

ZEN NOTES



Sayonara Jim -- New York, March 1986

RUNNING ACROSS JAPAN by James Shapiro

After 53 days I reached the northernmost tip of Japan, a place called Cape Soya on the island of Hokkaido. Russia was a thin stripe on the horizon. The sea was gray, choppy, glistening in patches. I stood on a rock and then that was really it. 1900 miles across Japan. I felt tired enough to believe I had done it.

In the south banana trees and palm fronds. Wilder mountains than I could ever have imagined, steep and angular as dragon's teeth. Endless hills across Japan, blue hills, green hills, hills covered with fog and a coastal rain so fine you could never feel it. When you face mountains you express going up and when you put your back to a mountain you express going down. Rivers run down to the sea and a runner runs with them, winding through valley walls. Even at night lying thankfully under a warm quilt on the tatami mat I could still feel the rivers running. The world was not waiting. When it was time it would end and then it would be over for good.

Most people got gap-jawed when they saw a *gaijin* loping through but a smile or wave would shock them into a smile or wave of their own. Sound of small feet and when I turned to see, an embarrassed schoolgirl who had been tracking me, running in her own quiet way, ducked her head. People bowed, laughed, called out "*Gambatte kudasai!*", pulled their cars over to offer a soda or a good luck charm, small kids waving out the rear window, howling dogs on short tethers, even a companionable horse galloping alongside for half a mile.

At every point on a mountain where it felt special, undefined but potent, there would appear a roadside shrine to Jizo, protector of small children. Unknown citizens tied cloth bibs and cloaks round the Jizos to keep them warm, left oranges, candles and flowers. Shinto temples with the familiar dangling lightning bolts of paper. On the mountains, too, the Japanese go to worship in love hotels. And at the very end all the tumble of hills dwindles away into long earth, long sky and a bitter ocean wind.

If you would think of something bad, you might do something bad; if you would think of something good, you might do something good. Thus all the Dharma exists within your own nature.

As the sun and the moon are always bright when the sky is clear, but when the cloud covers the sky, the world becomes dark, and then a blast of wind sweeps away the cloud, disclosing all the phenomena in the sky and upon the earth, so is the mind of man like the clouds that flow in the sky.

Virtuous scholars, your intellect is like the sun and the moon. The intellect should be always bright, but when your mind cleaves to the outside and the cloud of delusion covers your original nature, the intellect cannot remain bright as it should be. But you hear the true Dharma when you meet an enlightened one. You will then abandon your delusion by your own exertion of mind. Thus your intellect will become as clear as crystal and all the Dharma will be revealed to you. The man who sees his own intrinsic nature will be like this. This is called your pure Dharmakaya Buddha.

SOKEI-AN SAYS

I am translating from the Record of a Zen master, called Hui-neng, who was living in the T'ang dynasty.

If you would think of something bad, you might do something bad; if you would think of something good, you might do something good. Thus all the Dharmakaya exists within your own nature. Dharma is a Sanskrit word of twenty-five different meanings but here it means those semi-phenomenal existences, the material of the mind, your own thoughts that come from the outside and stay in your mind as seeds of thoughts. You see everything outside through the conceptions of color, sound and so forth--but you do not truly see them; you cannot see their exact existences. When you think of something as good or bad, it is your own habit of thought.

It is written in an old sutra that there was a beautiful woman whose name was Epidatta. She realized that the phenomenal world is like a dream.

People's minds are influenced by topography. When you go to a climate such as India, your whole attitude will be changed. There, bamboo shoots grow in a day and perish in a day. In such a climate you realize that wealth, beauty, youth and so forth, will perish like mushrooms after rain. It is like a dream. Religions always take this topographical influence. In Tibet they take a hard practice of meditation because they must sit quietly all winter as there is no production. In that high climate and hard winter, there is not much food for winter, no wood for the fire, so they put on their blankets and eat very little--perhaps once in three days--and take this mode of life into their religion.

