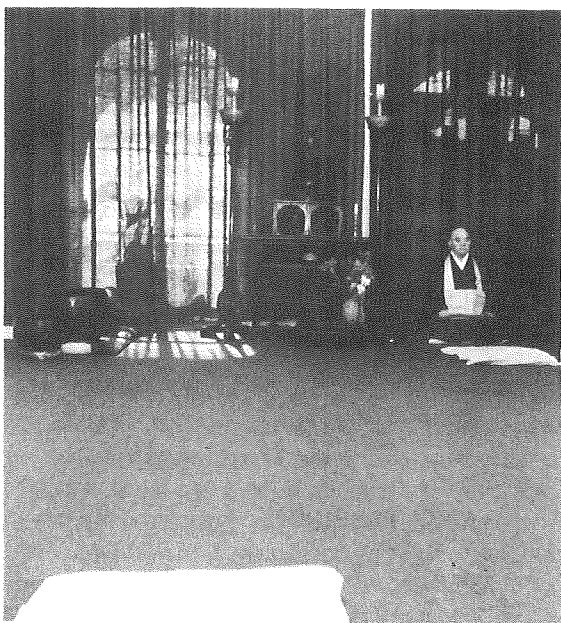


ZEN NOTES



In sanzen, you are not listening to someone else's enlightenment...It's your own enlightenment that you are endeavoring to attain. You bear witness whether your own enlightenment is true or false... You testify as to the truth or falsity of your own enlightenment.

Sokei-an, Mar. 10, 1937

Q&A

BRIEF A's to Q's WE'RE OFTEN ASKED

Q How does the breathing in zazen differ from normal breathing?

A *Katsuki Sekida, Zen Training*: There is an important difference between the method of expiration in normal breathing and in zazen. In normal abdominal respiration the abdominal muscles are simply contracted, which pushes the viscera upward, causing them to press on the diaphragm, which in turn expels breath from the lungs. However, in zazen the free contraction of the abdominal muscles and their upward pushing movement are opposed by the diaphragm. This produces bated breath...If you then expire slowly, little by little, it is necessarily done by holding the diaphragm down and steadily checking the upward pushing movement of the abdominal muscles. The latter are placed in opposition to the diaphragm, and the contraction of each is increased. This is what we mean when we speak of "throwing strength into the tanden."

Q RAT NEWS?

A 8 large rats have been night-stalking across the street, apparently resident at #108. The city has again put out an alert and poison. A frightened small black wet rat which had gnawed itself into the bamboo-surrounded back room jumped over her hand as Farkas reached for a handbag lodged on the floor. An hour's skirmish to get it to leave through the open door conducted by an alerted Lamp ended in its disappearance under the book shelves from whence it had come. It has not been heard from since.

COVER PHOTO is by Carole Binswanger of Joshu Sasaki Roshi from inside the door through which students enter for sanzen.

PICTURES OF AN OPERATION--Noted by Valeria

8 a.m. The room reflected blues: a five-foot high blue plastic trash bin, thin blue sterile trays, flat blue hydraulic bed in three separate moving parts and a funnel-type blue overhead light with multifaceted crystal elns. Cheap classical music scratched at the radio--19th century chestnuts

--climaxes only. Long, thin sangha member J. practiced zazen in the third of the four noble postures with his head, neck and shoulders draped in Sicilian sea blue. Snap.

The first cut bisected the cheek. The cheek sprang open. Magic markers tattooed irregular boundaries at the side near the nose. A second cut traced half an oval. Tissue retracted, blood spurted. Cut, slice, scrape, clean the underside of the skin. Quick, jumpy rhythms of focused energy. The doctor taught as he excavated. The eager resident unblinking, uh-huhing. Snap.

Beneath the skin J. deepened his breath. I mimicked his rhythm, trying to learn from it when his breath met pain or when his breath was tempted by exasperation. His hands held firm on his "hara."

Surgical inquiry: "Does it hurt here?"

Patient answer: "I wasn't paying attention to it."

Surgical quizzical look.

Total right cheek exposed. Snap.

4:30 p.m. The plastic surgeon entered for the closure, gowned in blue lilac. A master, he layered, stretched, pulled, pursed the skimpy remaining edges of the cheek near the mouth and drew them up towards the ear, wrinkles of 40 years lost along the way, landmarks abandoned, dimples in upheaval flattened out, eye lines pressed away into a new hairline and the sewing, tying, stitching, tacking of planes and angles melted into smooth cheekskin, making all whole again. An eight inch scar snaked from right eye down under lower jaw. Snap. 5 p.m. finished.

