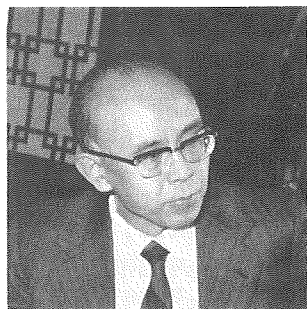


# ZEN notes



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近

昭和五十五年十月百  
中山散人

YOSHITO HAKEDA  
1924-1983

On August 30, 1983, my teacher Yoshito Hakeda died at St. Luke's Hospital in New York City. He was fifty-nine and had been suffering since the previous winter from cancer of the pancreas. His ashes were returned to Japan by his wife and son and will be interred in the mountains of his native district in Nagano Prefecture. I am sitting here today, the day of the service in Nagano, and trying to set down in words a picture of Hakeda sensei; not a biography or formal portrait, but a random collection of snapshots, the sort one might pull from a drawer for a guest, some shuffled together in sequence, but most simply poured out onto a table or casually pressed into a palm.

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When I first met sensei at Columbia University in the spring of 1970, he had already been teaching for nine years in the Departments of Religion and East Asian Languages and Cultures. Although he had received his doctorate from Yale in Sanskrit, at Columbia he handled a wide range of subjects which included Buddhism, Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan and Kambun -- the method adopted by the Medieval Japanese to read Chinese in their own language. Sensei himself had a genius for language that I have seen in few others, and would solve the most abstruse Chinese and Japanese texts after a single reading, most often out loud, and without benefit of any sort of supporting materials. In fact, apart from a single battered copy of Kenkyusha's Japanese-English Dictionary, long-since torn in two, his room was entirely bare of books. Sensei's approach was not primarily academic, but intuitive, almost shamanistic. He had a mysterious ability to enter the minds of the men of long ago, to work from the "inside." To him, there simply was no other way. Once you were able to do this, everything fell into place; until then, it was just struggling blindly. Sensei's translations of the *Awakening of Faith* (New York: Columbia

University Press, 1967) and the works of Kukai (*Kukai: Major Works*, Columbia University Press, 1971) were all examples of this process. "Scientific" translations that dealt with texts as linguistic problems he considered useless or worse since they invariably betrayed the genuine spirit of the original. This was part of sensei's general impatience with and contempt for "intellectuals." To him, they were like people who would be given a joke, analyze all the components, pose various theories and interpretations, but forget to laugh. His attitude toward Buddhism was the same. He delighted in quoting Kukai's statement that unless you grasped the core, the real truth behind the plethora of scriptures and practices, your study of Buddhism was just a waste of time. Sensei was a priest of the Shingon, or Esoteric sect of Japanese Buddhism. But only when he was pressed did he agree to enter into the complex detail of Shingon ritual and practice and discuss mudras, mantras, visualization and mandalas. To him, all these were merely expressions of the essentially simple and straightforward ideas that lay at the heart of all of Mahayana Buddhism. Whether one found them in Kukai, Lin-chi or Bankei, they were always basically the same. It was this knowledge that, I believe, was the source of sensei's enormous confidence, as a translator, as a teacher and as a human being.

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How had sensei acquired his talents, and at such a relatively youthful age? All of us used to wonder. Had he gone through some particular training or system of self-education? When I asked him, he'd simply laugh and shrug his shoulders. He didn't know, it just came somehow. I suspected there was something more, and urged him to write his story, or to let me do so. That only made him laugh harder. He assured me there was nothing much to tell. In many respects, he was the most unassuming person I have ever known. Yet over the years I was able gradually to piece together various fragments

of information about sensei's past. His father had been a successful farmer in Nagano, and sensei grew up in a rural setting. His favorite activity as a child was catching fish bare-handed in the local streams, and in certain ways, sensei remained something of a "country boy" at heart. He knew the name of every tree and plant and could scramble with perfect agility down steep cliffsides by sliding along the fallen leaves, dodging stones and tree trunks.

