

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE SEVEN ABIDING PLACES OF CONSCIOUSNESS, I

THIS evening I shall speak about the seven abiding places of consciousness. There is nothing that corresponds to the kind of analysis that I will give you in western countries but in the Orient since the time of the Buddha such analytical studies have been developed. Oriental thinkers studied and meditated on the place of consciousness--on where consciousness can abide--very carefully. Their way of studying consciousness was by the method of meditation. They meditated upon, and by their own experience they defined, the places of consciousness. There are many places where consciousness can abide, but most comfortably consciousness can abide in seven places.

Just as your Western psychologists have created terms such as percept, concept, and knowledge, so the Eastern meditators created many names. The Buddha educated his disciples, teaching them the seven abiding places of consciousness. These are very old teachings. The Three Bodies (Trikaya) of Buddha or the Alaya Consciousness systems were developed after the Buddha's death, but the Five Skandhas, the Three Worlds, the Four Foods and the Seven Abiding Places of Consciousness are among the oldest teachings.

The purpose of the Buddha in giving this teaching to his disciples was to destroy the other sects' idea of the ego. The other sects thought that consciousness is the abode of ego. They thought consciousness is ego. Every uninstructed person thinks so. I thought before I came into Buddhism that consciousness is ego, that after the body dies, consciousness still exists and, keeping all the memories of my lifetime,

goes somewhere else. "I will go down to hell and standing before the Judge of Hell I will relate everything I have done. I won't need to stay there."--in such a way I was thinking. I believe almost all people think in such a way.

But if there are seven places in which consciousness can stay, then what is consciousness? If consciousness leaves these seven places it loses the activity of consciousness. It does not conceive anything. There is no awareness of existence. It does not perceive anything. It is like a broken mirror. It is of no use as consciousness. Consciousness can reside in more than seven different places, according to our imagination, between earth and heaven, but consciousness happens to stay in only seven different places. In each different place consciousness changes its form and its nature and its function, so it cannot be ego. Outside these seven abodes there is nothing that can be called consciousness. Consciousness will be born and will die. Consciousness is something that exists in the state of appearance. People usually think of consciousness as eternal, everlasting. But this is an error. Consciousness insists on its own existence and refuses to perish.

It is very interesting to make a study of consciousness in the old Eastern way. It seems to me this type of study is not much developed in Western countries. The psychology of Western countries developed on the level of intellectual activities but on the level of the unconscious I do not think there is any development.

Now I shall introduce to you the seven names of the abiding places of consciousness.

The first place is in the Kamadhatu of man and deva. The first station in

man's mind and deva's mind in which consciousness abides is Kamadhatu, the world of desire. It is your present place, your present nature of mind where consciousness wishes to stay, is delighted to stay. Your consciousness in this state is very active. It tries to think, as you try to look for something. Trying to find out something from a book, your mind takes action. Thinking about this and that, three plus three equals six, three times three equals nine, six plus three equals nine, six times six equals thirty-six, nine times nine equals eighty-one, etc. Not only is it thinking, but it is dreaming also. Without any intentional thinking activity, your mind shows you many things. You are not "thinking" about this, but all of a sudden a maid who served you when you were seven years old appears before your mind, or your grandmother stands before your bed. In such a way thinking visits you. Or your mind makes contact with God or Buddha for instance. (The Hindu says Yoga, makes perfect yoga, "union, with something, union with the Universal Soul. The word Yoga is used in this country in a queer way, so I don't like to use it, but it can be used this way.) At such times you experience the state of bliss, delight, or great joy. Ordinary human beings do not experience that state of great joy. They experience great joy when they get money. Perhaps that is the only joy they can experience, not the joy of the yoga between this soul and the Great Soul. All of a sudden this soul is not a little piece of glass, it is a wonderful great jewel. This is bliss. But you cannot stay in this state of bliss a long time, and you will forget that place, but you are always in it and you need have no fear that you will come out of it. Temporarily I give the name of relaxa-

tion to the state that follows bliss.

Looking for everything, seeing something without looking for it, then bliss, and relaxation. These four states are in the first place of consciousness. This is the usual place where you are, that is, your most comfortable place. For you cannot remain comfortably in the other sentient states like preta, tir-yakyon, and so forth, the state of hungry monsters and beasts and souls in hell. In these states consciousness does not like to stay. It screams and tries to get out of there. So we do not count those lower worlds of desire.

