

ZEN NOTES



NICHOLAS FARKAS, 1890-1982

After WWII, the young Zen Buddhist movement in America was at a crossroads. Sokei-an Sasaki, the first Zen Master to come and teach and live in America had died in 1945, leaving a few followers, primarily his widow, Ruth Sasaki, and Mary Farkas. The First Zen Institute of America had a temporary home in Mrs. Sasaki's house at 124 E. 65th Street, but with her departure for Japan in 1947, this arrangement became impractical. This left Mary Farkas to carry on as best possible.

Her husband, Nicholas, in 1953, graciously offered the use of a part of his house in Greenwich Village as the new home for the Institute. For many years he supported the Institute and Zen in America in this quiet, but absolutely essential way. His home became the Institute's home.

Meetings were held. Visiting dignitaries were received. Later more space became necessary for the use of Isshu Miura Roshi during his stay.

On nights when the Institute was open to the public, a small sign was placed in the window noting the event. People would mill about the street and on the steps of his home, waiting for the door to open. Later their footsteps would be heard throughout the evening as they made their way up and down the stairs. Finally, in 1959, the Institute bought the building it now occupies on East 30th Street.

Nicholas Farkas is practically unknown to Zen students of today. Yet, it was due to his continual generosity and kindness at a crucial time in its development that it has prospered as it has.

We are grateful to him for his quiet, unrecorded and necessary contribution to Zen in America. We thank him for it.

THE RECORD OF BANKEI

Translated by Haskel

The Master addressed the assembly: I don't speak about Buddhism and I don't speak about Zen; I can manage perfectly just talking about the precious virtue of the Buddha Mind that you all intrinsically possess. That's why when I speak to you I don't quote the words of the Buddhas and patriarchs. Other than the Buddha Mind you received from your parents at birth, there's nothing else (to discuss). That's why we speak of the School of Buddha Mind.

It's because you fail to realize how vastly precious the Buddha Mind is, that you're deluded by things of no account. And it's being deluded that makes you into unenlightened beings. There's not even a shred of such a thing as a seed of ignorance that from the outset (predestines you to become) an unenlightened being.

(On the contrary,) all of you are (endowed with) the seed of Buddhahood, but because you fail to realize this, you become deluded in all sorts of ways and transmigrate. To change the precious Buddha Mind you received from your parents at birth for (that of) an unenlightened being is certainly the height of unfiliality.

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GETTING IT BACK

By John Storm

It's a law of life that for everything you give up, you get something back you didn't expect. This came to mind the other day while talking with a friend about giving up smoking. I went through that ordeal several years ago, and I got back two unexpected things.

The first was not all that welcome: my sense of smell. I hadn't realized how feeble it had become until one sweltering summer day, about a week after my last cigarette. It started functioning again as I stood on a corner between an open-air fast food shop and the yawning mouth of a subway entrance. I almost fainted.

But the other unexpected acquisition was, in my opinion, of supreme value. I started laughing again. I mean REALLY laughing: HA-HA-HA-HA-HA, instead of uh-uh-uh-uh-uh. Unconsciously, over a long time, I'd been suppressing a full laugh and was sort of chuckling. So as not to dissolve into a paroxysm of coughing.

Nowadays, when people like my friend wonder if quitting cigarettes is really worth all the misery, I just ask how long it's been since they have had a truly good laugh.

WE GET LETTERS

From

Dear Mrs. Farkas,

...Speaking of capturing the SPIRIT of things and of people, can you tell me of a book which does this for what might be called the SPIRIT of Tai Chi? Not a book on just the exercises--for I have a feeling that if one understood the spirit of Tai Chi, all the motions of daily life could be done in that spirit. Roughly, what I mean to ask for is something that might be expressed as "don't push the river". I don't know how familiar you are with Tai Chi, and if the above inquiry does not immediately suggest something to you, please do not give it further thought...
Sincerely,

L.P. Yand ell

Reply

Dear Mr. Yandell,

Mary kindly showed me your letter and question about a book on Tai Chi. I have practiced Tai Chi for a number of years and I believe the only way to understand it is through practice. Words can only point but practice can allow one to flow with Tao, not talk and think about flowing with Tao. The postures are simple but the way of flowing from one into the other teaches gradually a way of flowing through life--letting go of as much physical tension as possible.

