

ZEN NOTES



A ZEN NOTE

The veteran director was watching the younger actor trying out for the greatest role available on the world stage one day in 1980. Running through the prepared script, some bogs and drags appeared. Discussion, more discussion.

The old director interjected a possible solution. With relief the actor was able to proceed to a take. Satisfaction was expressed and the two men shook hands. The crew's photographer snapped a quick shot of their mutual appreciation. A print of this was later dispatched to the studio where it hangs today as a memento. The words the director used when the handshake took place were recorded: "Next time I shake hands with you it will be with the President of the United States."

There's only a little more needed to explain this shot by an unknown photographer. The older man had a good eye for a face. What he saw moved him to his prediction. The actor's youthful ardor and straightforward outgoing human-heartedness created confidence he could get the job and perform the role he was seeking. He evoked the part of an American, not a product of Madison Avenue grooming, but of an active participation in a full life. When you pick a man for a part like that, there's an investment of something like faith involved. The handshake or embrace is a demonstration of that total giving of self pulse by pulse which is a Zen note.

The print isn't too good, but it's the only record that exists of this event. To me, the hope and joy of these two old boys are like spring blossoms on an old tree. For the ninety-year old man, it was the last spring, for the sixty-nine year old younger one, it was the prelude to the first term of his greatest venture. I think it is appropriate to share this with you now. Since the recent political contest is over, it must be clear there is nothing political in this message. Happy New Year. Love,

MF

GENUINE AND FALSE CH'AN MASTERS

Lecture given by Master Sheng-Yen, December 2, 1981.
Ch'an Center, 90-31 Corona Ave., Elmhurst, NY 11373

There are two types of people who teach others how to practice Ch'an. The first are those who have reached a very deep level of practice and who continue to practice very diligently. These may be considered "genuine" masters. The other type includes those whose practice was not sufficiently deep. Although these people may have attained certain experiences, their experiences cannot always be maintained, nor do they continuously practice hard. At the time when they were practicing, during their experience, they could be considered "genuine." But afterwards, they can only be considered "false."

Among the false Ch'an masters, there is a group who make even worse teachers than the rest of them. These people have studied under genuine Ch'an masters who have had deep experience. But in spite of the fact that these masters are genuine, they have not obtained total liberation yet and are still attached to fame and following. For this reason, they are more inclined to give hasty recognition to their students, to certify that they have had an enlightenment experience, in the hopes of gaining more disciples. If they did not recognize them so easily, very likely many would leave them and go to other masters. So out of their desire to be more famous and have disciples teaching all over the country it is quite possible they may give recognition to disciples who have not had sufficient genuine experience. Some years later, the master might tell this disciple that he is ready to go out and teach others. This will do a lot of harm because the student believes his master's words, thinking he has had a genuine enlightenment and is ready to teach; he would thus never consider the necessity of seeking deeper experience or learning from other masters. Hence it is not necessarily the case that famous Ch'an masters are outstanding Ch'an masters. Nor is it always true that the disciples of outstanding masters will be genuine masters themselves.

But how is it that these masters who are not genuine can still attract a large following of be-

lievers? This is because the attitude and graceful manner they exhibit seems to be fitting that of genuine masters. Therefore it is difficult for an ordinary person to tell the difference between a false and genuine master. Only those people who have reached a very high level in their Ch'an practice, who are outstanding themselves, can know that a master is false just by exchanging a few words with them. In the kung-ans, or records of the sayings and actions of masters in the Ch'an sect, we can see that there is a definite formula, or pattern of words and behavior, that characterizes an enlightened Ch'an master. If you have read these books widely, you may adopt the same exact style of behavior and speech as the masters in these records, and people will take you to be genuine masters. There are many people teaching Ch'an who look very unattached, very graceful, as if they are liberated. But many of them have great problems, because these people are simply acting out a role in a script. Although externally their manner is identical to genuine masters, what is going on in their minds is a different thing. And the longer they play this role, the more skilled they become at acting. When they find success using one method, they keep using it consistently, causing people to have a lot of faith in them. They seem to have great determination, confidence, spontaneity. But their minds are the same as ordinary people. So false Ch'an masters are actually just good actors. In the case of the best actors, their acting may be so touching, that it is difficult for the audience to feel that they are just acting.

In "Faith In Mind" there are two lines which say that when a person has reached ultimate enlightenment, his behavior does not follow any definite pattern. He does not have to rely on any precepts or rules. Taking this wrongly may lead to a very serious problem. According to this, if a Ch'an master thinks he is deeply enlightened, and others also believe that he is an enlightened master, he need not follow any precepts. He can kill, he can steal, he can commit adultery, he can tell lies. He can do anything for the ostensible purpose of delivering sentient beings. Since whatever method he employs is "right,"

he himself will not accumulate any bad karma as a result. This terrible misconception is not uncommon in China, Japan, and now in America.

Most of these people have either never practiced, or their practice was not deep enough. Possibly they have had an experience of enlightenment in the past, but at least they are not presently in such a state. However, since these people seek the respect and admiration of their followers, they give an air, or project an image, that they are constantly in a state of enlightenment. And since most people like to think that their master is a very extraordinary individual who is always dwelling in a state of enlightenment, this also encourages these masters to put on a false air. These people are no longer Ch'an masters, but rather kings of demons. There is a saying that Ch'an practitioners can very easily fall into demonic states, and this is one instance.