The second state is called usually the state of the First Dhyana, the first Zen stage. The Chinese character for this word is the same as our Zen but its meaning is not the same. It is an old usage of the word Dhyana. Dhyana loca, that is "Zen place." This consciousness is, in Sanskrit, vijnana, wisdom consciousness. The First Dhyana is not the world for man, it is the world for deva. But do not think devas exist outside of your body. Your eyes and your own psychology perceive but do not conceive. In orientalism your higher deva does not stay in the Kamadhatu, the world of desire. Only the lower devas of ecstasy and yearning who are related to eating and procreating stay there. But a higher deva has no desire, no heat. It is cool. In this second stage there is no searching, but there is perceiving, as in a dream. When you search for something in a dream you will wake up, for the dream has no nature of searching. Just perceiving, as when you think of or analyze something in meditation. You do not use your brain to analyze, to try to think of something. You are absolutely negative, you are observing everything in the negative state. Or it is as if



Dear Everyone:

THIS is a hot mid-summer morning. Already the temperature in my study is 86 degrees, and by noon it will be at least ten degrees hotter. All the paper covered shoji of the room have been removed and fine bamboo *sudari* or hangings put up in their place. They don't let in much more air than the shoji, but they are lovely to look at and filter the light so the room seems cooler with them. The verandah screens are pushed open so that the little puffs of air that blow from time to time can come in more easily. Ichiro, our big boy cat, lies sleeping on the verandah close by. The polished wooden floor is cooler than the straw *tatami*, and there he, too, can take advantage of every breath that stirs.

The garden outside is already beginning to show the effects of the heat. The leaves of the banana trees are drooping; the grass and moss are turning brown; even many of the shrubs look thirsty. Only the pool gives us a feeling of coolness and freshness, with always the sound of trickling water and fresh water lilies every morning blooming between their shining green pads. The spiders have made marvelous webs across the pool from building to building. Several stretch fifteen or twenty feet. The old gardener thinks they should be destroyed every afternoon, but I try to keep them intact. They are exquisite in the early morning when the dew hangs on them. From his hiding place in the rocks the old frog croaks lazily and the insects lustily. One of our girl cats lies watching the gold fish swimming, all the while keeping an eye on her young offspring who has just discovered the joy of catching cicadas.

From across the pond come the sounds of the morning cleaning. The pat, pat of the little whisks for dusting the shoji, the clink of buckets being filled, the sound of bare feet running, the subdued flow of chatter, punctuated by giggles or laughter, and then the voice of the new maid from the country booming out. She has been brought up in a household of brothers. There is no longer any difference in manners between young girls and young men, nor in their speech. Both are rough and careless. Democracy for young Japanese people means complete freedom *for myself*. If anyone interferes with *my freedom*, too bad for him. You can imagine that there are lots of clashes.

Officially the Institute is closed until the 10th of September, but that means only that we are having no evening *zazen* meetings or lectures. Foreign guests, individually and in groups, come continuously. Japan is flooded this summer with

all kinds of young student societies that have as their aim meeting and exchanging views with young Japanese students of the same age groups. And many teachers and professors are here on their own to attend conferences. I am having these days to be rather firm about not meeting more than those with some real interest in Zen. Too many people coming to Japan now seem to feel that Zen people and Zen monasteries are just another of the "musts" in sightseeing.

In the library work always goes on at an accelerated pace in August, for all of our scholars are on vacation from their respective universities and have more time to spend here. I am happy to be able to report that the end of work on ZEN DUST is really in sight. Another three or four weeks and the last page of the manuscript will be completed, and within six weeks the printer should be able to begin setting type on the Notes and Bibliography--the text has been in type for over a year. The Notes and Bibliography are considerably longer than the text itself. I hope you will not find them tedious, but that they will give you historical and other background such as you have not as yet found elsewhere. Whether we like to admit it or not, Zen is a great religion with a long history and long development. It is not "being just as we are" and "doing what comes naturally", even if we try to be more aware in both. As I have so often said, if we are to determine accurately what the essentials of Zen are that should be transmitted to the West, we must know as much as possible of every aspect of Zen. Then only can we clearly discriminate between the main stream of Zen and the accretions it has taken on from the cultures in which it arose and has developed. Only then can we drop the accretions unsuit-

able for us without discarding the essential principles.

In the zendo we have had a most satisfactory year. We have now ten regular sitters, in addition to Teisan and myself. All do not come to every session, but all come regularly the nights that fit into their other schedules. And almost all have been here some time and/or plan to remain for some time longer. We have one Belgian, a Swiss man and a Swiss woman, an Austrian-born English woman, a Vietnamese studying nuclear physics at Kyoto University, a Japanese, and five Americans--a nice international group. Also we have had a number of interested visitors who have remained several weeks or come just one night for the experience of sitting in a zendo. Most of our students have gone out of town for the vacation.