I would suggest finding a teacher and learning the basic postures. From there it's a boring, repetitious concentration where the self complains so vehemently about being disciplined however, after some years of this kind of battling, subtle changes could come about--but through practice rather than reading.

I hope this letter is of some help to you and I wish you much success on your search.
Signed,

Ho ward Pa shenz

From THE GREAT NATURAL WAY

By Ven. Hozen Seki

“Parental Guidance”

Amida Buddha has two aspects: one is compassion, the other wisdom. Compassion and Wisdom are one, not separate. There is a proverb: “The father hits the son, and the mother embraces the son.” The son will think that father’s and mother’s minds are different; most think that way in childhood. But father’s hitting is wisdom, mother’s embrace is compassion. Hitting and soothing are to assist the child in growing up. They are the same thing. While we live in this world, we receive bitter blows—or tender caresses. Always, however, we are living in the Amida’s *prajna*--wisdom--and the Amida’s *karuna*--compassion. Gautama Buddha’s teaching is like *prajna*, to train man’s mind. Amida’s teaching is like the mother’s compassion. Some people think that Gautama Buddha’s teaching and the Amida’s teaching are different, but they are the same teaching. Without Gautama Buddha’s “hitting”, we cannot feel gratitude for Amida Buddha’s unconditional embrace. We appreciate Gautama Buddha’s teaching more through Amida’s compassion; this is Compassion and Wisdom, working day and night to the benefit of the child of Amida Buddha. Compassion and Wisdom will never rest.

When I was five years old I was trained by my father to be a Buddhist priest. He was rarely home--most of the months he was away on missionary work in the southern part of Japan. But every day while he was at home, he forced me to sit on the porch, placing a small table between us. On this table were two sutras, one for me and one for him. Beside this there was a big stick, used to strike the gong. I began to learn the Shoshinge, and he said, pointing to the Chinese characters, that I had to repeat exactly as he recited. of course, I did not know the meanings,

which he never explained. He forced me to follow what he said, which I did. But soon I would mispronounce a character; then my father would suddenly strike my head with a stick. It was very painful, and I would develop a bump. He told me why he did this: "The character is a Buddha; if you make a mistake saying one character, you kill one Buddha. So as punishment for this murder, I strike your head. Do you understand?" "Yes, father," I said. But how could such a small child remember every character perfectly?

So during a single practice session I killed many Buddhas--ten or fifteen. And on my head, each time my father visited our home, there were ten or fifteen bumps. One day while I was practicing the sutra under my father's guidance, I heard my friend's voice calling, "Hozen-san! Come out! Let's go play!" My concentration was broken, and I killed several Buddhas in that one moment; so my father struck hard, the same number of murdered Buddhas. I could stand this no longer, so I ran away first to the yard and then continued running until I reached the small cottage that stood at the edge of my village. Then I decided that I would not return home. Deep within this cottage--really it was a storage long-house for bamboo--I fell asleep.

That night I was awakened by a voice calling my name. It seemed to reach everywhere. Through a little hole I could see people carrying lanterns and searching for me. Finally an old man found me and said, "Your father will not scold you, so please return home." I was taken to our small temple where my father was chanting the sutra before the Amida Buddha. In fear I sat behind him as usual, and I thought: he will hit me. So I held out my head to him, and he took the stick and pretended to strike my head several times; but it never once touched my head. I still remember how that night my parents had a quarrel, my mother saying,

"Your education is too severe for such a small boy. When he is older, he will learn sutra-chanting easily." Then my father became very angry and said, "Such tender thoughts spoil my son."

