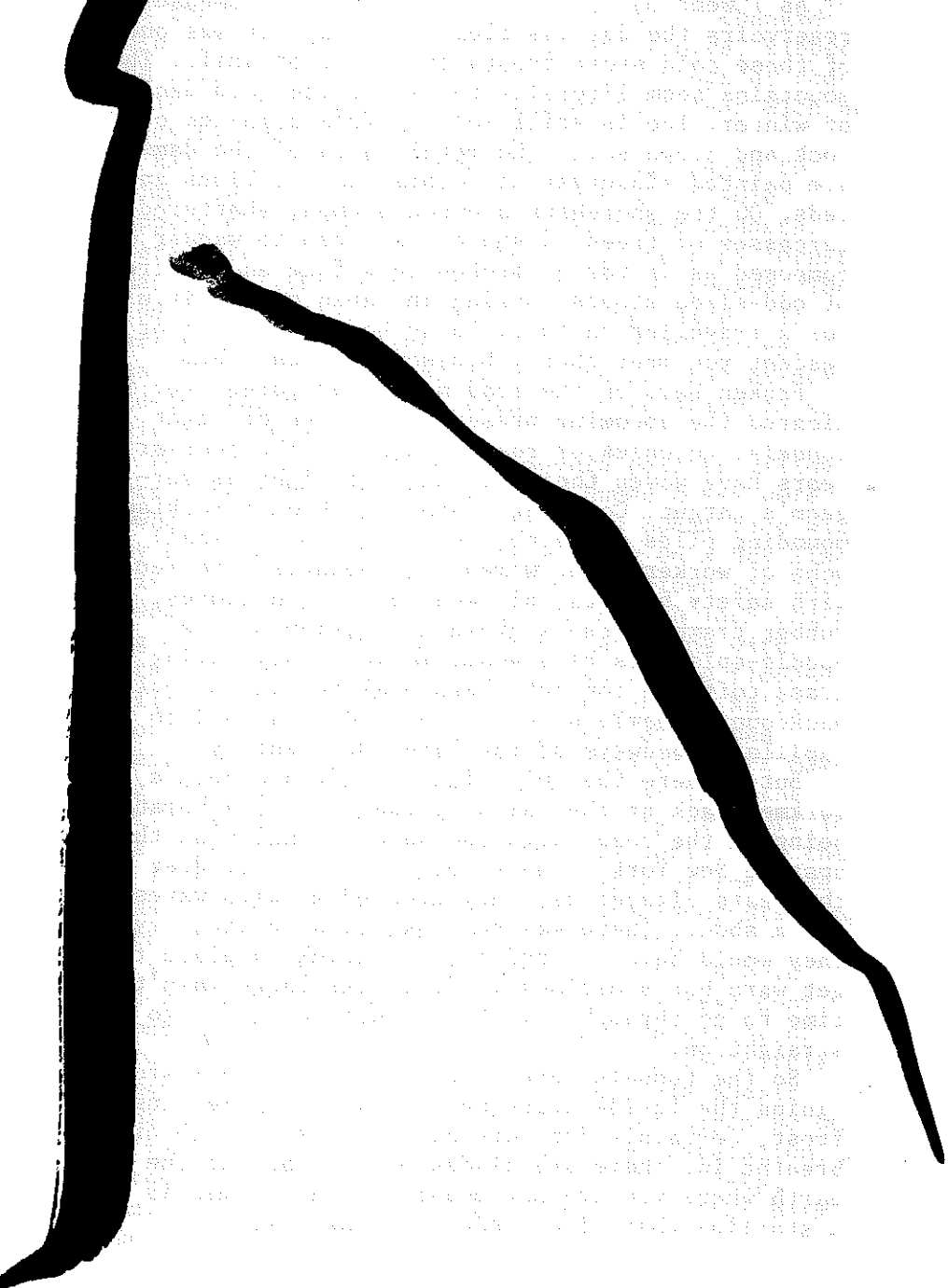


# GEN NOTES



## CROSSING THE JAPANESE ALPS

As I went on into the mountains past immense reservoirs the day was bleak and gray. It was one of those cold storm fronts the color of shale. The mountains seem literally to exhale the cold dankness of winter. Ice is still melting from crinkles of rock and brown soil. The metal gates of the dams are painted kindergarten colors, pastel blues and reds. On the shorebank drowned stumps, shattered carcasses of trees, a shore too steep to wander on, composed as it was of broken rock face and a strew of odd-sized stones. Spring in Japan comes fitfully for a traveller on foot. In an hour of ascent or descent you meet cherry blossoms or lose them.