The last week in July we had an abbreviated sesshin, sitting for seven evenings in succession from seven until ten. One of these nights we sat with the monks in the big zendo in the Daitoku-ji monastery. This week we experienced the first real heat of the summer, and the nights as well as the days were truly hot. At Zuiunken, where the Belgian, the English woman, and one of the American men are living with Teisan, they decided upon a strict regime for the week, doing away with all talking except what was absolutely necessary. There was some spirited discussion about the use of fans during zazen periods. Those who felt the heat to be unbearable without the fans won out this year. But I am not at all sure they should have.

It is only the rare student who, in the early stages of his practice, can feel the necessity for certain traditional attitudes and rules in zazen practice. Of course students can be convinced that they must take the traditional position of full lotus, or at least of half lotus,

though with some even this first step in the discipline is difficult to accept. The first weeks and months of sitting are painful for everyone, but obviously much more for some than for others. But the pain must be gone through, must be overcome physically by continued practice, and, even more important, mentally through faith that it can be dissipated and unflagging determination to achieve this.

Next in importance in the practice is the breathing, first merely as an exercise so that when one sits down on one's zabuton the breathing automatically falls into the correct rhythm, then a little later counting the breaths. It is difficult to explain in writing about the breathing rhythm, and I hesitate to do so; for this, as for so much else that is vital in Zen, a teacher is really a necessity. But to state the method simply, when one sits down on the zabuton, one takes a short inhalation through the nose, then expels the breath slowly and as smoothly as possible, always through the nose, pushing the abdomen down and out somewhat until the exhalation is completed. Then one sits for a few seconds with the breath expelled and lets the following inhalation come spontaneously and naturally without any conscious effort. The inhalation is sometimes short, sometimes longer. One should let it be just what the body asks for, no more or no less.

In counting, begin with the exhalation. One full count consists of the exhalation, the period of holding the breath out, and the inhalation. The second count should begin with the second exhalation, and so forth. Traditionally the breaths are counted from one through ten, then one begins over again. This breathing is not an arbitrary method, but has both a phy-

siological and a psychological basis. If it is persisted in, and the mind concentrated on the number being counted so that you and the number become one, so that you are aware with your entire body of only the number being counted, you will be surprised how the pain in your legs will be, not diminished, but your awareness of it diminished so that you can sit longer and more comfortably than you would have imagined.

All this is merely preliminary Zen practice, just as practicing scales and five-finger exercises is preliminary if you want to play the piano, or vocalizing if you want to learn to sing. Zazen is an art. The body, including the breath and the mind, is the instrument with which the art of zazen is practiced. You must be in full control of your instrument in zazen practice and this instrument must be fully responsive to you, as with the instrument in any art.

As you go on further and further in your practice, if you are doing it correctly--that is, if your bodily position is correct and your attention fully concentrated in your breathing--you will become more and more aware of the reasons for other rules that are traditional, and they will seem in no way onerous. Instead of eagerly awaiting the end of a zazen period to take a cigarette or chatter with your fellow-sitters or your family, you will naturally keep in the same quiet state of mind from sitting period to sitting period, and, even when the evening's practice has come to an end, you will want to leave your seat quietly and go to your own room or home with few if any words to others. You will come to see among your fellow-sitters, if you practice in a group, those who are just sitting, and those who are really sitting. Just as it is necessary for the

string of a musical instrument to be at the right degree of tension in order to produce a beautiful or accurate tone, so in sitting, while the body and mind must not be tense, both must be in a certain state of tension. A subtle difference, but one you can appreciate if you think about it and try out with your own body both the state of tenseness and the state of correct tension. It is to arouse a body or a mind which has become relaxed and flabby that the stick is used in the zendo, and also to loosen a body and mind that have become too tense. Trained practitioners of zazen can see in one glance what kind of sitting a person is doing, whether his body and mind are diffused, dead, or living and vibrating. When you get where you really do zazen, heat or cold, noise or quietude, extreme by ordinary standards, are of no moment. In fact, though you are aware of them, they make no difference to you. You welcome them at times as opportunities to test your progress. I don't say for a moment that they should be necessarily sought out and made the usual conditions to endure, and certainly in beginning they pose unnecessary difficulties. But when they come, the real practitioner of zazen makes use of them as he does of every situation that presents itself. Thus we can take the long hours of practice and the few hours of sleep in the sesshins, the cold of the one in the last week in January and the heat of the one in the last week in July, as opportunities and privileges, not times of arbitrarily imposed hardship or callous severity.