Sensei's father's business eventually failed, and he was forced to liquidate all of his holdings. Sensei went to live with his paternal grandmother, and when he reached adolescence, was sent off to school to Mt. Koya (Koya-san), the headquarters of the Shingon sect founded by Kukai. He remained here through high school and then began classes at Koya-san University.

Japan was now entering the final period of the war, and sensei, at nineteen, joined an elite naval corps, mobilized in a last-ditch attempt to defend the Japanese coasts against the allied invasion. Each cadet was to be placed inside a small missile-like contraption, which could be fired from the cliffs and guided in a suicidal trajectory toward the American troopships. Neither sensei nor his fellow cadets in the so-called "Cherry Blossom" squadron questioned their task; all were resolved to die resisting the enemy. Shortly before the mission was to be launched, however, came the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Emperor's announcement of Japan's surrender. For sensei, it was like waking suddenly from a dream. "What have I been doing?" he recalled asking himself in amazement. He was like a man who had been sleepwalking over a dangerous precipice, and had come to his senses only at the last instant. It was then, he told me, that his serious study of Buddhism began.

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Sensei returned to Koya-san to complete his degree, graduating first in his class and even

winning an all-university judo elimination bout. The following years were spent at the University's Mikkyo Kenkyu-ka (Esoteric Buddhist Studies Center) and in studying under his teacher Soeda Ryushun of the Rengejo-in, a Koya sub-temple. At this time, the Shingon school, along with other Japanese Buddhist sects, was undertaking missionary efforts in the West, and sensei was selected to go to the United States. Before departing, he sought the advice of D.T. Suzuki, who urged him to study three things if he wished to teach Buddhism to Americans: Western religion (i.e. Judaism and Christianity), psychology and philosophy. Sensei had already studied Western philosophy at Koyasan, but he followed the rest of Suzuki's suggestions when he arrived in California in 1951, taking an M.A. in Religions at the University of Southern California. Yet, for sensei, his studies of Western thought had little meaning by and large. Compared with Buddhism, he found these teachings curiously primitive, even naive. He did, however, participate in the activities of the Los Angeles Shingon temple and became friends with the noted Zen monk Nyogen Senzaki, who was a frequent visitor at the temple, and whom sensei later described as a "Manchurian lion" (see ZEN NOTES, vol. XXI, no. 6). It was also during his stay in Los Angeles that he met his wife Sachiko. They were married in 1957 and have one son, Yuji, who lives in Japan.

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As indicated by his admiration for Senzaki, sensei's viewpoint was decidedly non-sectarian. If a teacher was real, then he was a "man," and it didn't matter what school he said he belonged to. But if he was haughty or phony--a "big-mouth"--then, Shingon, Zen or anything else, sensei had no use for him. When I first met sensei, he would regularly tease me about my interest in Zen. "Zen people tend to be somewhat arrogant, don't you think?" he would bait me playfully. He was also critical of Zen masters' calligraphy, which he felt was widely overrated and lacked the

strength, the "guts" of the finest Chinese brush-work, which he himself would copy with remarkable accuracy. At the same time, however, sensei would become rhapsodic over the *Lin-chi lu* (*J: Rinzai roku*), which he considered the greatest work of the Chinese mind. When we translated the passages describing Lin-chi's lightning encounters with various masters and monks, sensei would carefully set the scene and then proceed to take the parts of the different characters himself, "demonstrating" rather than "explaining" the episodes. It was essentially drama, he said, and that was the way to get into it, to make it come to life. To him, Lin-chi was not a fabulous or remote figure, but an actual person who was speaking right to you if only you'd open your ears.

