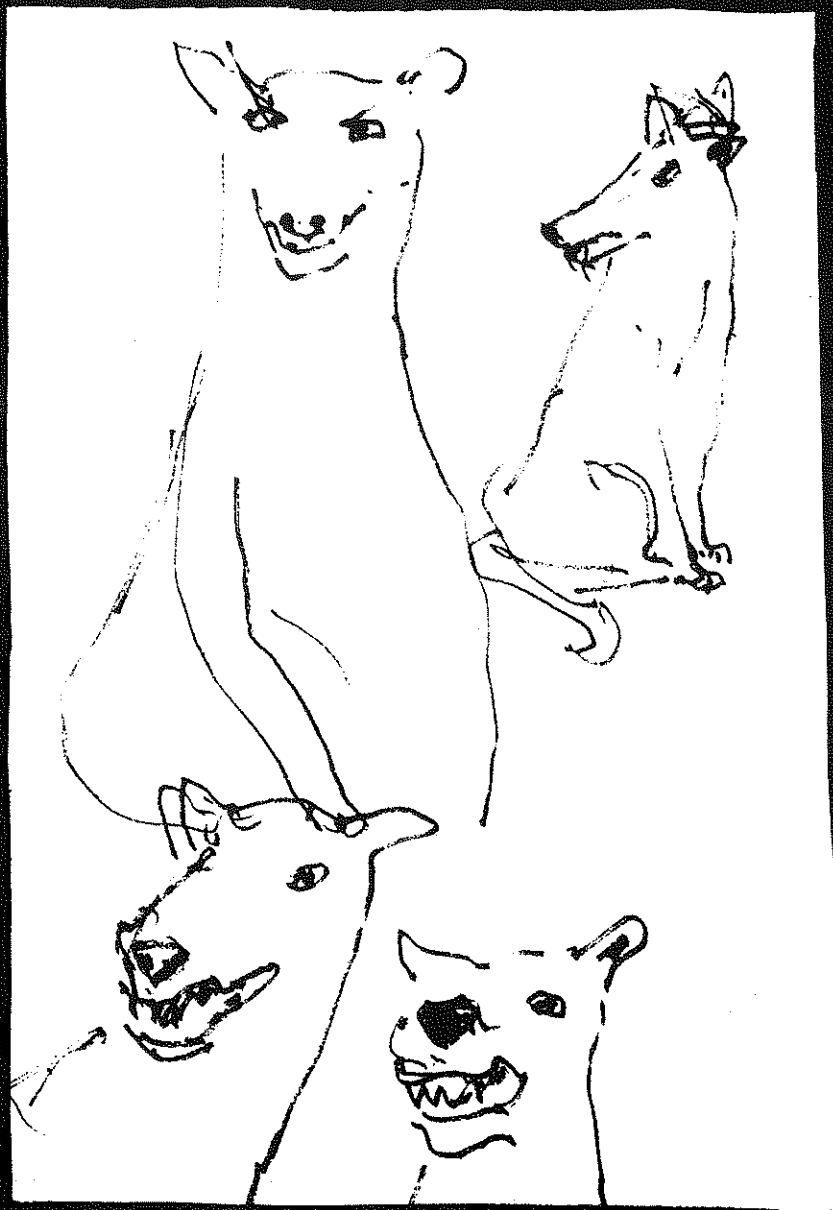


# ZEN NOTES



## MYOKONIN

By Gyoko Saito

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Somewhat abbreviated

Ever since D.T. Suzuki wrote and published about myokonin, the person as rare as a lotus flower, myokonin has become something of a stereotype for Shinshu followers. There are two reasons for this. First, because of the lack of biographical records, we have no way of understanding such individuals, in terms of the process by which they developed. Second, we naturally try to understand their understanding in our own way and within our own limits. For example, D.T. Suzuki sees myokonin through his Zen experience and understanding.

I am very fortunate to know many myokonins and I have shared the process of seeking the Buddha-Dharma together with them under the same teacher--not for a short period, but already for the past thirty years. There are many of them, but at this moment I will pick one, Mr. Mikio Kanazaki, 93 years old, a three-star general in WWII.

To meet the Teaching is to meet the Teacher and find that I can gain the endless source of the teaching for the rest of my life. In the case of Shinran Shonin, he met his teacher Honen and knew that this encounter was the endless source and bottomless spring of unlimited inspiration which gushes out.

More immediate and vivid to me is the case of Helen Keller. By meeting with her teacher, she found an endless, limitless life manifestation in the human word. Ordinary human words express life directly, but the more we learn of words the more of the essence we lose. The more sophisticated we become, the further we get from the true word that is the direct manifestation of life itself.