The other day I received from Hono-

lulu the leaflet DIAMOND SANGHA, for June and July, 1962, which some of you may receive regularly as I do. This issue contains a section of 27 multi-graphed pages given over to "Introductory Lectures on Zen Practice," by Yasutani Hakuun Roshi. Yasutani Roshi, a Soto Sect priest, is one of the heirs of Harada Sogaku Roshi, also a Soto priest, but who studied Rinzai Zen in his younger days. I can think of no better manual for beginners in zazen and old practitioners as well to read and to keep on hand to read again. Since Yasutani Roshi is a Soto Sect man, as a person who has had only Rinzai training I cannot agree with him on every point, but I should be quibbling unnecessarily were I to do other than recommend this piece of work, so ably compiled and translated, to all Zen Students. No price is indicated for the issue. Mr. Aitken, the head of the Zen Buddhist Association of Hawaii, 2119 Kaloa Way, Honolulu 14, Hawaii, merely says: "This is an expensive project; please help us meet the cost with a check to the Zen Buddhist Association of Hawaii." We can only hope that sufficient "help" will be forthcoming so that the material can eventually be put within hard covers. But don't wait for that time to write for it.

It is now late evening. A heavy shower at dinner time has helped to bring a little cool. After a busy and rather confused day--we call it a *muchakucha* day here--the house is quiet. Only the drip of water in the pond and the singing of the night insects breaks the silence. Even our old frog is still.

Eryu

you are listening to something. You don't speak.

In our meditation we take this same attitude. We do not intend to think in our mind. We take the negative attitude. We let everything appear before us. Everything can be seen, everything goes before us. Something thinks for you and gives you the solution. You are not thinking. It is as when you think something in bed. You are in the state of half-sleep, and you get a clue to think of your old debts, all the papers and pens, the man with the angry face, and your regret and apologies. Everything comes clearly before you. The Chinese call this "peeping." You are not "peeping"; "it" is "peeping" into your mind. There is bliss and relaxation in the second stage, but there is no searching. There is no desire. This state has no searching but it has many activities and these activities are of the images that come from outside the place of consciousness. Consciousness in this house is called Mahabrahma and the activities of consciousness are Brahmakaika, the subjects of Mahabrahma. This is still a shallow stage of meditation.

The third stage is called the Second Dhyana. In this stage there is no peeping any more, no searching, neither looking for nor peeping, only bliss and relaxation.

The fourth stage is called the Third Dhyana. In this state there is only relaxation.

The fifth stage is not in Rupadhatu, but in Arupadhatu. It is not in the sense world, it is in the purely mental world. It is consciousness itself. This fifth abode is space. You say "space and time" but this space includes time and is the body of consciousness. This is your body. Without this body there is no consciousness and you cannot cut off this body or sever this body from this consciousness, from yourself. So this time and space is the body, the constituent of consciousness. It is a member of consciousness, just as our organization consists

of members, and when the members disappear there will be no more society. When time and space disappear there is no more consciousness. So the fifth stage of the abode of consciousness is space. Here is no more bliss of relaxation, no more mind activity. Just space.

In the sixth stage is consciousness itself, consciousness only. No more space. It is duration. Time is consciousness. Consciousness is time, existing in duration from beginning to end. There is no here or there, but it exists in duration. Of course there is no mental activity.

About the seventh stage there is nothing to be said. No consciousness exists in it. Maybe we can call it a state of latent consciousness. Consciousness may appear at any time, but there is no activity of consciousness. In this emptiness there is no activity. Here is all latent activity, but nothing that can be called consciousness. Nothing to be thought about, only the potential power of consciousness. This is the final state.

Ancient students meditated in these abodes to stay there. I tried without a teacher according to my own knowledge to do this type of meditation. Of course you cannot do anything without a teacher. Finally I found my way was wrong.

In reality all these stages appear with other stages and at the same time you can have knowledge of all stages. Just as when you play a guitar you do not play on just one string at a time, but on all. If you listen for a long time you can plainly hear each string. So after you have meditated many times, these different stages appear. Also you can experience two or three or four stages at once. You cannot understand anything when you are in the coarse stages, of course, in the states of Kamadhatu or Rupadhatu. You will not experience these states unless you get away from noise and keep your mind quiet. But then you can certainly approximate these meditation stages.

DATA on terms handled in this issue is noted elsewhere in ZEN NOTES as follows: Alaya Consciousness IX/6; Devas IV/2; The Five Skandhas VI/7, VII/5, VII/6, VII/7; The Six (or Five) Ways IV/2, IV/8; The Trikaya III/9, VI/11, IX/3; The Tridhatu VI/5, VI/6. The Four Foods will be described in a series to come. Roman numerals refer to volume numbers, arabic numerals to months.

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Founded in 1930 by
Sokei-an Sasaki

A square seal containing stylized Chinese characters in seal script. The characters are arranged in a 2x2 grid. The top-left character is '禪' (Zen), the top-right is '美' (America), the bottom-left is '會' (Association), and the bottom-right is '一' (One).

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會 協 禪 一 第 國 美