This beautiful woman, Epidatta, was slender as a bow. This is a metaphor for a beautiful woman, as the Japanese say of an old man, "Bent like a bow." She decided to become a nun, to shave her beautiful hair, take off her gorgeous garments, and she came to the garden of Jetavana where the Buddha was staying. She looked at herself in the pool and saw that she was beautiful, admiring her own beauty as did the Greek Narcissus. As she was admiring her reflection in the water, she saw the full moon reflecting back of her--but it was not the moon; it was a beautiful woman, more beautiful than herself. "Who are you?" she asked. "My young sister, I am strange to you, but I understand that you wish to become a nun. You are young and beautiful; why do you abandon life? Why not stay in the world and enjoy it?"

Epidatta suddenly awakened into her new aspect of life, embraced the older woman and wept; and as she wept, the older woman changed into the white moonlight.

This is not a true story, but 2,500 years ago in India it was quite a natural thing for a young woman to give up the worldly life and become a nun.

As the sun and the moon are always bright when the sky is clear, but when the cloud covers the sky the world becomes dark and then a blast of wind sweeps away the cloud, disclosing all the phenomena in the sky and upon the earth; so is the mind of man like the cloud which flows in the sky. We do not see such quick changes in the weather in this country,

but in Japan, at about sunset, the black clouds often cover your head; tornado-like winds suck the fish up from the water and throw them down elsewhere. As I was living on the top of a mountain, the thunder was at my feet; thunder, lightning and rain. Then in about ten minutes, the sky cleared and we could see the sun. Just so, the mind thinks of this and that--now it thinks of jewels, now of cigarettes; now it cries and then it laughs--endlessly thinking of something. But it never pays attention to "what is this that makes me think like clouds that flow in the sky?"

Virtuous scholars, your intellect is like the sun and the moon. The first training of the lay novice in Buddhism is to control the mind by looking into it. You must meditate, not thinking of conscious or subconscious, but just looking into your mind. The first training is not allowing yourself to be carried by these thoughts that flow in the brain.

You are reading a book and you suddenly think of a friend. You go to the telephone, "Hello, dear," and you put on your hat and go to meet your friend. You have been carried by your thoughts. This is the first point a beginner must practice in Buddhism; it is training to put a rope on one's thoughts, holding tight so that the thoughts do not disturb the mind, the real mind.

I think I must explain this "intellect." In Sanskrit, it is *vijnana*, translated as "wisdom." Wisdom and intellect are almost synonymous. Wisdom is the mental function that makes one aware. "Buddha" means awakened one, one who has awakened to the intellect within himself. The Buddha thought that the whole nature of the world is born from this intellect which is a universal force. You could say it is the cosmic dynamo of God. If I say "God," it sounds like religion; and if I say "cosmic dynamo," it means something scientific. I could also say, "over-soul" or "super-man" or "transcendentalism." Words always mislead. We say "Buddha," and you think of one who is always in meditation but it is really one who has awakened this intellect in himself.

The intellect should always be bright, but when your mind cleaves to the outside and the cloud of

delusion covers your original nature, the intellect cannot remain bright as it should be. When your mind cleaves to the outside, you think that red is the color of this wooden fish and that green or blue is the color of water; you think that water is cold and fire is hot; when you cut your hand with a knife, you think the pain belongs to the knife. All this is not a quality belonging to the outside but it is your sense perception.

People's view of the whole world is topsy-turvy, upside-down. Naturally they cannot observe anything exactly as it exists because this cloud of delusion covers their original nature.

But you hear the true Dharma when you meet an enlightened one. The Sixth Patriarch heard an old man who was reading a sutra on the street corner: "Depending upon nothing, realize your own mind." Upon hearing these words, the Sixth Patriarch was suddenly enlightened.

You never think your own thoughts. You depend on this religion or that ism. So you only think thoughts that have been thought by someone else. You must depend only on yourself, your own intrinsic nature.

The Sixth Patriarch asked the old man where he had found that sutra. "I got it from the temple of the Fifth Patriarch." Having said this, the old man disappeared in the air. This is just fanciful talk, to make a mysterious story.

You will abandon your delusion by your own exertion of mind. "By your own exertion of mind" is the true way to enlighten yourself. Just meditate and control your flowing mind. The mind is very difficult to control. When you are meditating--suddenly, "Oh, Mr. So-and-so owes me twenty-five dollars." Then you are back in meditation--and you think of a cigarette. You must become like a cat watching a mouse coming out of his hole. This is the beginning. Then you will finally go back to the soul of the universe and realize that you are a part of it. From that day, you will understand all religions, all teachings. There is only one way to get into enlightenment; do not look for it in books but only in your own nature.