Helen Keller's first shout of "Water!" was the opening gate to enter the vast ocean of words manifesting life itself. So it was for Shinran Shonin. Meeting with his teacher Honen, he found the Namu Amida Butsu that is equivalent to Helen Keller's shout of "Water!" Then for the first time Shinran entered the gate that opened up to the ocean of the infinite wisdom and compassion.

In my case, 35 years ago, for the first time, I met Reverend Ono, a disciple of Reverend Akegarasu, and then through him I met Reverend Akegarasu and his teachings. Then I met many myokonins who had been listening to both Reverend Ono and Reverend Akegarasu for years. Mr. Mikio Kanazaki was one of them.

Both of us were pretty much beginners 35 years ago. His twin sister Masa, who is now also 93, and his older sister Shizumo, 98, were advanced students even then.

Mikio and I share somewhat the same background. I was a cadet at Japan's West Point; he was a three-star general. Immediately after the war ended he attempted totally alone, to commit hara-kiri

because of his sense of obligation to his men, the country and the Emperor. But after he cut open his abdomen, his sword was dulled and he could not succeed in cutting the jugular vein in his neck. He was found unconscious, hospitalized, brought back to life.

It was after that that he met Reverend Ono and Reverend Akegarasu and started listening to the Teaching--around the same time I did. Here we were--two soldiers, the old veteran and the raw beginner.

Two years ago, when I went back to Japan to visit my sick mother, I visited the Kanazaki family; I had not seen them since my previous visit to Japan ten years before... Two more years have passed since then. Last week I received a three-page letter from him, written in a small, firm, beautiful hand. In it he said:

I have just turned 93. The secret of my continuing health is my conviction that as long as I am useful I am allowed to live, otherwise I will return to the Pure Land. So I have no worries. I wake up at three o'clock in the morning and regardless of whether it is bright or raining or snowing I clean the main street of my district. It takes me about three hours.

A Japanese road is like a dumping-ground for garbage, so I find all kinds: cigarette butts, empty match boxes, empty cigarette packs, juice cans, beer cans, waste paper, vomit from drunks, dead dogs and cats, dead leaves, and so on. I have plenty to clean up! I have been doing this for years. Doing something for others--and at the same

time it's good for my health.

But nowadays I have been meditating on this work from various angles. I am listening to the voice of heaven: "Mikio, you think you are cleaning the road, but actually you are cleaning your mind." My mind is worse than the condition of the road. The more I clean the garbage of mind, the more comes! And each time, the more I clean, the more I see truth. As I do this, the people in my district appreciate and recognize me, but I am the one who gets the most benefit, not only gaining long life but gaining such deep insight. What a life I am enjoying!

Summer is pretty hot. In the winter, even though I wear two robes I often lose the sense of feeling and I have pain. But I never rest from the work one day---

#### FROM THE GREAT NATURAL WAY By Ven. Hozen Seki

When you study sutras, do not depend on the characters or the sentences of constructions, but try to test through your heart. When we say, "to go to so-and-so's room, take the hall on your left until you hit the doorway at the end" and the like, we don't expect anyone to "take" a hall with his hands or "hit" a door with his head. Our understanding is of the sense, not the letter.

## SOKEI-AN SAYS

### Principles of Buddhism, VI

The whole teaching of Buddhism is to attain through our own effort. You cannot get it by argument!

In the last talk on Principles I spoke of the Buddhism of the Bodhisattva. This is different from that of the Arhat, for whom self-enlightenment (his own enlightenment) is the goal. When he attains this, he stays there on the mountain top or in a cave in solitude. He renounces the world and holds to that one thing in his body, and in his mind.

We know this one thing. We cannot tell about it because it cannot be explained. The Buddha called it Nirvana. Buddhism is a non-ego religion. Of course I must call myself "I" just the same--this "I" exists in relation to others. All sentient beings are other I's. A friend confronting me is my alter-ego. When you find this alter-ego in another, you are not alone even though you are living in solitude!

It is here that Hinayana Buddhism must come to its end. A tree cannot exist with one branch! Here it expands into Mahayana.

The truth must be promulgated. Someone must go into the world, sacrifice himself and let it be known that there is this *one* thing that must be attained in a lifetime. This is the deed of the Bodhisattva--in one word, sacrifice. Having received the milk of the Dharma from the Buddha, we must repay him by promulgating this understanding to others. The Bodhisattva does not live for his own pleasure, but

sacrifices himself to show the nature of Buddha.

The mother who lives for her child, and the father who lives for his wife and children, pass on their understanding to the children--or else they will not know the nature of life or the reason for living.

In advanced age one must come to this understanding if one has undergone many experiences, studied diligently and attained enlightenment. Now there is nothing more to do, no reason to live longer except to give this teaching to others. It seems to me such a life has more meaning, more weight than the life that is lived for oneself alone.

