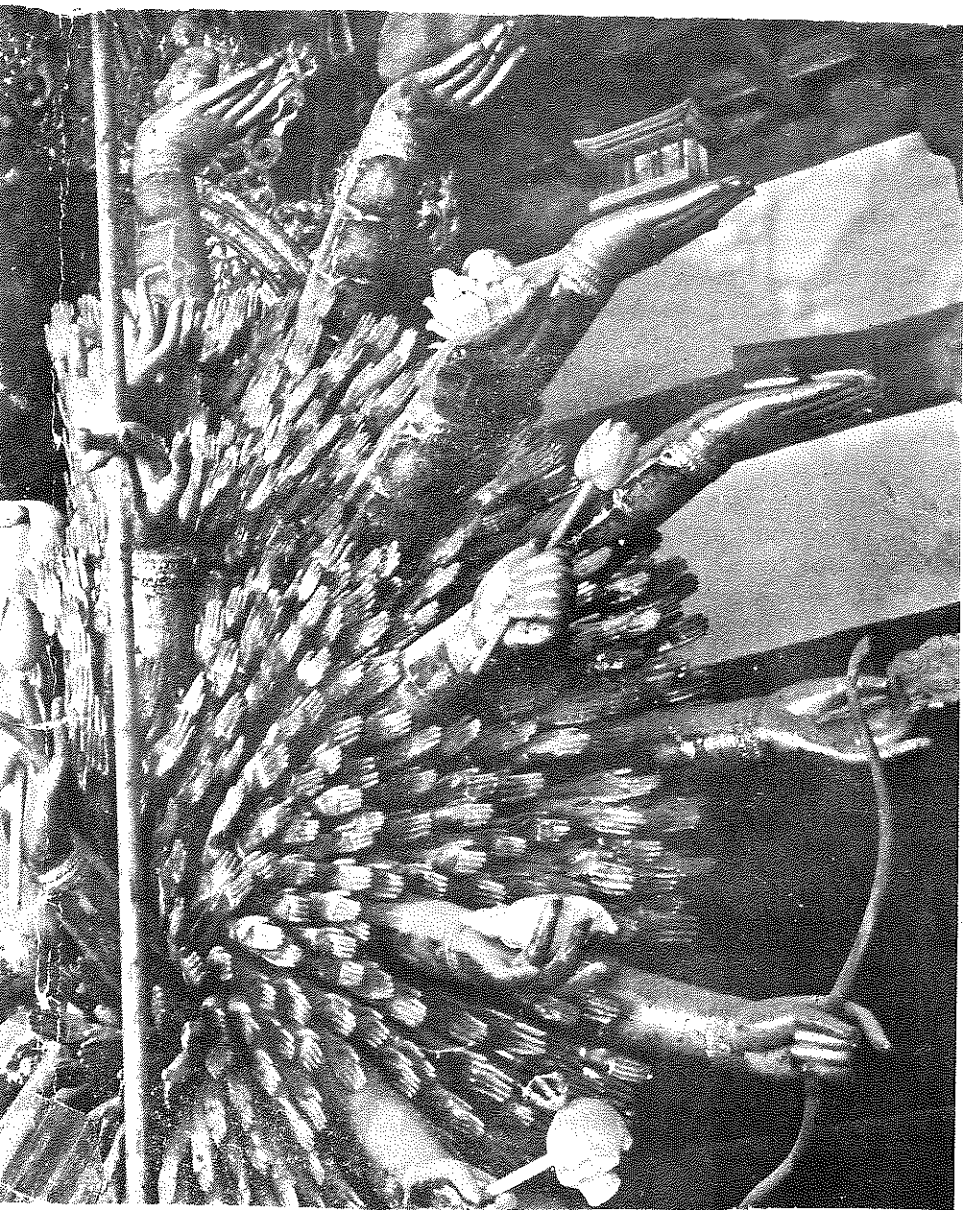


# ZEN NOTES



## TAKUAN'S *SENJU* (1000-ARMED) KANNON

Consider the Senju Kannon with its thousand arms (and eyes): If its mind became fixed on the one arm that holds the bow, the other 999 arms would be unable to function. It's precisely because its mind *doesn't* become fixed on any one point that all its arms are able to function freely. . . Let's suppose you're looking at a maple in autumn, covered with crimson leaves: If your mind becomes fixed on one particular leaf, you miss all the rest; but if your mind doesn't get fixed on any *one* leaf, you'll see all the thousands of leaves that cover the tree. So any person who has realized Mind is himself a Kannon with a 1000 arms and eyes! An ordinary, unenlightened person believes blindly that it's a marvel, having a 1000 arms and eyes in a single body; the skeptic refuses to accept it. But neither belief nor denial are the point. What's to be revered is the principle *behind* this. Buddhism expresses this principle through a particular image. One who takes the image literally is an unenlightened being; and one who denies it skeptically is worse still!

