


# ZEN NOTES

二六九月三日  
九子舟の五  
喜力山(神田)の山



BOOK NOTED by John Storm

Yamaoka Tesshu was a man of many accomplishments. He was an adviser and bodyguard to the Emperor during the tumultuous early years of the Meiji era, when Japan opened itself to the modern world after centuries of isolation. He was a brilliant practitioner and teacher of kendo, the Japanese art of swordsmanship, with a wide circle of disciples. And he was a master calligrapher, whose much-sought-after work helped raise funds for such worthwhile causes as disaster relief and the restoration of temples. Tesshu sounds like a Type A over-achiever, if there ever was one, and yet amid all of his furious activity he must have been relatively unruffled. For above everything else, he was a man of Zen, a realized man, clearly, who radiated boundless confidence and energy.

It's high time someone gave us more than brief Tesshu references, and John Stevens, a Buddhist priest and aikido instructor living in Japan, has come through with an excellent book:

*The Sword of No-Sword*, Shambhala, 1984. For any one skeptical (or squeamish) about the Zen of a professional swordsman, it should be noted that a 19th century kendo expert had much more in common with a contemporary fencing teacher than with their lethal predecessors. Nor should it be forgotten that even when swords were meant for killing, some of the strongest Zen statements ever were made either by or for swordsmen. The great Takuan's letter to Yagyū Tajima no Kami, a 17th century kendo master, is probably the best example.

Here are some samples of Tesshu's Zen.

Explaining his "no-sword school," he wrote: "'No-sword means 'no-mind;' 'no-mind' means a mind that abides nowhere.' If the mind stops, the opponent appears; if the mind remains fluid, no enemy exists." Elsewhere, advocating this "no-enemy" state of mind, he made the same point more compactly: "If there is self, there is an enemy; if there is no self, there is no enemy."

On gaining an insight into a remark by his Zen teacher, Tesshu submitted this verse: "Perfect when

clear/perfect when cloudy/  
Mount Fuji's Original  
Form/never changes."

As he was approaching death, suffering without complaint or drug what must have been unrelieved agony from a stomach cancer, Tesshu received a request from his disciples for a traditional Zen death verse. Without hesitation, he chanted: "Tightening my abdomen/against the pain--/the caw of a morning crow." The disciples were scandalized, at first, that a Zen master should admit to any pain on his death bed, but later came to understand that they had nothing to be embarrassed about, that indeed the verse was a great one.

Finally, there is Tesshu's definition of "wu-wei" or "non-action," one of the central concepts of Zen: "What is 'non-action?' Fighting furiously in the midst of a raging battle without a hair out of place."

#### Editor's Note

The self-portrait of Tesshu on the cover which we cut out from his 1886 painting of the three patriarchs of his sword school carries the inscription: *Standing in*

*the dojo of suigetsu/  
Slashing at the flowers  
of emptiness.*

This is Tesshu's version of the Zen saying (Stevens explains in his *The Sword of No-Sword*):

"Sitting on the dojo of suigetsu, practicing myriad forms of empty flowers.' Both Buddhas and worldlings see flowers of emptiness, but those who are enlightened know that they are false while those who are deluded think that they are real.

"Tesshu's school... placed little emphasis on complicated explanations or rational analysis of technique. He rarely corrected his trainees' hand or footwork...new...swordsmen were instructed to devote themselves to... 'attack training' for at least three years...repeated straight blows to the opponent's...top of the head...The important element was never to retreat or hesitate; swordsmen must keep up the attack until they drop... When students complained of a lack of progress after a year's training, Tesshu thundered, 'You've just begun!' Pointing to his abdomen, he continued, 'You must experience swordsmanship here!'"

