

ZEN NOTES



BOOK NOTED by John Storm

In the old days, Zen people were constantly trekking across China, setting out on foot on multi-thousand-mile journeys as casually, by all accounts, as we might hop a red-eye flight for the coast. Today, this kind of pedestrian Zen is still being practiced, but the practitioners are somewhat faster-paced; they tend to run rather than walk.

Take James Shapiro, author of "Meditations From the Breakdown Lane: Running Across America," (Houghton Mifflin, 1982), who five years ago ran from California to New York--3,026 miles, to be exact--in 80 sometimes triumphant, sometimes tortured days. Readers of Zen Notes may think of him as the rat catcher, the fierce Fudo figure of the First Zen Institute who bashes rodents and then writes about it, unabashedly, in the Institute's publication. But much more important to him than ratting is running, his main interest for many years; and in "Meditations" he has given us a gripping account of a truly extraordinary

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CONVERSATION WITH FARKAS--Noted by JAMES SHAPIRO
GIVING AND RECEIVING

When meditation is going on, there appears to be some kind of output of energy that can be conveyed through space and received by other humans who are receptive to it. Separate streamings from each human blend together and resonate mutually. This activity, regarded another way, might be described as a body or field. In an individual, when such an energy or force rises and flows out in a forward direction or in all directions, it radiates. As humans are both receptors and projectors, they both give and receive.

What is radiating? When singers project their voices, that's one kind of radiating. That smell is conveyed through space in a substantial form is well known, though I do not understand the mechanics of it.

Humans have, or rather are receptors that identify and distinguish substances wafted to them. When Buddhists in their language speak of "opening an eye" it could be taken to mean that some receptor has "awakened" to an excitation not previously apparent. Why wasn't it working before? Various reasons may apply in particular cases. Immaturity of the receptor, blockage, insufficiency of the stimulus, inappropriateness of the substance to the receptor are possibilities. Potentially receptive sensors may be dormant until sensitized. Anyone who suffers from allergies and has an inquiring mind knows something about this.

There are people who can project the energy I am talking about in a selective as well as in a general way. The current can also be modulated--turned up or down. Not by "you" exactly. But it is not anyone else. Sokei-an spoke about the fish that has a lantern in its head. It uses it but does not know about it. There are also the fish that can give you an electric shock strong enough to kill you. Who turns them on?

When people are close to death, you can sometimes see how this works. "The light of the eye" in this case can be clearly seen turning up like a light operated by a dimmer until it comes to a certain degree and then contacts your wave-length. After a time it goes down, down, down and perhaps out altogether. This contacting energy I have experienced even in insects. The physical eye is its medium. But "you" is also involved. Buddhists ask themselves, "Who or what hears or sees? or "Who am I?" The theories handled by Zen can be understood from various angles.

The energy that operates is between two utensils, as Buddhists say. Each senses its operation separately, though they are part of one unity. At each point, the form of the energy may change, as might its target. Say the waves of the current are shown on a screen in front of you as in biofeedback. By seeing it as you are doing it, you can identify as well as alter its variations. In concentrating on your breathing, which is itself a force, the same holds true. The problem is to see this without altering it. Yogins seem to be able to do this sort of thing and experienced meditators also. It could be a lifelong study. But the substance of the current is, like electricity, unknown. By attaining real quietude, however, it is possible to "see" without paraphernalia what is happening. If you are alert to what is going on, you'd say, oh, that's it.

Meditating with others, breathing with them, is one way. If you are naturally open, you will not find it difficult to tune into their rhythm, and become one with them. Walking-chanting is particularly effective. After a few minutes, you will be deeply involved in harmony. If you are rigid, blocked or distorted in your receptivity or output, it won't work right away, but, with repeated practice, it will come. Chanting together fast is an easier practice, as it is very difficult to think of anything else at the same time, and is instantly apparent to all. To breathe together and to act together is a very intimate experience. To meditate together is, according to Miura Roshi, the most intimate activity.