From the *Fudochi shinmyo roku* (Takuan Osho Zensho V:4-5) by Takuan Soho (1573-1645). Translated by Peter Haskell.

COVER PHOTO: JAPANESE 1000-arm Kannon  
from the Medieval Period

THE GREAT SIXTH PATRIARCH'S TEACHING  
Chapter IV, 8

*Virtuous friends, why do I lay down this mindlessness as the fundamental principle of my sect? Because you merely talk about the realization of your intrinsic nature by mouth, so that a deluded one entertains many fancies in all the circumstances that he encounters, and gives free rein to all the evil views in his mind. Thus, all the afflictions and intolerable imaginings spring from these evil views. There is not a single dharma that you can conceive in your original nature. If you conceive some thoughts (about your original nature), you will improperly speak about fortune and disaster, and this is what I call afflictions or imaginings. For this reason, I lay down this mindlessness as the fundamental principle of my sect.*

COMMENTARY

This part will cover almost all the structure of the Zen sect. It is a very important part, and the Sixth Patriarch explained it openly; he did not conceal anything. If you have the eye of Zen, this part will be very clear to you.

*Why do I lay down this mindlessness as the fundamental principle of my sect? Because you merely talk about the realization of your intrinsic nature by mouth? Not only you, but many Buddhists and many kinds of religious teachers are merely talking about God, Buddha, the infinite, the absolute, atman or oversoul, universal consciousness and what not! They give all those names to your intrinsic nature. But this you is not such a small you. The word "you" or "I" in Buddhism is just something to denote the subject. But when I say this I or you, this I or you covers the whole universe.*

"Before father and mother, what were you?" This you is not Mr. or Mrs. So-and-So. It is your original nature. When you realize this, you pervade the universe, and the whole world will come under your wings. God or Brahma is nothing but a

synonym of this you. But you are speaking about the realization of your intrinsic nature by mouth from morning to evening and you never know what you are speaking about.

If your teacher is this kind of person, his disciples are also. They are doing nothing but speaking names from their conceptions. It is as though you were in a drug store on a street corner, talking of the names of medicines and never taking a dose of them; or you are at a restaurant window, reading the menu--poor hungry people who have never tasted the food; you know the names but you never eat.

*So that a deluded one entertains many fancies in all circumstances that he encounters.* When I was young, I went to the ocean where there was a little island about like Staten Island in the far-away sea outside of Tokyo. A couple of American missionary women were living there--Christians--I forget their names. They were barely supporting themselves. In the morning they were fishing; in the evening they were teaching. These women would kneel down on the shore, clasp their hands, and with tears, offer prayers to God. The boys lined up to see them. These women must have been very lonesome, like exiles on a far-away island, never meeting anyone of their own kind. They were about thirty-five years old. No islander could understand their language, so they picked up some of our language from the fishermen and tried, with this, to teach the Gospel of Christ. They would kneel and pray--a miserable sight. Finally they sent two Japanese boys to America. I met them in Berkeley and we talked over the old days. They told me that they had been sent to study Christianity by the missionary women. I thought: "Well, some fruit was gathered on that lonesome island, nursed by the hearts of those two old maids." The two boys were educated and went back to Japan. They had become very eminent Christian teachers.

Zen students do not wipe tears from their eyes, or join hands, offering prayers to heaven. I do not blame anyone for doing this, but such people have a crude conception of religion. This picturesque old-style religion was the result of

sentimentalism. But one who has a cool brain cannot accept that type of religion. Of course, there are many such types of Oriental religion. But I am sure that the Sixth Patriarch, for one, would not in any circumstances have cried aloud the name of God or of Buddha. He thought that all such petition and tears was just mind stuff--not the true essential nature of the human soul.

*And gives free rein to all the evil views in his mind.* They do not penetrate to their own view of religion, so they cling to different names and even kill each other over these names. So there is religious persecution in even what we call the flower of civilization. One sect drives the other from its sect because they don't know their own sect and cannot grasp the other. The people of different religions won't intermarry. Though their hearts love one another, the difference in their religions prevents them from marriage.

*Thus all the afflictions and intolerable imaginings spring from these evil views.* My God is omnipresent. Your God is personified.