THE GREAT SIXTH PATRIARCH'S TEACHING, Chapter VI, 4

*Virtuous scholars, that which I have just mentioned I call confession ("zan-ke"--a two-character expression) according to the form of non-existence.*

*What is that which is called "zan" and what is that which is called "ke"? "Zan" is that you confess your previous errors. You confess from the bottom of your mind all the previous evil karmas that you have created and the sins that you have committed as the result of your delusion, arrogance, jealousy and the like. This is called "zan". "Ke" is that you give up any present faults. You have realized the evil karmas that you have created and the sins that you have committed as the result of your delusion, arrogance, jealousy and the like. From now on you will abjure them all forever and will repeat them no more. This is called "ke". Therefore, this expression "zan-ke" means confession.*

*The common-minded man knows only how to confess his previous errors but does not know how to give up present faults. If he does not give up his present faults, his previous errors do not cease. While he is committing a present error, how can he wipe out previous fault? When errors continue to be committed, how can you call it confession?*

SOKEI-AN SAYS

This is a sermon preached by the Sixth Patriarch in Southern China in the T'ang dynasty, about the eighth century A.D.

Philosophy is not the only element of religion; the intrinsic measure of religion as morality, which is called "conscience," is also an important element of religion. In Sanskrit, conscience is called "shila," the innate measure of our morality. Vinaya is the law that regulates our daily life. So shila is intrinsic in all sentient beings, and vinaya is made by man. This shila is not only existing in man, but in all sentient beings; in accordance with their typical life it is manifested according to circumstances in various ways.

The commandments of Buddhism are based upon this shila. In the Western theory of morality, it is said that fear is the origin of morality; that morality is derived from fear, the first knowledge of human beings and the cause of all their agonies. Man found

this first knowledge when Adam accepted the apple from Eve. Until that time, man lived in the wisdom of God, but from the moment that man discovered his own knowledge, he must support himself by his own toil. Therefore, God drove him out of the Garden of Eden. This was taught us at school by a teacher of Western philosophy. It was quite interesting.

From the Buddhist viewpoint, fear is not the cause of morality; fear is the result of human life, and morality is also. From head to tail, all morality is the result of human existence. It is common to all who are living in a social order.

The origin of morality is very easily explained, but man's mind must have something by which to measure innately, corresponding to the result of human life. This is conscience. Conscience is like a mirror or scale; it is like a compass that always points to the north pole. This conscience is not only in the human being; it is in everything. It is like the law of magnetics. Upon this base, the Buddhist commandments are established. The Sixth Patriarch does not speak very carefully about this, but it seems to me that the audience gathered there about the earthen platform was not very enlightened so this lecture is not very deep. When you come to study this conscience, you will hear some very surprising stories.

Confession is based upon non-existence, not objective existence. Law, for instance, is objective existence: If you do such-and-such, you will go to jail. But the intrinsic law is not written anywhere and it is not objective. This law is like writing on a clean slate without any notes; it is like a white sheet of paper on which no particular law is written. Human conscience is like that clean, clean slate, so it is called the form of non-existence. If anything happens outside of this, it makes an immediate reaction. From that clean slate we make confession, not from any ulterior motives, but from the bottom of our mind.

Confession might be from your erroneous reasoning --what you have picked up from the past, from personal experience--that is not quite adapted to the present. But when you make a real confession, you will find the base of human knowledge that is common to all, and you will find that it is a clean

sheet of white paper. Take the sheet of paper away and, in Buddhist terms, it is empty.

No particular explanation is necessary on the lines of the text, but I'll say a few words on karma. The Buddhist believes that the karma of previous existence is this life. Evil karma you must repay with your own agony. For instance, an Oriental religious teacher comes to a place like New York and tries to get pupils. The people from China or Japan who know him whisper, whisper! From the Buddhist attitude, he must accept this in silence. He must not object. He can say, "I am glad you have given me an opportunity to pay back my old karma." Later, when he has paid all his debts, he can create something he wishes to do. If people talk about him, it is no use for him to become excited. If he was not a pure man in the past, then when he puts on his pure robe and all stand up and make a fuss over him, he becomes frightened and runs away to another town, and he will repeat the same experience again and again until he realizes it is all just human nature.

Today (1937) a queer cult is coming from Germany---this Freudianism, which is based on the deluded view. Man's mind always adheres to the deluded view and to his private desires.

I have not much time, so I cannot give an explanation in detail.