I am trying to describe what I want to talk about in more than one way so as to get it across. "Scientists" have their way, religionists another. Intuitionists, like Sokei-an, combine art, the senses, action, thought and feeling, even what some people call poetry in their communication. Speaking of something in Buddhist terms may sound very different from the same thing described intellectually or psychologically. Each of these "ways" has its own jargon. Best is just to show it, if you can. Basic communication between sentient beings is not necessarily a matter of words, but words used clumsily may prove a serious obstacle.

Well, try it. When you're on, you're on. Keep trying it. Once in a while it will work. Repeat it enough times, you can get to do it. It's fun, too. Practicing laughing, even in a forced way, is one method. Getting a baby to laugh is even better.

THE GREAT SIXTH PATRIARCH'S TEACHING
Chapter VI,8

Virtuous scholars, we take refuge in the Buddha who is two-footed, who has renounced the world and who is the most honored among the pure. From today through the future, we call the Buddha our teacher and will make no vow to any heretical god! We shall ever testify to the truth or falsity of our enlightenment with the three treasures of our own nature.

Virtuous scholars, I urge you to take refuge in the three treasures of your own natures. These are: the Buddha of awakening, the Dharma of true law and the sangha of pure unity. When you take refuge in the awakening of your mind, your deluded thoughts will cease. You will be content with the provisions for your few needs and will abjure thirst and lust. Then you may call yourself "the Buddha who is two-footed."

SOKEI-AN SAYS

These are called the three commandments for you to be converted to the three treasures. In such a way, the Buddhists handed down from the Buddha's time the vow to enter the sangha of Buddhism. When you entered the sangha, you made this vow and were admitted.

When you have a true heart as a man or a woman, and once in your life have made a vow to do something, you cannot abandon it or violate it so easily, for religion is the foundation of your heart and soul. When you make the vow to your own treasures, you cannot throw it away as if it were an old slipper, for some trifling reason, for hatred, or for ego--"Well, I quit, let it go," and forget all about it. If you do, then I do not call it making a vow. If you really made a vow with all your heart and soul, you are not going to give up because there is someone you don't want to meet at the temple. When you really make a vow, it is your decision and you will uphold it all your life.

To be sure, it is very easy to make a vow for big things, as a soldier, for instance, makes a vow: "I vow to sacrifice myself for my country!"

But it is not so easy to keep a vow when it is a trifling thing such as: "I make a vow not to borrow from my friends!" and next morning you call up and say, "Will you lend me five dollars for a couple of days?" If you are going to give up a vow so easily, why do you make it at all? You did not make your decision to study Zen in a couple of days, yet you come for one or two years, then take the vow, then throw it away like an old slipper. If you make a vow, if you make a decision, you should uphold it all your life.

Virtuous scholars, we take refuge in the Buddha who is two-footed, who has renounced the world. Shakyamuni Buddha, Buddha in the shape of a man, and we worship his footprint. Because he found his Dharmakaya, he renounced the men of the world and the life in the world of these men.

When you find your Dharmakaya and really understand its meaning, you cannot help renouncing the life of the man of the world. If you keep your ego and desire to satisfy your ego's wishes, you are still living in your old physical body and not in Dharmakaya.

To live in Dharmakaya is the true meaning of taking refuge in Buddha.

There is just one substantial body in the world. With this substantial body, you can stop the sailing boat on the far away ocean. With that substantial body, the wooden man sings and the stone woman dances. That which you cannot do, you will ask someone else to do. Your body is in San Francisco, Japan, California, Chicago, New York--everywhere. I ask my Dharmakaya to carry my message to Japan and he will carry my letter to Japan. If you do not take this Dharmakaya attitude, what will you do? You will mail the letter yourself, not trusting anyone. It will take five cents and one month. If you do not see this, you are still in the old physical body; still eating your food for yourself and not for anyone else; you are saving your money for yourself, not for anyone else. Your physical body is very limited and your mind is narrow.

So, to take refuge in Buddha means to take refuge in Dharmakaya. At the end of the day, I close my eyes and peace comes because I know my Dharmakaya

is eternal.

Dharmakaya means something to the Buddhist. You realize this when you are taking sanzen, going through the keyhole, over the great water--all those transcendental old things. You must not pass a koan and then put it on the shelf. If you do not realize this, you are still in the same old physical body and you cannot realize the value of your Buddhism. Remaining in the old physical world, you will not become a Bodhisattva.