The color photo taken during the peak of surgery shows a reclining head turbaned in blue. Forehead smooth. Eyes half-closed. Burmese Buddha smile suggesting either samadhi or exotic pleasure in the unseen portion of the photo. Full, enigmatic peace, however, is conclusive...even with the big round ruptured fissure, raw and trembling in the center of all that tranquility.

The next morning a look in the mirror. A cancer had taken hold and was uprooted, leaving behind a serpent guarding the face, forehead to jaw, and a mouth with a wry Buddha smile which the plastic surgeon had accidentally sewn into permanent place.

Text: The Song, concluded

You must make an endeavor to see your own essential nature. Do not be indolent! The whole world will come to an end when your last mind ceases. If you awake to the Mahayana, you will attain the wisdom to see your original nature. You must seek it sincerely, joining your hands together.

Virtuous scholars, all of you had better recite this song by heart always. If you make your endeavor according to this song, you will see your nature upon the word. Even though you are living a thousand miles away from me now, if you see your original nature, you will find me with you face-to-face; but if you do not see it, though you are with me face-to-face, you are living a thousand miles away from me. You do not need to put yourself to the pains of coming all this distance into my presence. I thank you for standing this long."

There was none among the multitude who heard this sermon that was not enlightened, and all were delighted, upholding the teaching.

SOKEI-AN SAYS

I am translating this Record of the Sixth Patriarch of the Zen sect in China from the original text written by a disciple of the Sixth Patriarch. His name was Tsung-pao. Bodhidharma, who was a Hindu, was of course the originator of the sect of Zen Buddhism, but Hui-neng was really the founder of the actual Zen school in China.

Before Hui-neng, Zen was not quite independent. It was practiced by monks of different sects, but the so-called Zen sect was originated by Hui-neng. He was not an especially learned man--not a scholar of Buddhism--but his attainment of the esoteric nature of Buddhism was really immediate.

His followers, in order to attain, made this peculiar school which is Zen today. This was during the first part of the T'ang dynasty which began in 618 A.D. Hui-neng was born in 638 and died in 714 at the age of seventy-six.

First I shall give the meaning of the terms here which sound peculiar to your ear. "Essential nature"

--original or intrinsic nature. We say of nature that it is good or bad, but this essential nature is different from such aspects of human nature. In a word, essential nature is soul, or it can be called the universal nature that is within man. But this nature is really deeper and higher than the mere nature of man. It is original universal nature that enshrines in man; therefore it is the link between man and the universe.

Theoretically speaking, something that stands between man and God is always very important in all types of religion. However, the Buddhist does not think that there is any particular one who stands in this position. This linkage is within man's nature. So if I use your Western term, I can say that Christ is within man's nature and that, through him, man will know God. In Buddhism we say that we can awaken to our own essential nature. Thus, by this enlightened wisdom, we directly know God. In Buddhism we call it "Buddha." Buddha is the name of the god of the Shakya tribe. The Japanese call it "Kami," and Christians use the Shinto way to translate the God of the Bible in Japanese.

When the Buddhists came to Japan, they did not use the Japanese name for God, which is Kwannon. They used "Buddha." Buddhism was carried into Japan by the Koreans.

In the T'ang dynasty, the Chinese pronounced Buddha "Bhu." In our chant "to take refuge in Buddha," we say Butsu.

The essential or original or intrinsic nature is very important in Buddhism. We have our Trinity, our Trikaya. The Nirmanakaya is the body that lives on earth and eats. The Sambhogakaya is the essential nature that is common to all sentient beings, and this soul, which is essence, is in Dharmakaya.

Sambhogakaya is in the body of man--of every man. Once I saw a dictionary of the Theosophical School which translated Nirmanakaya as a "man with holy nature." But to the Buddhist it is the body of all sentient beings, neither sacred nor profane.

Mahayana is another important term. I realize that in this Western hemisphere, Mahayana and Hinayana are not accepted in the sense that we give them. In this country, they think that Hinayana

is a religion of Ceylon or Burma or Siam, and that Hinayana is dominant in Japan. They also think that Hinayana is southern and Mahayana is northern, coming to Japan from the Gobi desert. Some European scholars said that Mahayana literature was negligible, and they made their own notions about it. This is not authentic.

Buddhism, of course, has two natures. In this physical nature, beginning in fear and ignorance, we strive to open our mind to higher knowledge and to excavate this from the dust of notions; and then through this essential nature we approach that which is universal. It is as if one were going up from the foot to the top of the mountain. But Buddhism does not end there. The one who has attained the summit will return to the foot of the mountain and find that his dwelling place is in Mahayana. So Hinayana and Mahayana are like the two wheels of a cart or the wings of a bird.

He who struggles between Hinayana and Mahayana will have no time to come down to his own village and find his own home. These are the Buddhist monks.

