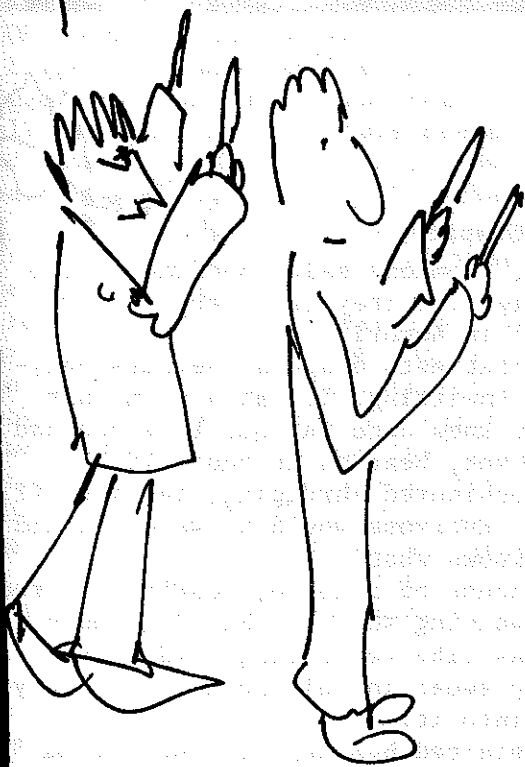


# ZEN NOTES



A LESSON IN DRUMMING



4 May 1986 by Jim Shapiro

"You are to play," someone said, nodding in the direction of the big drum they use every year in the *nebuta* festival in Aomori.

This was a drum that eats dragons, devours children, captures the unwitting. It was a drum that just looking at you knew once in your life you had to hear it, or better yet, beat on it yourself. Now was my chance. I considered shrugging, begging off, acting indifferent. Everyone would be watching and I might . . . who knows what?

The little powerhouse of a guide, wearing his red *happi* jacket, was waiting so I clambered up onto the platform. It was like performing bows in the *zendo*--you can drip sweat in self-conscious misery or you can vanish into it.

No preamble. He started beating out the rhythm with his drumsticks. I was back at the elbow of the French chef at the Ambassador Grill who taught me how to make two omelets at once and then walked away. One chance.

The deep sound spilled out into the afternoon, rousing sleepers out of medieval alleys, calling woodcutters down from the mountains, riveting curious Japanese families who stood watching as the novice watched his master.

When there was an opening in the thunder I jumped in. I'm not musical, it was no deep and flawless copy, but it was something. We went on until it was time to stop. I felt a pang, wanting to try again but the moment was over. Had to go on. He had to leave and I had to finish running across Japan. Later, he beeped passing me on the road out, his motor scooter spitting blue exhaust. I waved and watched steadily as his figure dwindled in size and then was lost in the afternoon traffic.

#### BOOK NOTED by John Storm

Eight years ago, in "Zen and The Ways," Trevor Leggett provided the first really comprehensive collection of Zen materials drawn from martial arts and samurai training sources. Now, in "The Warrior Koans: Early Zen in Japan" (Arkana, 1985, \$8.95), he offers a complete selection of the 100-odd Kama-kura koans, some two dozen of which had appeared in the earlier book.

For the most part, these koans were improvised by early Chinese teachers who spoke no Japanese for use by Japanese lay students--often warriors--who spoke no Chinese. Forceful, earthy, sometimes even bawdy (as in the dialogue that hinges on the literal-minded warriors' misunderstanding of "that thing below the navel," the colloquial Chinese phrase for the energy center in the lower abdomen), they can be appreciated as much for the historical flavor they convey as for their simple, powerful Zen.

SESSHIN IN PRINCETON with Joshu Sasaki Roshi is scheduled for Nov. 13-19, 1986. For details, write or phone Princeton Zen Society, 317 Mount Lucas Road, Princeton, NJ 08540, (609) 924-0782, Les Fehmi or Pete Shaw.