*There is not a single dharma that you can conceive in your original nature.* Because conceptions are nothing but conceptions; they never bring you to the gate of true religion. When you enter that gate, you cannot think of spirit nor can you think of the physical body. You cannot speak of good and bad, present or future, time or space. There is neither past, present or future; neither spiritual nor physical. It exists from the beginningless beginning to the endless end.

Here Hui-neng intimately states the aspect of your original nature. Under this word, your mind attains enlightenment. As the Buddha said, when he had attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree: "When one Buddha attains enlightenment, the whole world, the great earth and trees and weeds--all attain Buddhahood." Why trees and weeds? That was an aspect of his attainment. After six years of meditation from early morning to evening, he found the truth--"Ah!" In that great tranquillity, there was not a trace of human thought. His soul melted into the soul of the universe. Through the night, he remained in this tranquillity, and in the early

morning he saw one star twinkle in the eastern sky; he then became aware of his boundless existence. He was tree and weed, heaven and earth--he was everything. It was then that he said: "When a Buddha attains enlightenment, the whole world, the great earth and trees and weeds attain Buddhahood!" This is described in a Sutra that was translated into Chinese. When you read the Agama Sutras, you will come upon these lines about the enlightenment of the Buddha.

Upon this, the Buddha founded his religion. If you cannot understand this, you don't understand religion. If you do not go through this gate, you cannot enter Buddhism. It is the one and only gate. There is no other way to enter.

Today, thousands of teachers speak about Buddhism, but none of them truly knows it.

*If you conceive some thoughts about your original nature, you will improperly speak about fortune or disaster.* Perhaps you have the idea that alaya consciousness holds the seeds, that the seeds carry karma and receive reward and punishment. Conceptions such as this about karma are from the human standpoint. But when you really grasp the Dharmakaya--who carries the seed of the universe? I carry, you carry, but who receives the karma? Whose karma did I receive and carry now? You come to the gate and your ego will be destroyed. You will realize that there is no single individual soul existing in the universe, bearing a separate karma; all souls are interrelated. So in the conclusion, we must have compassion for others because we do not know whose karma we are bearing --whose karma we are paying off.

In the Orient, at evening time, some fire moth will come and hover in the circle of the flame. The children will try to kill it, but the grandfather will stop them, saying: "Perhaps it is the spirit of your grandmother who comes to see you." A foolish idea, but it catches the child's fancy. Or a spider will come and it will be said that it may be the spirit of your cousin.

You can eat meat, but you cannot help feeling compassion when you are consuming the flesh of animals. Japanese children wail after the pig when

it is taken away; they will run half a mile, calling the name of the pig. It is hard on the Japanese father to become a pig-man.

Evil and suffering arise from conceptions; from these conceptions, people speak about fortune and disaster. They are always in fear, suffering physically and mentally.

*And this is what I call afflictions or imaginings. For this reason I lay down this mindlessness as the fundamental principle of my sect. Mindlessness! Mindlessness! It is not human mind, you know. The mind of mindlessness is not human. Wonderful mind!*

An old story of Japan talks about this mindlessness very marvellously. An old man goes to a bamboo wood and finds a little daughter. Every day this little one grows, and in four years, she became a daughter of twenty. She was so beautiful that all the people in the city honored her. Finally the Emperor and all his court heard of her. Some months later, in May, she became melancholy, and the old couple asked her: "What happened?" She answered: "Oh, I felt something that I could not understand." In June, she kept herself in one room, having the fear of going elsewhere. In July she started weeping: "I have to go back to my home and I cannot tell you why." The old couple couldn't understand. August came, and she went outside, looked at the moon and cried. In September, she said: "My home is the moon and I must go back there on the fifteenth."

The Emperor, who loved her, heard this, and he sent soldiers who put her into a cupboard, shut the door and stood watch. The soldiers stood with arrows watching the moon, and a white cloud came down from the moon, full of queer figures. The soldiers fell down on their faces. The cabinet opened and the girl came out, saying: "Before I put on the winged robe, which is mindlessness, I realize that I love you, O Emperor." Then she put on the robe and rose up to the sky.

But we, from universal mindlessness, will enter into the human heart, human suffering and human compassion.

*Zen notes*

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113 East 30 Street, New York, NY 10016

Vol. XXXI, No. 4,  
Apr., 1984

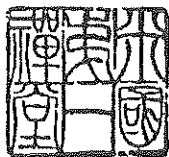
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First Zen Institute of America  
113 E30 Street  
New York, New York 10016  
(212-686-2520)

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