Broken bars on the road map I had pored over indicated the upcoming presence of seven or eight tunnels. Colonies of road workers in the postwar years have woven their asphalt net tight as surgeon's catgut. Constantly shaving through rockface, mounding piles of earth; on any given day small mobs of workers, the women with bonnets, the men with safety helmets, all wearing cotton gloves, rubber tramp boots--a grown-up version of the puddle-splashers kids wear, meticulously laying in grass tufts in concrete hexagonal retainers; pulling backcountry hamlets out of the middle ages into the capillary roadways of the late 20th-century.

But up here the only sign of life had been a few workmen back at the dam surprised to see a human being on the road. With the same friendliness that upstate New York farmers reserve for a pet deer that eats cigarettes, they greeted me with waves and a shout. There was real question in their eyes. They would have offered food or drink, a place to get warm but sometimes it felt like there wasn't time to go through any of it. Just better to go straight on.

So the tunnels were mine alone, the black stone lining the inside dripping steadily from melting frost, certainly not intended to walk through or breathe in. There are places on the face of the earth where you are not meant to stay. A man is not a starling that lives under a highway strut.

Once in a great while a car passed and there was the stain of exhaust on your tongue a long while after. Pattering rain. Then the rain came quickly and the road went dark and then shiny. I changed into tights, broke out wool cap and gloves, zipped the rain jacket all the way up even though at that position the light plastic zipper pull beat with an annoying small rhythmic pulse.

Rain came steadily now and the road began to climb again. No lunch, just a handful of some peppery concoction of rice crackers and peanuts. There were no stores up here among the pine forests that came right to the road's edge. No houses. The wind was cutting, constantly getting colder. It carried no cooking smells, no sounds of voices, just the full and unabridged coldness that exists independently and indifferently in relation to any shivering human frame.

Road vehicles, fat earth movers painted yellow were parked by the roadside but human elves were nowhere to be seen. No one from the human race with any sense was up in the Alps working on a day like this. Road shoulder streams running brown and thin sweeping waves no higher than an eighth inch coursing down the steep grade. Socks fattening with water, toe box in each shoe aslosh like a flooded cellar, nose dripping like a rain gutter, salty snot running out of internal pipes, eyelashes freighting up with droplets, patches of shirt making conquest of dry territory until at last the entire shirt was cold and wet. Nothing dry left in the pack, no way to get dry in this world. And then as I stood to take a piss at the side of the road, steam rising off the twirl, hot human soup draining into chilly pine needles and dark earth.

Suddenly the television van appeared. A bold red-and-white banner was lashed to the rear door. A modernistic stick figure, cliched rendering of a running human in a digital age, in a red circle. Japanese characters. And in English: Jim Shapiro runs around the world. In this part of Japan no one to read that now. A slight push on my exhalation, a sardonic sideways glance. When you're in deep, edging towards hypothermia, things like that seem such trash.

Sasaki Roshi always puts it that you live in both the absolute and the human world. The world of cold rain and my own pigheadedness. Getting flogged by both today. I felt I would rather die than ask the film crew for help. If I'd said I would cross Japan alone then screw it, I'm responsible. I didn't say a word, wouldn't look over at the black glistening hole of the camera lens as the very silent van cruised just alongside. They were in another world--dry, warm, safe. As I always did when they were near I smoothed out the surface signs of physical distress, stopped talking out loud, went stone-faced, wouldn't show how hard I was working, how much I was worried. Hard not to puff going up the slope. Wind kicking the rain so hard it felt like fine buckshot.

Each watersoaked step came slowly. One at a time, one at a time I kept putting my feet down. When I'm feeling good on a journey the temptation is to grab it and dream of going on forever as if, just because it pleases you, it ought to last. But when you're nailed, you can't wait to get it over with.

