

ZEN NOTES



Every student of Zen has many times heard the Master say: Go back to your original mind. To discover one's original mind is one of the first problems Zen students face.

SOKEI-AN SAYS

What is original mind? It is evident we have a mind. Is our mind not the original one? If it isn't, what is the original mind?

It is the bad habit of man to think everything in space, time, and value. I have a mind, I have this present mind, some mind must have existed before this present mind--it is thus we think in time.

If I said, "The sky is the present sky, there must have been an original sky," it would sound ridiculous. Well, this sky we have is an old sky, of course, but it is new sky, too.

We know we have this mind, this present mind. But my father had this mind, my ancestors had this mind, Adam and Eve had this mind. This is old mind, yet it is new mind too. I have it at the present time.

Next we think: "Old mind was quite valuable, but my new mind is very cheap, degenerate, depraved. I would not pay one penny for this mind." Thus we put a value on things. If it is old, we value it very high; if it is new we would not pay a penny for it.

A million years ago human beings paid no penny for the sky, today no one pays a penny for it either. For a million years we have lived under the sky, but it is valueless. We cannot put a money value on it.

The sky is sometimes clouded, sometimes clear. Our mind too sometimes is clouded, yet at other times it is brightly clear. Our mind is the same as the sky. And it is as old as the sky.

The Sixth Patriarch called it original mind.

When you meditate upon your original mind you will find it. When you first practice meditation you will find a pandemoniac procession in your mind. Your mind will be like Battery Place when the passengers come from the Bear Mountain Boat. We experience this endlessly. In meditation you repeat your memories many times. But after you meditate for one, two, or maybe three months, you will not find even a mouse passing through your mind. Your mind will be still as a deep ocean, quiet, transparent. You will find your original mind. This is old mind, timeless mind. In deep meditation, the outside vanishes from your sight and mind is alone in endless space, mind is pervading in multifold directions. It is a timeless mind. In deep meditation you will realize it.

ONE DAY, after taking a bath in the stream, the Buddha and his disciples were invited into the house of Ramyaka. Though not a Buddhist, but a Brahman, Ramyaka often invited the disciples of the Buddha and the Buddha himself to his house. On this occasion he asked the Buddha to tell how he had attained enlightenment and from whom he had received the teaching.

The Buddha told that first he had followed an ascetic whose name was Arada Kalama. Later he went for instruction to Udraka Ramaputra, who was considered one of the greatest teachers of the time. Ramaputra had received his teaching from his own father, who in turn had received it from his father; thus through many generations this teaching had been transmitted.

Ramaputra said to the Buddha: "There is no teaching I can give you by speech. You must attain it through meditation. In meditation you will pass through certain stages. In the end you will reach the highest stage, that of neither thought nor no-thought. In that stage there is no coarse thought, as in the lower stages. In the lower stages human mind embraces desire and passion; in the middle stages, from the many impressions which have come from outside, it creates those notions which are called thoughts. In this highest stage, all rough or coarse thoughts are annihilated, but pure thought, pure as crystal, is still there, for without this pure thought the soul would disappear. So this is called the stage where there is neither thought nor no-thought. When you have attained this stage come back to me."

The Buddha went away and practiced. Later he returned to Ramaputra and demonstrated his attainment--there was no way of speaking about it.

Ramaputra said: "Exactly as you have attained, thus I attained and my father before me. Therefore you have attained the highest stage."

The Buddha said: "I am not quite satisfied. I think there is a higher stage." And he went away and attained the highest stage, the stage no one had attained before him.

After his enlightenment the Buddha stayed under the Bodhi Tree for about three weeks, then went to Baranasi. On the way he met Upaka. In a sutra this encounter is noted as told by the Buddha.

At that time the heretic Upaka saw me approaching and accosted me thus: "O Gotama, O Wise One, your expression is pure, your appearance is beautiful, and your face is luminous! O Gotama, O Wise One, who is your teacher? Whose teaching do you follow and what Dharma do you make your faith?"

Then, for Upaka's sake, I made a gatha in answer:

"I am the highest, I am the mightiest.

When I was a young novice I thought: "Why does the Buddha, who has so marvelous a personality, speak in such a loud voice?" I asked this question of a monk. He said: "Because you are a small person you think in this way. When you call yourself a wise man you think you are superior. So when the Buddha says, 'I am the highest, I am the mightiest,' you think him very haughty, very arrogant; but this is merely from your standpoint. The Buddha

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had attained the highest enlightenment, so to him he and everyone else are one and the same; he thinks there are no two men in the world. He doesn't think 'he,' 'you,' or 'I'. He thinks there is only one man in the world. It was from that standpoint he said, 'I am the highest, I am the mightiest.' He makes us high also. You must observe him, not from

your small standpoint, but from his standpoint."

"I am the mightiest!" In my old age I read this part and there is nothing strange. My father used to say: "When you give advice, include yourself in your advice, then your advice will not offend. When there is no difference between yourself and your friend, he cannot take offense." These words come to my mind when I think of this passage.

To no Dharma whatsoever am I attached.

Buddha's Dharma is the only one which exists beyond speech. "Dharma" here is teaching.

From all cravings am I released.

I do not hold to this virtue or that notion, or this thought or that theory. I do not cling to any notions whatsoever. I am emancipated from all self-made notions.

Self-awakening only I call my teacher.

Self-awakening--awakening to one's own self. But this self is a great self. Not this self which is called Mr. Smith or Mrs. Brown, but the Self which has no name, which is everywhere. Everyone can be this self which is the Great Self. But you cannot awaken into this Self through your own notions. When you abandon your self, your notions, your thoughts, your desires, then all of a sudden you will find your Self there. You don't need to go anywhere. You find you are there.

*None other is so mighty, none so peerless;
Self-awakening is the highest awakening."*

We emphasize "self"-awakening here. The Buddha called his awakening that which he had attained without teaching.

The records show that the Buddha had both Arada Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra as his teachers, and that from them, he learned his meditation, so it cannot be said that he had no teacher. But when the Buddha attained awakening, he did so by himself.

In the real sense, no awakened Buddhist has had a teacher. I cannot bring you awakening. You must do it yourself.

The Buddha said: "There is no teacher. Self-awakening is the highest teacher." Please remember.

The gatha commented on here by Sokei-an is from *Chu-agon-Kyo (Madhyama Agama)* 204. For a longer excerpt from this work translated by Sokei-an see *Cat's Yawn*, page 55.



Early Later Now

The Chinese character for fish is a fish.



In a Zen temple there is usually a wooden fish drum. This is a symbol of mindlessness, for in ancient days it was thought that the fish had the usual five sense organs but no mind.

When I was a child, one day I met a monk. I looked at him and smiled. He did not smile back so I looked at him again and tried to search his mind. I felt: "He is not thinking anything at all!" It was my first contact with a Zen master. Later I went to Ryomo Temple and met Sokatsu Shaku. He looked at me with his great eyes and that was all.



Ancient sutras are so subtle in expression. If you do not read them very carefully with Zen eyes, you may overlook important parts. Many scholars of the Orient can read the words of the ancient sutras but their eyes do not always penetrate through the page of the sutra. They just read the surface of it and miss the fine points.

But with your Zen eye and with the experience of your Zen realization, no matter how deep those fine points are hidden you will find them, you will be able to point them out, and you will be able to analyze them. Those ancient sutras were written by Buddhists who had Zen eyes so though readers of later periods without Zen eyes cannot find those hidden points, you must understand them.

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Founded in 1930 by Sokei-an Sasaki	First Zen Institute of America 113 E30 Street New York, New York 10016 (212)-686-2520 www.firstzen.org
	
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