Hinayana Buddhism is the way to enlightenment, and Mahayana is the enlightenment that one can give to another. The Buddha called this "recompense". Surely *we* must requite the Buddha, like Bodhisattvas, for giving us the milk of the Dharma! Without this Dharma we cannot enter into Nirvana.

The Arhats who followed the Buddha into Parinirvana thought that life had no longer any value after his death. Wishing to follow the Buddha, they cremated themselves in forest fires and jumped off cliffs, following one after another like pigeons in flight--the corpses of monks and nuns covered the valley of the Ganges! They did not enter Nirvana, but showed the decline of Buddhism! Others said, "Look at those following the Master into Nirvana! We do not want a religion like that--it is of no use to the human being."

Mahakashyapa said, "We

must requite the Buddha for giving us the milk of Dharma. We must promulgate it forever into the future."

Then he gathered 500 Arhats together and made a collection of the sayings of the Buddha which was handed down by the Bhikshus. There were also many lay followers among them and Bodhisattvas who followed in the next 200 years. Among them were Vimalakirti, Vajrapala, Manjushri, Samantabhadra--now personified--who became historical figures and handed down their Buddhism. Their teachings are collected in the sutras handed down by monks and layman.

But the *one thing* that I am talking about you can attain only by yourself--no one can give it to another, just as no one can digest the other's food.

Lay brothers also have the Mahayana idea. In Japan today, there are 2 systems of Buddhism: one for monks and one for laymen.

The following words were spoken by the Buddha's own lips: "You must repay everything you have received; if it is enlightenment in the Dharma--*that* you must give to another."

If someone holds this compassionate idea, I respect him. He does not forget even the smallest kindness. He receives with great gratitude. He does not tell about it--but he always remembers it.

Sacrifice is the beginning of recompense.

## THE RECORD OF BANKEI

Translated by Haskel

A monk asked: "The men of old declared that with a great doubt one will experience a great enlightenment. How is it that your Reverence doesn't make use of the great doubt of the masters?"

The Master replied: "As to what's meant by 'great doubt,' long ago when Nangaku went to see the Sixth Patriarch, he was asked by him, 'What is it that comes thus?' Nangaku was utterly flustered, and puzzling over this for eight years, (finally) answered: 'As soon as you speak about a thing, you miss the mark.' This is the true great doubt and great enlightenment. For example, when you misplace a *kesa* and no matter how much you search are unable to find it, and searching and searching you can't put it out of your mind even for a moment--that's real doubt. People nowadays go stirring up doubt just because they say the old masters did, so what they produce is an imitation doubt, and because this doubt isn't genuine, they'll have no day of awakening. It's just as if they were to search all about, thinking something to have been lost that never was."

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SESSHIN with Joshu Sasaki Roshi  
Begins Monday, March 15, 4:00AM,  
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tion. One half fee (total is \$150)  
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INSIDE THE FZI,10

*In quietude under the old El  
in the West 50's in New York City  
in the fall of 1929, Sokei-an looked  
back at his visit to Dr. Goddard in  
the spring of that year.*

Dr. Dwight Goddard  
Thetford, Vermont

My dear Dr. G.

I thank you for sending me your kind letters. Tho I have not replied, I am very much regret of that I have not much time to write anything in Japanese either. I have many things to tell you, yet when I think of that putting my understanding into the word it would make no result to help anyone to increase knowledge about Dharma.

After I came back from your house last May, I should have written a letter immediately, yet something did not make satisfy me in our meeting, and it is very clear to me yet it may be not known to you. So I thought while you don't notice that between us why should I tell you myself? So did not write.

I was reading your magazine which you are sending me am very much interested about your way of understanding Zen, but of course there is no way to criticize it for any way from my point of view of Zen because my understanding of Zen is always not in a word. Mr. Krihara, my friend who is living in Japan, (I think you will recall him) send me his letter saying you did not agree with our commandment that we observe and I do not surprise if your criticism about our form of commandment because you do not know anything about that history of progress, and the circum-

stances of Zen Buddhism in Japan today.

Obaku Zenji a famous Zen priest in China, as you know the story, had his mother and he was supporting her by making straw handles. His disciple told him we have enough provision to support your mother. You Reverend must not toil yourself to make straw handles. He replied, Tho she is my mother, yet she is not a member of the Buddhist community. It is not lawful to support her by spending your provision so I will work to support her as my private task--and he worked as long as his mother lived. Japanese priest today have some duty to perform for the family which he left are simply going after Obaku's example. I do not think to give some help for our family which we left is not against the commandment of Buddhistic monk (corrected to read: against that which is commanded of a Buddhistic monk).