His education continued just as severely; he never changed his method. When I was nine years old my father became sick and went to the hospital for surgery of the stomach. The operation was a failure because the doctor had neglected to check my father's heart. He had to be carted home, and the doctor visited him, confessing his mistake. The old doctor was very honest, but my father told him, "You need not worry about the operation; it is my own karma, so I cannot complain or blame you--please do not worry." Later the doctor would say, "I never saw such a wonderful priest in my life."

At the end of his life, my father chanted the San Sei Ge. He repeated the Nembutsu. With Nembutsu he finally passed away. Surrounding the deathbed were my mother, my five sisters, and myself. My sisters cried, but I didn't hear my mother crying. At the funeral service, many of my father's friends gathered from far away; he was much mourned. But I did not feel sadness. I thought: my father is dead; there will be no more scoldings. So I felt release and freedom. When my father was buried, and all the others cried, even then I could not cry; there were no tears in my eyes. I felt ashamed of this and took a little saliva to moisten my eyes so that I would appear to be crying.

At that time I could not understand my father's will for me. Later, when I entered the Buddhist university in Kyoto, my mother told me the following story:

When I was three years old, my father and mother made a pilgrimage to the Honganji in Kyoto. The distance from our village was far; there were no trains or planes, and the journey took about one month; but they

were determined upon their pilgrimage. After the long journey, they were finally able to pay their respects at the great temple.

While he was in Kyoto, my father wished to buy a new *koromo*, but he did not know the location of an appropriate shop. So he asked this of a passing priest--a gentle old man--who looked at my father and said, "I think you come from far away. I know a shop, and I'll take you there." So they went to the shop, and the priest told the shopkeeper to give my father the most courteous service. Then he took his leave.

The shopkeeper asked my father, "Do you know the gentleman who brought you here?" My father replied, "No, I just met him in front of the Honganji, and he kindly guided me here." The shopkeeper was surprised. "That old man is the president of Honganji University," he said. My father, a country Buddhist priest, was more surprised than this shopkeeper.

The next morning my parents visited the university and called on the president to apologize for spending his time on such a trifle. The president welcomed my parents with a smile. He gave them a tour of the whole university, including the classrooms, library, and chapel. When it was time to leave, my father said to this man, "Dear president, I have an only son. I want him to study in this university, under your guidance. I shall send him here." The president accepted, saying, "I will be very glad to receive your son in this school. How old is he?" My father replied sincerely, "Sir, my son is three years old." The president smiled and said, "Well, that is still some time off." My mother continued: "Your entrance in the Honganji university was your father's dream and wish." Now in my later years I recognize my father's life in myself. While I was a child, I disliked him; but now I appreciate his strict training. Gautama Buddha's "severe teaching" is to realize Buddhature.

Father's *prajna* and mother's love are the same face.

After my father passed away, my mother sent me to a remote temple. My father's relatives were opposed to this. But my mother feared that if I remained with her and my sisters, I would become spoiled. So for the sake of my future, she sent me far away, and she said at the time, "My mind is like that of a cruel devil." I spent four years at the remote temple. When I returned from grammar school, I was trained to chant the sutra and clean the temple; and there too I had a severe education, because I was so poorly behaved.

One day my mother visited me. After the visit, we parted at the temple gate, and my mother gave me a small sum of money--about ten cents. I complained: I couldn't get anything with so little money; I asked for more, throwing the coin down. But my mother did not give me any more, nor did she say anything. She silently walked down the narrow path toward home. When she disappeared from view, I picked up the coin. But my mother's silence impressed something on my childish mind.

After I graduated from grammar school, my mother decided to send me to high school in Kyoto near the Honganji, because she thought that although there were many high schools near my native place, the best way to become a priest was to study at the Honganji school. I was able to pass the entrance examination.

During vacation, almost all the students would return to their own homes; the dormitory had only a few students remaining. It was with difficulty that my expenses for dormitory, tuition, books, and the like were met. At that time, almost all my village friends went no further than grammar school; very few went on to high school. My mother's financial condition made it almost impossible for her to send the necessary monthly

payment to the school, and my sister who was a schoolteacher, had to help her.