*Do not think of what is past or in the future. You will never grasp anything by thinking of it after it has happened. If your mind is clear, you will see your original nature at this moment.*

*Evil and virtue are unlike in nature, but they are alike in their original aspect. The nature of this oneness is Reality. That which is not stained by evil and virtue in your original nature is the Buddha of the perfect sambhogakaya. If you harbor an evil thought in your original nature, you will destroy the cause of a million years' virtue, but if you hold a good thought in your original nature, all the evil thoughts, countless in number as the grains of sand of the sea, will cease and you will directly attain the highest Bodhi.*

*When you see the original nature of your mind with your own mind, this will never be forgotten, and you will realize that which is called sambhogakaya.*

#### SOKEI-AN SAYS

The Sixth Patriarch is speaking about the triune body, the trikaya of the Buddha. Taking refuge in the three treasures, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha--Buddha as dharmakaya, Dharma as sambhogakaya, and Sangha as nirmanakaya--these three become the foundation of the Buddhist "commandments."

(In Chapter VI, 12, the Sixth Patriarch spoke about the dharmakaya, the base of Buddha consciousness. Here he is speaking about sambhogakaya, the conscious mind of Buddha. Next, he will speak about nirmanakaya.)

Jnana (pronounced *ngyana*, *hsin* in Chinese, *shin* in Japanese) we translate "consciousness," though this is not exact. Jnana comprises three elements: 1) To perceive. It is like a mirror. 2) To possess. It is like a storehouse. 3) To react. As an arrow to a bow, or to any living soul.

Jnana means "living soul," so to translate it as "consciousness" or even "soul" or "mind" does not quite hit the mark. Dr. Suzuki, I believe, always uses "mind." Some scholars use "soul," but I always translate this as consciousness. Perhaps, in plain

English, you could also say "heart" or, "brain." From a moral standpoint, it is conscience. In the Buddhist commandments conscience has three elements: 1) The body of conscience; 2) The law of conscience; 3) The written law (of conscience).

"Commandment" I also use to translate shila and vinaya. Shila is conscience; vinaya is the scripture of conscience. So the body of commandment is *this* (touched his body). The usual "body" of commandment is not the law of commandment; the law does not appear in this living body nor in the living mind, as realization (to burn a finger is the realization of the body of commandment).

When you find the cornerstone of the "written" commandment, you will have a clue to the attainment of the whole body of commandment. When you contact something with both body and mind, you will understand clearly; to such a one, the written commandment is not necessary, while to one who has not found this body, the written commandment is very important. This written commandment is nothing but a photograph of the body of commandment. It can be called "the still, small voice" or the "daemon."

We are entirely deaf to this "voice of the daemon" until we recover the ear to hear it. How can we recover (or discover) the body of the Buddha which is the true conscience? In Buddhism, we are taught to empty the mind completely and to hear that commandment. It is the only way. Your looking glass is covered with filth; so clean it up. You must demolish all images, all previous conceptions, your imagination must be cleaned up. Finally "you" will be one plain mind, which is the body of commandment, and it will become very clear and simple.

This is the talk of a Buddhist monk. The commandment "you must not kill" is naturally written in your soul, on any one's conscience. When you are compelled to become a soldier and to work hard on the battlefield you must kill. There is no contradiction here, if you understand the body of commandment. But when your conscience is as if painted over with white paint, you lose the body of commandment. So the Sixth Patriarch here has the same conclusion as in Zen: his jnana and Zen are alike; his shila

and Zen are alike; his Zen is to find your own original nature.

*Do not think of what is past or in the future.* Sometimes you think you cannot apply the law of commandment that worked in some past experience to the present moment. You are correct, for the written law is not always applicable. You must mind the present body of commandment and what it says. From the Zen standpoint, mind and body are the same. And when the expected future is at hand, its circumstances may be entirely different from what was expected.

*You will never grasp anything by thinking of it after it has happened. If your mind is clear, you will see your original nature at this moment.* If your mind is not blurred, painted over, or in the custody of the old tradition, you can see your original nature right now.

There is an ancient commandment that monks may not tell the commandments to women who wear high-heeled shoes, for, as they are women of the world, monks are not permitted to speak Buddhism to them.

*Evil and virtue are unlike in nature, but they are alike in their original aspect.* The Sixth Patriarch does not mean good and bad. To him, evil means all the external and extraneous attitudes of Buddhism. Virtue means experience--the intimate experience of Buddhism through the heart and soul. They are two sides of one thing, like a sheet of paper.