To popularize the essence of Buddhism, they created a new school called "Amida Buddhism." They call the name incessantly in order to be saved. They are not suited for Mahayana. Please do not mix up these terms with those invented by European scholars.

In the first lines of the Sixth Patriarch's song, he placed emphasis upon the need of awakening to one's own nature.

If you are awake to the Mahayana, you will attain the wisdom to see your own original nature. This Mahayana is not necessarily original nature but it is the link.

The Buddha was a Mahayanist, but the disciples who were unenlightened were Hinayanists. However, these terms do not really mean anything because in the Buddha's day there were no two sects--no Hinayana or Mahayana. After about two hundred years, came the sects. So the Mahayana written here means: "If you awake to the true teachings of Buddhism."

When we were in the monastery and the elder monk taught us how to meditate, he would always beat his abdomen, so all the young monks made faces and

grunting sounds. It is not necessary to do this at all. I am quite fat, so I can make a good sound beating my abdomen, but younger monks have no such abdomen. The elder monk always carried a six-foot stick of oak with which he struck the floor and hit his abdomen.

These ideas of meditation are difficult for you. You think about something like the moon, meditating very softly and sweetly, but your notions come from the outside, not from consciousness. This is not good meditation. To find your original nature, you must make the decision to annihilate all words. We call the monk who meditates thus: "A fish-minded monk." He doesn't think about anything, but has a large eye like a Zen monk. Unfortunately I do not have the large eye but I can imagine it. So forget to think! What you get without thinking is true. Like the monk sweeping the courtyard with the bamboo broom and without any thoughts. When his broom struck a pebble and the pebble hit a tree--"Oh, that was IT!" Meditation with thoughts is very tiring. This Buddhist meditation is easier than any other because we do not meditate on thoughts. I hope you try this, but it is not easy. There is nothing on your mind, and then some notions come in. You watch each one very carefully, like a cat at the hole of a mouse. You think "I am thinking of nothing. My mind is empty." It is very difficult to eliminate thinking.

In Buddhism, we meditate upon the five consciousnesses, the five skandhas or five shadows of consciousness. The first is rupa skandha, the faculty of perceiving, sense perception--vedana. Then there is samjna--subjective matter--mind stuff, visions, dreams between heaven and hell. Samskara is pure force or mind activity without matter. Some European scholars translate this creative faculty of the essential nature "confection." I once asked a European scholar about this. In Ceylonese, samskara means "cake-eater," so the Western scholar thinks it is some kind of a cake, does he? Oh no, but cakes have seeds and so has samskara. This "confection" is not a good translation. Samskara is force--pure mind force without mind stuff.

So, in meditation, we look at each stage of con-

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sciousness but we do not meditate upon words. We are taught to stay in one position for about three months, and then take our koan, "Before father and mother." From this point, we call it the true practice of Zen. But the practice of Zen and Zen itself are two entirely different things. I hope those of you who have some spare time between your activities will practice Zen, and I will help your religious honesty.

So, from the Buddha's day, this meditation and the result of meditation was handed down, but not in speech. Nothing is written. It is the actual experience of your essential nature, proven face-to-face. The disciple will finally come to that state --"I realize it," and it is proved: "This is that." The answer is the same for everyone; it is not my answer or your answer; it is the universal answer. As a moth dives into the flame, and then there is no more flame and no more moth--so you will realize it when you embody it.

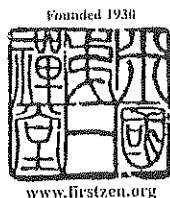
Editor's note on the fifth skandha:

The fifth of the five skandhas was described by Sokei-an in a talk March 3, 1939. "Vijnana is the state of consciousness that lies at the bottom of the aggregation, but it appears in many places. The highest consciousness that we have is the intellect. With our intellectual consciousness we become aware of our own state of existence and our state of mind as well. This state of consciousness may be cultivated by education or by the attainment of enlightenment. The human being has a large area of this consciousness. Animals have a narrow field. In Buddhism, it is called prajna. It can appear as will power, and it appears as continuous consciousness. We are continually aware of our own existence, while some other sentient beings at times have no awareness. Human consciousness has continual awareness... There is further consciousness in the eye, in the ear, the nose, the tongue, in the million pores of the skin. Consciousness in the mind is called manovijnana. Everlasting consciousness is called alaya-vijnana. It carries the seeds of reincarnation. Then there is the consciousness that reaches to the bottom. In the terms of Buddhism, amara consciousness is the deepest; it does not carry seeds from the outside."

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113 East 30th St., New York, NY 10016

Vol. XXXIV, No. 4, Apr., 1987
Editor, Mary Farkas
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