Thus your intellect will become as clear as crystal and all the Dharma will be revealed to you. Dharma here means outside and inside--visible and invisible. *Kensho* is to see your own nature. Through the koan, "Before father and mother," you get into it. With that first koan, you come into the first gate of Buddhism.

BOOK NOTED by John Storm

Translations of Takuan's works have been slow in coming. The early Tokugawa master's succinct, pragmatic writings and his exemplary life story--in particular, the way he managed to keep his integrity intact amid a whirl of political complications--make such a splendid record, altogether, that you'd think the Takuan bookshelf would be crammed by now. One reason it's not may be the uneasiness that some members of the American Zen community seem to feel over his willingness to teach Zen to the sword-fighters of his day. For Takuan, in his famous written instructions to the swordsman Yagyu Munenori, helped cement the bond between swordsmanship and Zen, what the Japanese call *kenzen itchi*, or, as the phrase is rendered in "The Sword and the Mind," "the state where the mastery of the mind achieved through swordsmanship is equal to that achieved in Zen training."

The centerpiece of "The Sword and the Mind," by Hiroaki Sato (Overlook Press, 1986, \$16.95), is Munenori's "Family Transmitted Book on Swordsmanship." Munenori, the son of an accomplished swordsman, distinguished himself during the battle of Sekigahara and became the second Tokugawa shogun's personal instructor in swordsmanship. From that platform, his Zen-based ideas--posturelessness, no-winning, no-losing, acting only in response to an opponent's moves--developed widespread influence. Sato, translator of several collections of Japanese poetry, presents all this with understanding and careful attention to detail. And yet, as Munenori's technical secrets unfold, it becomes obvious that they can be of little use without the accompanying guidance that he and his disciples must have given their students. "When the opponent cuts at you with a downswing," Munenori says, "block his sword with

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yours, bring your right foot forward, and cut at him. As he steps forward to strike, dodge to the left, bring your right foot forward, and strike his fists." There is an opaqueness here that appears to be unavoidable; certainly, similar formulations in Musashi's "Book of Five Rings," Trevor Leggett's "Zen and the Ways" and John Stevens' "Sword of No-Sword" slide into the same impenetrability. But there is more to "The Sword and the Mind" than descriptions of swordfighting technique; later sections dealing with Zen and the mind are clear and to the point, moved by a practical spirit straight out of Takuan. In fact, the real hero of the book is Takuan.

The teaching Takuan gave Munenori is almost universally recognized as a classic statement of what Zen is all about. It has become a bible of the martial arts, and even in the bits and pieces available so far in English (in a section of "The Buddhist Tradition" translated by Yoshito Hakeda, and in D.T. Suzuki's "Zen and Japanese Culture"), it will assuredly clear up many questions about the meaning of "original mind," "no-mind" and the like--intellectually, at least. As an example, Takuan says: "If you put an empty gourd on the water and touch it, it will slip to one side. No matter how you try, it won't stay in one spot. The mind of someone who has reached the ultimate state does not stay with anything, even for a second. It is like an empty gourd on the water that is pushed around."

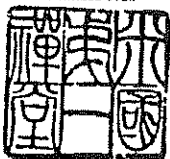
Elsewhere, he says: "Buddhism abhors the mind that stops and stays with something...what is prized is the mind that flows torrentially and never stops, like a ball riding a swift current." And in the kind of passage that causes some to shudder, Takuan says: "The accomplished man does not kill people by using his sword; he lets them live by using his sword. When he wants to kill them, he does so instantaneously; when he wants to let them live, he does so instantaneously. He can kill or give life at will."

Sato provides a translation of "Divine Record of Immovable Mind" and "On the T'ai-a," a reference to a mythical sword of ancient China. This amounts to more bits and pieces, of course, but until a full edition of Takuan comes along, we ought to welcome every bit we can get.

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

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Meditation and tea: 8-9:30 PM

會協禪一第國美