

ZEN notes



SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE FOUR FOODS (1939) The Buddha often spoke about the food that nourishes the sentient body and supports the mind and life. The Buddha said, "There are four kinds of food to support the sentient body and mind and consciousness." In Sanskrit the term is *Catvari-ahara* (*Catvari*, four; *ahara*, food.)

The first kind of food is translated from the Sanskrit *Kabalinkara-ahara* into Chinese as differentiated, or "parted" food. When we eat, for example, a loaf of bread, to partake of it, we part, or break, some portion from the original loaf and put it into the mouth. The sentient being cannot eat all the original quantity of food at once, or all kinds at once. In the Indian style of eating sentient beings "part" them into particular kinds, sort them by kind, pinch them, and put a part into the mouth.

The second kind of food that nourishes the human body and mind is called tactile food -- food for the tactile sense. To consume this food is to wear clothing on the body and massage the skin with the hand, to walk around, to take a bath, and to suffuse the skin with grease, as when here you put your cosmetics on. In Sanskrit, this is *Sparśa-ahara*.

The third food is the food of mind. Among these foods there are many that nourish your body and mind. Of course there are also many that destroy your body and mind; as a man who is about to starve to death, who hopes that when he reaches home food may be waiting for him--by this food of mind he is nourished. But when he reaches home, when he fails to find food, he will be destroyed. When his last hope ends, he dies. In Sanskrit, this is *mano-samcetana-ahara*. By its karma it nourishes the human body.

The fourth food is human consciousness. Human consciousness is itself a food. Human beings, all sentient beings, are consuming their own bodies to nourish their bodies. And who consumes this consciousness is a question. If consciousness is a food, there must be something else that consumes this consciousness. Or consciousness supports itself by itself. From my own view, from my own experience, consciousness is a food, but something else consumes it that is not consciousness. According to previous teachers, consciousness is the food that supports mind and body. In Sanskrit the name of the food of consciousness is *vijnana-ahara*.

The three outer foods--material food, the food of touch and the food of mind--nourish consciousness, and consciousness supports the existence of these three kinds of food. This is the usual view of Buddhism. My view is eccentric, but from the Zen standpoint I can state that it is something else that consumes this consciousness.

I have informed you of the technical meanings of these Four Foods. Now I shall speak about these Four Foods in a little more detail.

About Differentiated Food, Parted Food (*Kabalinkara-ahara*): This food is eaten by sentient beings with different organs. The material food can be eaten with the mouth. Another organ, as the food is being eaten with the mouth, smells the odor, as when you eat kabayaki in Japan you smell the fragrance. When you eat canned kabayaki in America, there is no delicious smell of eel. Without the fragrant odor you cannot eat kabayaki. So certainly we realize that our nose is consuming food, too.

I was living in a house next to a good restaurant in Tokyo. One day the

Dear Everyone:

THE Year of the Tiger has come to an end and the Year of the Rabbit begun. I trust that for the world at large as well as everyone in it 1963 will be a quieter year and one in which fewer disasters descend and fewer emergencies arise.

At Ryosen-an we have been blessed with no disaster and only small emergencies that could be fairly easily handled. The slowness with which our work in the library proceeds frustrates us all from time to time, but since this slowness is due to the nature and quality of the work we are engaged in we must accept it as inevitable. At least we all hope that what we are producing will form a firm foundation for the work of later scholars and students and save them from much of the drudgery, academic and otherwise, that the clearing of any new field demands.

During the summer and autumn months we had an almost full zendo. Quite a surprising number of visitors came to sit with us for one or two nights each, in addition to a few who were here for several months. Though of course two or three nights sitting as a visitor accomplishes little or nothing in improving physical sitting, the memory of the experience undoubtedly can be of lasting importance. To sit together in the dimly lighted hall where absolute silence reigns, with the fragrance of incense wafted in on an occasional puff of breeze with only the sharp clack of the wooden clappers or the ching of the bell to break the stillness, until at the end voices chant the Hannya, then to come out into the darkness of the garden, with here and there a shaft of moonlight breaking through, and to walk down the pine tree bordered road through Daitoku-ji, is probably not soon forgotten. If the imagination is vivid, the memory can be revived, and though one is far away in a very different environment, for a moment that sense of peace and quietude can be regained.

Teisan, the monk who for a year was in charge of Zuiun-ken and the zendo, left us the first of October to take both a bride and a temple of his own. We miss him very much, and as yet have not found a replacement for him. The priest of Shinju-an came for a while to be head monk in the zendo. Now a younger monk attached to Koho-an, another Daitoku-ji temple, sits with us every night. To find a more or less permanent monk for the Institute is very difficult these days. So few of the monks remain in the monasteries long enough to acquire the experience and authority we require, and those who do almost immediately become the priests of temples to which they have long been committed. But we are hopeful for the near future.

Our regular students are now eight in number and all have visas for long stays in Japan. One is English, two are Swiss, and the others Americans. Two or three other Europeans have indicated their intention of coming for long stays later this winter or early spring. Which should make an interesting and varied group. All our students are mature, thirty or over. The earnestness with which students sit makes a great deal of difference in the atmosphere of a zendo, and this quality in our present regular students is most marked, and one upon which they as well as the Institute are to be congratulated.