One winter, as vacation time approached, my mother sent me a letter with a money-order enclosed, telling me to come home for the vacation. The money, for thirty yen, was to be used for train fare. I was very happy, and my heart jumped for joy. I began preparing to return home. I packed my bags and then went to the post office to change the money-order into cash, which I did, putting the sum in my pocket. I returned to the dormitory. Then I decided to go buy the train ticket. But at the train station I could not find the money. I became pale. I consulted with my teacher back at the dormitory, and he recommended that I report the loss to the police. When I did this, the police only scolded me: "You will never find stolen money! This is your fault, because you were careless! We cannot help you; in the future, be more careful!"

I worried about this lost sum and finally wrote to my mother about it, explaining my terrible situation and asking what I ought to do. Several days later her reply arrived. By then the vacation was half over. She said in her letter, "Very good, my son! You say that you lost the money that I sent you, but do not worry. You borrowed that same amount from someone in your past, which you did not know; now you are able to repay the amount. This is therefore a very wonderful happening! The vacation is almost over, so spend the rest of it at the dormitory. You did a splendid thing! I enclose five yen. Go and have a good meal with it."

I had expected my mother to scold me and to advise me to be more careful, that such money was hard to come by, and so on. But on the contrary, she glorified my misfortune. I repeated my reading of the letter. Outside the dormitory nobody was around, so I cried, holding my mother's letter, until it was wet with tears. The youthful mind is

strange: if my mother had scolded me, I would not have cried; instead, I would have risen up against her. But my mother accepted--even admired--my behavior, so I determined not to give her any worry, because she was so tender.

Amida Buddha's calling is that he knows very well our innermost mind: "I will not criticize, because I know well your thoughts." Amida's salvation is absolute, unconditional; there is no praying, no asking, no changing my thought; whatever I think, Amida Buddha always is with me. His compassion is beyond our thought; therefore we are glad at receiving such tenderness. Amida's compassion manifests itself in my mother's letter. At the time, I called mother's name as *Namu Amida Butsu* in my youthful mind. My mother always told me, "Even if you become a great scholar or great businessman and wealthy, your mother will not be glad. But if you become a priest with black *koromo* and *kesa* like your father, that will be my greatest pleasure."

During the second year of my university studies, I received a telegram: "Mother is in critical condition. Return home immediately." I hurried to see my mother. My only wish was to be able to tell her one thing: "Mother, please don't worry about me." But when I arrived home, after a three-day journey from Kyoto, she was already lying in the casket. I put my hand on her cold head, and I whispered in my mind: "Mother, please don't worry about me." But it seemed to me that I had lost everything in this world, and I was unable to do anything for two weeks. I could not even understand why I should study Buddhism at the university. During the day, many people would come to offer their condolences. All day I would keep smiling. But in the night, alone, I would cry into my blanket for this separation from my beloved mother. Finally, the Nembutsu gave me the

ganvotas

courage needed. In Nembutsu my father and mother are living with me. Nembutsu is the power to live in this world with courage, hope, and appreciation.

Kannon's compassion was manifested in my mother's tenderness, Seishi's wisdom in my father's strictness. But in this world our minds frame only love and knowledge. Mother's love and father's knowledge come near Wisdom and Compassion but are still based on ego and so are not pure compassion or wisdom. To me it may seem Compassion or Wisdom, but since it cannot even be extended by my parents to other people's sons, it is still based on desire. Wisdom and Compassion are beyond our thought, beyond our definition. So Shinran Shonin said that all men were his father, all women his mother.

For details of the 1982 Summer Seminar on the Sutras--June 8-25, cosponsored by the Cornell University Department of Asia Studies and the Ithaca Zen Center, featuring Joshu Sasaki Roshi, Shotaro Iida, Taitetsu Unno and Philip Yam-polsky, write:

Summer Seminar on the Sutras
Cornell University Summer
Session
B 12 Ives Hall
Ithaca, N.Y. 14853
(607) 256-4987

Joshu Sasaki Roshi will conduct Dai-Sesshins before and after the Seminar, June 1-7, and June 27- July 3.

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Mary Farhas, Editor
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