The van drove off suddenly, never came back again. At a deserted work shed at the top of the mountain I ducked under an overhang of roof. Peel gloves off and the hands shine up stark white under the tan, nails pink as ever but remote. At such moments everything but simpleminded thoughts and sensations drops away. Sucking air less slowly it was clear there was nothing left to do but cut losses and run for my life.

Hours later I was skittish as a drenched cat when I came to paradise--a dry coffee shop down the other side of the mountain back in the world. Even then it never occurred to me to ask the name of the mountain.

NY POST HEADLINE: METS CALL ON CATS TO ROOT OUT RATS  
Mets already have beefed up "security" at Shea. Because of bigger crowds, working cats have been increased from 30 to 45. All ballparks have working cats. They hunt the rodents that prowl the underground.  
THE FZI has not been troubled by inside rats this year, but across the street they've been seen investigating the garbage. Trees have posters: RAT ALERT.

What is that which is called the hundred decillion Nirmanakayas? If you do not entertain your mind about the million Dharmas, your original mind is like the empty sky; but if the mind entertains one thought, your mind has, so to speak, undergone a transformation. If you think of evil, you will be changed into an evil being. If you think of good, you will be changed into a heavenly being. The venomous becomes a serpent and the compassionate becomes a Bodhisattva. Through wisdom you will ascend and through ignorance you will descend. Thus you will undergo many changes in your own nature. The deluded one will not be conscious of it and, in one after another of the minds, he will think of evil and practice it. If he brings his mind back to virtue once more, wisdom will be born. This is called the Nirmanakaya Buddha within your own nature.

SOKEI-AN SAYS

What is that which is called the hundred decillion Nirmanakayas? Nirmanakaya is one of the three bodies of Buddha, the materialized body of Buddha, Buddha in human form. In personified Buddhism, Avalokiteshvara takes the part of Nirmanakaya Buddha. He, Avalokiteshvara, transforms his body into thirty-two nirmanakayas. He has thirty-two bodies. From his one body he transforms into these thirty-two bodies. In Buddhism, this thirty-three is the largest number of transformations.

If you do not entertain your mind about the million Dharmas, your original mind is like the empty sky. The "million Dharmas" means a million circumstances, or environments. Empty sky is allegorized as shunyata--emptiness.

But if the mind entertains one thought, your mind, so to speak, undergoes a transformation. Transformation is the way of Nirmanakaya--a transformation of one's body in accordance with one's mind--from naraka (hell) to preta (evil spirit) to tiryagyoni (animal, beast) to human being and to deva (including ashuras). There are six evil transformations. The original idea was five, then Ashura

was added. Ashura was an angel who fell down to hell and became Satan.

*If you think of evil, you will be changed into an evil being. If you think of good, you will be changed into a heavenly being. The venomous becomes a serpent and the compassionate becomes a Bodhisattva.* Shravaka means a sacred man who tends to annihilate his mind and his desires, by virtuous transformation, according to the Buddha's four truths. The Four Noble Truths are: agony, cause of agony, cessation of agony and way of cessation of agony, or truth.

Pratyeka Buddha means a "forlorn" Buddha. He is an awakened one who attains his enlightenment without the help of others but cannot transmit his attainment to others. Therefore, such a type of sacred man takes the title of "forlorn enlightened one." He observes the change of the phenomenal world according to the law of the twelve chains of causation.

Bodhisattva means "non-ego Buddha" (awakened one.) So if there are twenty Bodhisattvas, they are just like one; and if there is one Bodhisattva, he is just like twenty. This is the nature of the Bodhisattva. He observes Buddha's six paramitas.

Buddha is the completely enlightened one who has attained samyak-sambodhi--the highest enlightenment.

These are the four ways. Added to the six evil gates, this makes ten ways. So these words "evil" and "good" do not mean to steal, kill and so forth. Good does not mean to keep the commandments. Evil refers to the five evil transformations and good refers to the four good transformations.

Hell is naraka, a place for dead or disembodied spirits who are in eternal agony. Heaven is Nirvana, eternal peace and rest.

*Through wisdom you will ascend and through ignorance you will descend.* Wisdom means "Bodhi," the power of Buddha which is within us. To be awakened with this power is wisdom.

"Through wisdom you will ascend" means to ascend from hell to Buddha. "Through ignorance you will descend" means to descend from Buddha to hell.