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When I think back now on sensei's own teaching of Buddhism, I realize it occurred on several different levels. Even after settling in New York City, he continued his efforts to promulgate Shingon, initiating a group of interested students and others in the practice of moon meditation, one of the basic Shingon meditation techniques. At the same time, his many translations made available to English-speaking readers some of the seminal works of East Asian Buddhism. But, above all, sensei's way was not to obtrude, but simply to make himself available to those who sought him out. If he felt a student was sincere, he gave of himself completely. I would often apologize to sensei for taking up so much of his free time. "No, no," he'd say, "I am here, so use me all you want." He would never permit me to do anything for him in return, except on occasion when, reluctantly, he would agree to let me carry certain supplies he needed from Chinatown: "Gunpowder" green tea and paper for his calligraphy practice. I suppose that part of sensei's teaching was this rare kindness, this total and natural giving of himself to others, coupled with a quiet sort of innate dignity and good humor.

What was sensei's personal instruction to me? Japanese teachers can be quite authoritarian with their students even to the point of guiding them in their private lives, but sensei's advice to me was always the same: "Just rely on your own judgment." In many ways, this is what sensei's heroes--Kukai, Lin-chi and Bankei--were trying to say: be yourself, rely on yourself, trust your own real mind. A simple teaching, perhaps, but I don't think there will ever be a better.

Peter Haskel

## THE GREAT SIXTH PATRIARCH'S TEACHING

### Chapter IV,3

*Only with the lips you speak of straightness and with the mouth you speak of the samadhi of singleness of mind (ekavyuha), but you never practice the straightness of mind.*

### COMMENTARY SOKEI-AN SAYS

Straightness of mind, in modern parlance, is monism. But from the Buddhist standpoint, monism is not singleness; it is a different type of dualism. Monism today is the conclusion of dualism, because without conceiving dualism we cannot arrive at monism. Dualism is the cause and monism is the result. The attitude of the Buddhist is that he does not care about monism or dualism, the two or the one. Nor does he care about shadow or light, is or is not. Yes or no has nothing to do with the truth. Reality is neither yes nor no. Before the human being could speak or think of anything, Reality was existing. When you grasp that Reality, you grasp straightness and you are practicing straightness of mind.

*Eka* is one; *vyuha* is to adorn. *Ekavyuha* samadhi means the samadhi which adorns Reality with oneness. To affirm and to deny is dualism; to think of something or to refuse the thought is the same. The true Buddhist attitude is very difficult. When you observe the koan: "Without depending upon anything, manifest your own mind," you will get the answer of straightness of mind.

This does not mean harping upon one word; it is the attitude of practice, not the practice itself.

*But you never practice the straightness of mind and non-adherence to existence.* The Sixth Patriarch practiced nothing but this: Do not adhere to any existence--sitting, standing, lying or walking. In your answer, you must be natural. Straightness of mind is an attitude, not a practice. The practice of Zen is like lightning in the sky. It doesn't stay in one place and it will not be caught in any one thing. But the human mind is not like this. To be free as a bird in the sky, as the American Indians never traced the same road. This has the smell of Buddhism.

*Any deluded one adheres to the form of things and insists that it is samadhi of the singleness of mind:* Form means "certain position." To stick to form is not important.

*And says that sitting down continually without motion and never fluttering your mind uselessly is what is called samadhi of singleness of mind.* Such people restrain the mind. You must keep your mind free and not pursue it. When you read a book, you let your mind flow but you do not pursue it.

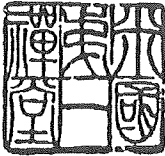
*Anyone who takes such a view thinks that man is the same as insentient being.* Like stone. Many monks fall into the pit of becoming insentient, and think that they are true Buddhists.

*This view becomes a causal obstacle to the way of Buddhism.* This kind of Buddhism was practiced in India at the end of Buddhism, and the monks were wiped out by the Moslems. The Twenty-eighth Patriarch never practiced such Buddhism. It is not authentic Buddhism--just a game of beggars, sitting on a rock for ten years. Buddhism is not such a dead fish!



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