*The common-minded man knows only how to confess his previous errors but does not know how to give up present faults.* A husband may slap his wife's face in the evening. The next morning he apologizes but at noon he may take a drink, then slap her again in the evening. If you do not clean up your deluded view, you will always repeat your faults.

In the early times of human life, fathers married daughters and mothers married sons. The father would be jealous of the son and the mother would hide him; when the son was twenty-one, she sometimes led him to the place where the father was sleeping and bade him kill the father. Men also married their sisters. Such turmoil! Then the first commandment was written: "Fathers shall not marry daughters nor mothers marry sons."

I had some rats here and they had their babies. No rat knew which baby was her own, so all the moth-

ers came together and all the babies were adopted in common. But I realized that at first each wished to make her own nest and tried hard to sort out her own babies and take them to her nest. This is terribly confusing, isn't it?

Human beings, I am sure, experienced this a long time ago and slowly evolved the morality we have today. When you look back to the cave-man, you realize the value of today's morality.

A mysterious law is written in the human heart which it cannot explain. No man wishes to permit his wife to be taken by someone else; this is in the bottom of his heart. He will hear a whisper-- "No, love and sex are not the same thing!"

JOSHU SASAKI ROSHI SAYS

The purpose of Zen is to study ourselves. Everyone knows that we are never separated from ourselves. Whether you are talking or eating or driving your car or yawning, you know very well that you are the one who is doing this. The study of Zen is truly to learn about this same individual you.

There will be suffering if this individual you is always at the mercy of external influences. The true nature of your self is unaffected by outside influences. This self can be regarded as the same as God or Buddha or authority. So we can say further that God or Buddha or authority is always within us... Without mistake we can also say that we have

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this God or Buddha or authority. Since we are in possession of this great treasure, it is senseless to seek elsewhere. It is also useless to seek authority for any answers. Since we are in possession of God or Buddha, and we are with God or Buddha, we are therefore manifesting this same authority at all times. So the study of Zen leads us to the realization of our true nature which is also the authority of all things. Everyone is constantly realizing this authority, so there is constant knowledge within us. This authority is available to everyone without exception, and thus we encourage all to seek it. However, to seek this self outside in any symbol or external authority is quite a mistake and not at all the way of Zen.

THE FZI RATCATCHER'S REPORT

by Long Arm

*gan notes*

Articles about ratcatching in ZN have roused various passions in readers whose most common criticism has been the seeming lack of compassion for small-sized sentient beings. Humor over this topic is misunderstood. There is, however, a Yiddish expression about laughing through cold teeth.

As of early May, 41 mice have been trapped and some unknown number poisoned. But still they flit with the speed of gray ghosts along the baseboard of the kitchen, make sorties into the library and even into Mother Farkas' cupboard in the ground-floor office.

Why me? I grouse sometimes, mopping up dried patches of blood or sweeping turds out of the corners. Why don't any of my house mates take an interest in baiting traps or removing carcasses?

And it isn't even enough to write articles about the various dilemmas this work entails in the misguided hope that stating a dilemma solves it. My first reaction to a critical letter is to get a hot flush on my face. Why don't we have rules here handed down from Sokei-an's time, vinaya, that will get me off the hook?

NYC law demands a stringently clean kitchen and pure food. Mice demand their share. Buddhists tell me of ways to handle this in a more Buddhist fashion. Oh, it's tempting sometimes just to push it off, not go all the way through with it. Who would notice? But even if it gets boring chasing after this elusive and tormenting prey, it is, as MF rather gleefully notes, my particular fate. This is your opportunity, this is your test, she is saying. So whose law will solve the mouse problem?

And with what mind does one meet this? Because in that answer lies everything. The state of the refrigerator is the state of the universe. There is no hiding when your own leg is caught as securely as the pop-eyed little carcass whose own appetite lured it to extinction.

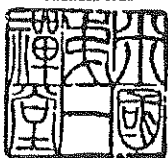
The rat chaser himself gets caught in a trap. The jaws of the trap are the jaws of the world.

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