And who is the most honored among the pure. From today through the future we will call the Buddha our teacher and will make no vow to any heretical god. This is a very old teaching. When the Buddha was in India, there were many heretics who worshipped their own gods, so when they entered the sangha, they made this vow "through my life." If you say this and then throw it away in the garbage can, what kind of a vow is this?

We shall ever testify to the truth or falsity of our enlightenment with the three treasures of our own nature. In Buddhism, you do not listen to anyone's attainment; it is your own enlightenment that you are endeavoring to attain. You bear witness whether your enlightenment is true or false, standing before the Buddha of your own nature, before the Dharma of your own nature, and before the sangha of your own nature. In sanzen you testify as to the truth or falsity of your own enlightenment within the three treasures.

My mind and yours is the same mind; my dharma and that of Buddha is the same Dharma. When you come into the Zen room, you join your hands and bow down to your own and Buddha's enlightenment.

There was once a student here who said he couldn't bow to me (Sasaki). How foolish! He thought he was a demi-god. You do not bow to Sasaki; there is no Sasaki in the Zen room. You bow before the three treasures.

You bow before the three treasures, then you say: "Oh, Reverend gave me such a terrible koan I quit." There is no such terrible koan; it is your mind that is impure.

Virtuous scholars, I urge you to take refuge in the three treasures of your own nature. These are

the Buddha of awakening, the dharma of true law, and the sangha of pure unity. The answers that you attain through sanzen are the "true law," and the "sangha of pure unity" is composed of the three treasures.

When you take refuge in the awakening of your own mind, your deluded thoughts will cease. You will be content with the provisions of your few needs and will abjure thirst and lust. Then you may call yourself the Buddha who is two-footed. When you really understand the true meaning of the law of causation, you will accept the result of past karma and you will not complain. You will not swim against the stream.

A gentleman from Japan said to me: "Why don't you act forcefully? Why don't you advertise?"

I am Japanese and I came to this country where the diplomatic condition between the white man and the yellow man is not quite fifty-fifty. We are poor economically and the whole situation of the world will not permit a Japanese man to do something in the field of religion in America.

If you open your eyes to all the waves of the Dharmakaya, you will know that you are one of them; you will understand your position, wherever you are. Then you will abjure thirst and lust, which is the real source of your agony.

Then you will attain Buddhahood.

JOSHU SASAKI ROSHI SAYS--Noted by John Storm

IT'S ONLY NATURAL--The true teaching is not sentimentality or emotionalism. It is not like putting on an overcoat on a cold day; it is like taking off all your clothes, on a cold day. If it is cold, it is cold--we needn't try to console ourselves with a lot of wrappings. This continual effort to console one another for what is only natural is a cultural failure. That kind of Zen is called sitting-around-the-stove Zen. There are many records of people who have reached realization under the most difficult conditions, where there were no stoves, nor even any proper place to sit. But I must caution you that there are no records of anyone reaching realization while crouched around a stove. In the authentic practice of Zen, we must strip ourselves of everything, we must fall into everything--just as an infant falls onto its mother's bosom.

Book notes

BOOK NOTED (continued from first page)
accomplishment.

Indeed, the accomplishment is so extraordinary that for a time sheer amazement at its scope may cause one to overlook the felicity of the writing. Sunrises, sunsets, deserts, mountains, rivers, farms, cities, suburbs, all jog by--together with a cast of fellow travelers ranging from the solicitous to the murderous--in colorful, poetic prose. On the outside there is the ever-various American panorama; while on the inside, scarcely less varied, there is the Shapiro panorama of changing moods. And interwoven throughout there is the Zen of a student of Sasaki Roshi. As the book concludes: "The bear went over the mountain to see what he could see. And what did he learn? That everywhere there is sky, everywhere there is ground. At every moment, everywhere, we are home."

Photos of James Shapiro emerging from the landscape are by Joseph Greene

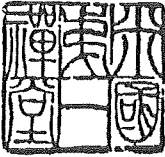


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