*The nature of this oneness is the nature of the real. That which is not stained by evil and virtue in your original nature is the Buddha of the perfect sambhogakaya.* Here, sambhogakaya means "light, awareness." It is the force of a potential power.

Dharmakaya is also potential force, but not focused, like the ocean. When a cyclone moves over the ocean, making the waves circle and twist like a top, the top of the waves is sambhogakaya. When a newborn baby cries, "Wa-a-ah!"--at that moment sambhogakaya is born.

When the baby Buddha was born, he is quoted as saying, "Between heaven and earth, I am the only one to be revered!" Tradition is a queer thing, isn't it? Of course, what the infant Buddha said was, "Wa-a-ah!" This infant wail was canonized.

When Christ was born the son of God, he also said, "Wa-a-ah!"

*If you harbor an evil thought in your original nature, you will destroy the cause of a million years' virtue.* Try to find something that is true in your daily life and settle down upon it. That is our religion. Nature is our shrine. All human life is our sangha, and daily life is our retreat. That is all.

#### Q and A

Q WHERE CAN I GO TO SIT IN JAPAN?

A (given us in the form of a clipping dated Nov. 1980 by a priest with the Institute of Zen Studies August tour. Article was written by Martin Roth)

"Summer zazen session for foreigners for one week. No charge. Free vegetarian breakfast and lunch. Evening meals, cook your own or eat out. Lessons in calligraphy, India ink painting, tea ceremony, yoga on request. Apply by postcard to...

The temple is called Kaiohji, and it is in the Wakayama hot spring resort and harbor town of Kii-Katsuura. The priest's name is the Reverend Sosen Takeuchi.

"I organize a sesshin...of about a week's duration at the beginning of most months," he told me. "I like to help foreigners study Zen, and I know that Japan is expensive, so in summer I invite a few foreign girls to study free at my temple. I enjoy meeting foreign people very much. During the sesshin, because of the accommodation problem, I invite women only. But at other times men and women can come and stay here cheaply, and I will help them with Zen."

I also spoke to an American woman who spent a week at the temple last year. "It is certainly a lovely place, and in a wonderful location," she said. "The priest and his wife are extremely friendly, though they speak little English. Four people came for my sesshin. We were taken to the zazendo. It was a small building, detached from the temple. Like in a big monastery, we were to eat, sleep and do zazen there. In theory we had one

tatami mat each for all these things, but because there were just a few of us we could spread out a bit.

"Among the first things I noticed were the giant hairy spiders. But the priest said they were all right because they ate the enormous flying cockroaches that were also in the room. A Japanese girl in our group was so put off she left the next morning.

"On one occasion the priest reprimanded one girl for not sitting up straight during zazen. It turned out she was crouched in fear, because a big spider which I had just brushed away with my sutra book was poised above her.

"The first morning we got up early and did zazen. But later, after the priest went away we thought it was time to stop, so we were chatting when the priest's wife arrived. She was shocked to find us not meditating. It turned out the schedule called for us to do eight hours of zazen a day, most of it without the priest being present.

"In the afternoon we had two hours when we could ask the priest to teach us something like calligraphy, but we were all rather tired, so we turned this into a free period.

"In the evenings we went into the town for dinner, or we bought something to cook in the zazendo. And we also went to the public bathhouse.

"At night we were joined by the local townspeople for zazen. The priest was of the Rinzaï sect, so he tried to give me a koan (a special question used in Zen meditation) but my Japanese wasn't so good at that time, and he gave up.

"But it was an awfully nice place, and very pretty, with a beautiful view over the bay. However, I remember that the temple was on a hill, and at the foot of the hill, right below the zazendo, was a swimming pool. This was summer, so the pool was full of children. For much of the time while we were sitting and meditating we could hear the people enjoying themselves in the pool."

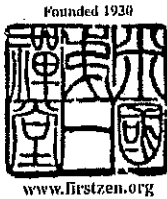
People interested in this temple should phone the priest (in Japanese) at 07355-2-0839. The address is Kaiohji Zen Temple, 642 Katsuura Hot Springs, Wakayama-Ken.

*Journal notes*

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