But, in fact, it is very rare to find people who are always in a state of enlightenment. Many of the kung-ans, or records of the Ch'an sect, talk about the state of enlightenment. But there is little mention in the literature of the fact that, after an enlightenment experience, the state will disappear. It may be possible to maintain the experience for a few hours, days, or even months, especially if you keep up a diligent practice. However, to maintain it longer than that is very rare. For most people, the experience will simply fade, and then disappear, due to the fact that they must return to the distractions of daily life. But even if they don't return to daily life, their state of practice may follow a wave pattern, fluctuating up and down. It is most difficult for a person to maintain a thorough state of enlightenment and never regress to the end of their life.

There are three kinds of precepts for Ch'an practitioners. The first kind is called "individual liberation precepts." That is, if you hold one precept, then at least on that particular precept, you are proceeding towards liberation. For example, if you hold the precept not to kill, then at least you will stay away from the bad karma of killing; and on that one point you are moving towards liberation.

The second kind of precept is called "samadhi precepts." The body and mind of someone who is in deep samadhi does not move. His mind is just fixed on one thought. Thus there is no way that he can break any precept. The third kind of precept is called "Path precepts." It refers to those practitioners who have reached the saintly level. At this level, their minds will be in accord with the right Path at every moment. It is not possible for their thoughts to stray from the Path, that is, to break any precepts. So they do not need to rely on any code of behavior, or formal precepts, because whatever they do will naturally fall within the scope of the precepts. This is similar to what Confucius once said: By the time I was seventy, I could do whatever my heart desires and yet stay within the realm of propriety.

This concept of "Path precepts" is very different from the misconception that Ch'an masters can do anything they want, and break all the precepts. In China those so-called Ch'an masters whose practice is not sufficiently deep and whose lifestyles are very unruly and unrestrained, are called "wild fox Ch'an," or "false Ch'an." All genuine Ch'an masters will stay within the precepts. And, especially if they are monks, they definitely must adhere to the monastic precepts. A Ch'an master must be equipped with wisdom, and it is impossible for someone with wisdom not to abide by the precepts.

Question: Then how is it that some people may not have any wisdom and yet they behave in such a manner that it appears that their behavior is so clean and pure, as if they did not have any attachments, as if they are completely liberated? It seems that they must have some wisdom.

Yes, they also have some wisdom. But there are two types of wisdom: one is without outflows (called "prajna" in Sanskrit) and the other is with outflows, not the highest, or transcendent, samadhi, but rather, a "worldly" samadhi. This kind of wisdom is still mixed with attachment, vexations, and the three poisons (greed, hatred, and delusion). These people are able to maintain a brighter mind, they seem to be more intelligent and clear than the average person, but they have vexation and attachment.

We must understand that any religion should have certain practical rules of behavior that fit with human society. For a religious faith to be passed down for thousands of years, it must harmonize and protect the human standard of moral living. The founder must be a person with very high standards of behavior and those who transmit the tradition generation after generation must be able to grasp this principle. Buddhism is such an example. Catholicism is also such an example. Up to now they have had a firm grasp of the proper relationship among people. However, in this country in the present day, because society is not very stable, there is no fixed pattern of proper social behavior. So out of curiosity people may follow certain masters who do not seem to have any moral standards or keep any precepts. These masters can at most create a minor boom or temporary following. There is no way that they can last for long periods of time. The only ones that will eventually last are those who abide by very pure rules of behavior, like those prescribed by Sakyamuni Buddha.

This is contrary to those arrogant Ch'an practitioners who think that a liberated Ch'an master can do anything they like. Even if they do supposedly very evil things, they would not have to pay the consequences, because it is all for the purpose of helping sentient beings, which is practicing the bodhisattva path. This idea that doing evil things will produce good consequences seems contrary to our normal concept of good and evil. But those people would say that Ch'an is just like this. Good is just evil, and evil is no different from good. This is garbage. Let me ask you a question: Do you think that if great liberated bodhisattvas commit evil karmic acts they will have to take the consequences? When these bodhisattvas do these things, they do not have the idea of whether their act is good or evil. But it is a fact that they have done certain evil things. And they have done these things to help sentient beings. Do they receive karmic retribution?

Question: To my point of view, evil is just a combination of greed, hatred and delusion. So I don't understand how a bodhisattva could do evil

things.

For example, a bodhisattva may lock someone up or even kill him for the sake of helping many people. If this dangerous person is not stopped, he may kill many more people. So in saving many people, the bodhisattva is doing a good act, but in killing the one person, he is committing an evil act. In principle, if a liberated bodhisattva chooses to come and go in the cycle of samsara, he must still pay the consequences of his acts.

So even genuine, enlightened masters have to be responsible for their actions, not to mention the false masters. No doubt they have to take the consequences for immoral action. There is no such thing as the idea that Ch'an masters can do anything they desire.

VERY LATE RAT NEWS

Issue #2 of the Journal of The Zen Studies Society came in time to include our goodbye to the Rat year.

Gempo Roshi, who first arrived at Ryutaku-ji in the early part of this century during a particularly impoverished period in that temple's history, many years later recalled those early days:

"When I first got here I told the mice, 'You have been here generation after gen-

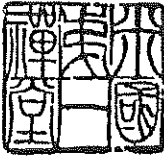
eration. I have just arrived. You are senior, I am junior. Please take care of me.' And I bowed to the mice. Nowadays I give a small amount of rice to them every night, and we have a wonderful relationship. Therefore, they don't bite the furniture and dig holes in the wall. They are protecting Dharma deities. Mouse, cat, dog, monkey, sparrow, crow--they all save us. It is all up to our mind, our attitude."

Gempō Roshi

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