In your recent letter you wrote me that I am following Shinkaku Soen's Zen. I cannot understand that the name you said. Shinkaku is as far as I know is a priest in Honolulu, Hawaii, belong to Hongoji, and Soen is my teacher's teacher. There must be some mistake in your memory of the name and I think you mean probably Shaku Soen or Shaku Katsu my teacher. Of course I am following my teacher's Zen as his disciple, but I cannot think that his Zen is different from the Zen which is handed down from Buddha. As my own effort I am trying to keep real torch which is handed down from

previous teachers and not make my own Zen by my wayward conception, and I never care that that Zen which I am upholding suits the New Yorker or to anyone who lives in any spot of world. I don't mind that my teaching will succeed in New York or not. I believe if I write letter to you often it will add more misunderstanding upon which we have that between us today. So till we meet face to face, I will hold back my sending letter--but my heart toward you is as pure as that my heart to my brethren, and I am always grateful for your giving me help through Mr. Iwami. I am waiting very eagerly for chance that you come to see me.

From SOKEI-AN

#### CLEANING and THE HULK

Noted by Hackney

Recently, I was sweeping my office. My employee, Jerry, commented on how often I cleaned and expressed wonder at my washing down the

steps leading from one level to another. I had just finished typesetting the article on "Myokonins" found in this issue of Zen Notes, so I related the story to him. He said, "Yes, I sometimes clean and find that it makes me feel better. In fact, I was cleaning my stove last weekend and it was hard going. But I remembered what you had told me about Norman."

Norman is a young attorney who, among other fine qualities, cleans his apartment thoroughly. He does an especially good job on his stove. One day I came into Norman's apartment and he showed me the stove top and oven, which he had just cleaned. Norman said, "I just cleaned the oven, but it didn't get clean enough, so I am doing it again."

Jerry continued, "I was having a hard time with the burners, and then I remembered how Norman had redone his oven to get it right. So, I put more energy in it and it looked fine when I was finished."

Jerry, who has had a difficult time growing up in America because he did not have many advantages, used to look askance at Norman, because Norman had the confidence of youth and possibilities not open to Jerry that come from birth. However, when we moved our offices on ce, both Jerry and Norman helped. Norman worked very hard, always laughing and lifting. At the end of the day, Jerry said, "Norman, I was wrong about you. You really showed me how. From now on I really like you and have named you 'The Hulk.'" One on one, just like Sokei-an said--no machinery religion.

## CONVERSATIONS WITH FARKAS

Noted by Hackney

Sokei-an had several dharma-brothers who had studied with Sokatsu along with him. I studied with one of them, Zuigan Goto Roshi, whom Mrs. Sasaki had wanted to come to the Institute in the fifties. He wanted to come in a way, but he was concerned about his health and that it would not be up to the trip. He probably had good reason.

Goto had guided Mrs. Sasaki in Japan along the way. He had this obligation as he was Sokei-an's dharma-brother. He also aided a number of foreigners in Japan who came to him in the fifties.

Another dharma-brother, Chikudo Ohasama, apparently felt an obligation to transmit Zen to the West. He went to Germany. There, along with August Faust, he wrote *Zen, der Lebendige Buddhismus*. Ohasama was trying to convey something about Zen to the people in Germany at that time. There was quite a bit of interest in Buddhism there before the war.

Eizan Tatsuta Roshi apparently didn't have this interest at all--his efforts however were directed to the other side of Sokatsu's aim: to provide for the Zen interests of the lay student. The others seem to have sensed that Zen was dying in Japan--to find a fertile field for it they needed--(a touch of vampirism?)--fresh blood.

They thought of it as something like a marriage situation. They thought Americans had the superior advantage in material things and success in the modern world and that

their youthful vigor was ripe for Zen. Sokei-an felt that the Japanese had the spiritual and masculine values that Americans really needed. There is some truth to this. Also, from 1866, the Japanese had had an interest in western philosophy and ideas, particularly that of the Germans.

After the war, the first Zen master to come was Asahina Sogen, of Engakuji. He came under the auspices of the State Department. He went around the country and met various people. He most wanted to meet Einstein--he did meet him, too. Asahina patted Einstein's face and said something that was very difficult to translate like "resilient, flexible or soft." I suppose what he meant was that Einstein's face, instead of being rigid or tense, was soft, with flesh like a baby's.

Before and during the war, the Japanese government was not interested in promoting Zen, although they made use of Zen in training soldiers. The government was supporting Shinto.

The monks were called into the army which depleted the temples. Further, the temples had been supported by both patrons and the government. Gradually, all this was taken from them. The occupying Americans completed the job.

Goto had been promoting Zen in Korea during the occupation. The masters were looking afield. But, they were interested in the West before the war when Sokei-an, Ohasama and Senzaki had come to bring their Zen in the first half of the twentieth century.

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