*Thus you will undergo many changes in your own nature.* The decillion Nirmanakayas are shadowy, semi-incarnated beings--all these different minds.

Each mind is a different being in Buddhism, so there is a new mind being born at every moment and a mind dying. Buddhism does not take this physical body as a unit; a multitude of beings are living in this physical body. Just as the box of a radio is not the entire unit--you hear thousands of singers through it. So, through this physical body, you will hear thousands of beings.

*The deluded one will not be conscious of it and, in one after another of the minds, he will think of evil and practice it. If he brings his mind back to virtue once more, wisdom will be born. This is called the Nirmanakaya Buddha within your own nature.* If I pour oil on water, although you see a thousand particles, you know that each is separate.

Pure mind is active, klistamana. Mind-stuff, aklistamana, is inactive. All that you think is mind-stuff but without it you cannot think. Mind-stuff is semi-material, semi-spiritual. It has place but it does not take up space. It is a queer being, this mind-stuff, and you cannot deny its existence.

In Christianity, there are beings of purgatory; in Buddhism they are called majjhima-skandhas--the middle shadow between soul and matter. Magicians use this to blind men's souls. They send their mind shadow into your mind.

True Dharma is different. It takes your shadowy being away from your mind and annihilates it. It tears down the sky and keeps tearing it down until you see the bottom of your existence. Unless you do this, you cannot see the empty sky, alaya consciousness.

If, when you are meditating, you have one thought like a small black cloud, a storm brews in your mind. Then you go from heaven to hell--from Buddha to hell. The Zen student knows when this mind-stuff is at work and puts strength into his abdomen and controls it.

Ignorance is like a washer-woman's mind--you don't know anything. Every moment you undergo change, ascending and descending. You don't know how to struggle with it, so you go, perhaps to an analyst. Why can't you analyze yourself and cure your own sickness?

Gather your thoughts and see to the bottom of your mind. From that base, intrinsic wisdom will be born.

*gan notes*

NOTED by John Storm

Mumon Yamada Roshi Says (in commentary on the "Zazengi," speaking of layman's Zen practice.

PARADISE What, then, is the aim of life? To enjoy. In fact, there is no purpose in life. Only those who have not reached the destination speak of it. For once you are at the destination, what can you do but enjoy your life there? When you reach what you were heading for, you have nothing but to enjoy life. A world where everybody can enjoy his life is a paradise.

RUNNING (Since the four dignities stand for all activities, "running" can be substituted for walking in the following...MF) Since man is an animal, for (a layman) to walk is more normal (than to practice zazen). However, it is rather unusual for us to see a man who is walking in the true sense. Aren't many people simply walking from force of habit? Are they not moving simply by drawing and extending their legs? Though they seem very busy in their daily lives, how many people are walking their own ways with a deep investigation into life?

*Master Okada Torajiro's Advice (from "Hara" by Von Durkheim)*

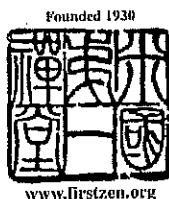
PRECIPICE, CLIMBING A Press the breath down into the tanden...With each breath one should gather one's whole strength into the tanden...one breath after the other with the whole body strength of tanden...Always, even when climbing a precipice, one should exhale very slowly at the same time pressing strength into the tanden.

THANK YOU AGAIN for your generous response to our reminders to renew once a year. We'll be making our annual check-up soon, so if you have changed your address or your mind, please let us know. MF

Copyr. 1986 The First Zen Institute of America, Inc. Vol. XXXIII, No. 10, Oct. 1986  
113 East 30th St., New York, NY 10016  
Editor, Mary Farkas  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



Copyright of Zen Notes is the property of the First Zen Institute of America, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download or email articles for individual use.



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

(Open House Wednesdays: 7:30-9:30 PM)  
Meditation and tea: 8-9:30 PM

會協禪一第國美

# ZEN NOTES



Recent visitors: members of the Institute for Zen Studies, Japan, including Rinzaï, Soto, and Obaku delegates

The Institute is located at the Rinzaï Zen College, in Kyoto. Its activities include translating and publishing materials relative to Zen; building a library of books on Zen; helping people and groups of all nationalities find the appropriate Zen practice place for their own level of experience, and holding zazen practice periods.