The library staff is a constant joy to work with. As I said, we all feel frustrated from time to time with the slowness with which we produce work, but it is a group feeling, not an individual one. We work now as one mind, with respect for the abilities each contributes, but with no fear of trampling on tender feelings if a justifiable difference of opinion arises. Some day I shall tell you just how we work, for I believe our methods are unique. They have derived from the needs of the situation, a situation which is in itself unique, and with time and heartfelt cooperation these methods have become a way of work in which we may justly take some pride.

The end of the year we had our annual Christmas-New Year party, this time at a so-called Chinese restaurant. There was not much to recommend in the food, for the Japanese hand can be as maladroit with Chinese food as with Western. But the party was a great success. One student was in Hong Kong waiting for a visa and two had earlier gone to Tokyo for the holidays, but with the others, the library staff and their wives--these latter apparently particularly enjoy our summer and winter parties and their husbands

are strictly enjoined not to come without them--Dr. Chang and Richard De Martino, whom many of you know, my children, and little Owen Laws, aged three, as guests, the number reached twenty-six. We have never had a happier or merrier party.

My daughter with her husband Carleton Gamer and her fourteen year old son Mike came to Kyoto the first part of October, and returned to America only a few days ago. Eleanor had been in Japan several times, but it was a first visit for both Carl and Mike. For months in advance both had been drilled in Japanese by Eleanor, who still keeps the old pre-war school books from which she began to learn Japanese thirty years ago. Carl had been sent by his university, where he is a professor of musicology, to Berkeley this past summer to take some courses in Japanese and Chinese history in order to give him some background for helping to plan the course in Oriental studies which his university hopes to open in a year or two. So all were well prepared for the visit.

In spite of innumerable shots, however, they were not prepared for the colds that assail most foreigners when they first come to Japan in the colder weather and live in a Japanese house. So the first weeks passed with not much more than getting on their feet, local sightseeing, and celebrating my 70th birthday. After that they started on their travels. This included two weeks in Tokyo, for one of which I joined them.

Tokyo is at the moment a shambles. The entire city is being torn up and rebuilt in anticipation of the Olympics which will take place there in the summer of 1964. New hotels, office buildings, apartments, are going up in all parts of the city. The subway is being extended in

every direction, and new streets and highways being constructed. Work goes on throughout the twenty-four hours of the day, and sleep is difficult in the center of the city where blasting, pile driving, and riveting seem particularly relentless. Transportation of all kinds is a grand mess. But hopeless as it all now seems, I've no doubt that the Japanese, with their ability to finish up things beautifully the last minute, will have their city in perfect shape when the time comes.

In the midst of visiting friends, parties, concerts, and so forth, we managed a day of sightseeing at Kamakura. I had not been there for several years and was more than happy to see the Daibutsu again. More than happy, too, to see the changes that had been made around that beautiful figure. All the cheap restaurants and booths, including the famed

Buddha Bar" with its raucous loud-speaker, had been removed. An unobtrusive but handsome covered gallery now runs along the outskirts of the garden on three sides, leaving the meditating Buddha quietly sitting among trees and ever-green shrubbery, with low blue hills rising behind. He never looked more serene. To gaze up at him was to receive his benediction. My two boys were deeply moved.

Our Kamakura day ended at Engaku-ji where Mike took the greatest delight in exploring the meditation caves cut in the hillside and trying to photograph some of the rock carvings inside them--unfortunately without proper flash equipment on his camera. We did not try to visit Dr. Suzuki, who is living on the hilltop opposite Engaku-ji, for we had had several good visits with him earlier in Kyoto when he came down with Miss Okamura to give a lecture and consult with other

scholars on one of his translation projects. In spite of his ninety-three years, Dr. Suzuki is marvelously active and in better health than for some time. The only problem Miss Okamura has is to try to keep him from doing all the things he can think up to do, usually with little success.

Christmas has now become a time for general celebration in Japan. On the whole the old traditions are followed for the New Year, that is, people spend New Year's Eve quietly in a final cleaning and ordering of their homes and the following three days in going to shrines and visiting friends and being visited formally. But Christmas, with no old traditions to be followed, is a gala time, particularly Christmas Eve. Until the last year or two gay Christmas Eve parties were largely confined to night clubs and their clientele. But recently more and more western style hotels have been offering parties to which the entire family can properly be brought, from grandparents to the youngest child. My family being here offered an excuse for attending one of these parties this year, and we invited Ogata San and his pretty daughter to accompany us.

Over two thousand persons sat down to a six o'clock turkey dinner with Japanese champagne--don't drink it; it will give you a dreadful headache, I warn you! (There were parties at all the other western style hotels as well.) Our entrance tickets allowed us to draw for the fifty odd prizes offered, beginning with towels, running through various electric appliances including an icebox, and ending with a mammoth five-tiered cake that took four men to lift. (We won only towels!) Several jazz bands played during dinner, alternating between the ballroom, banquet-halls and various dining

rooms that had been called into use. There were singers, comedians, and magicians to keep us entertained. By nine o'clock it was obvious that this part of the party was at an end. Each guest was presented with a beautifully boxed Christmas cake, and we older ones gradually prepared to go home, leaving the younger ones to dance for another two hours in the main ballroom. In a different room a special party continued with dancing until two in the morning, when a Christmas breakfast was served, and finally accommodations provided for the remainder of the night. This was, of course, the most swanky and costly party.

It is very interesting and very pleasant to see entire Japanese families taking their pleasures more and more together. Of course Japanese families have always gone to shrines or sightseeing together, but always with the men folks walking in advance and the women and children trailing behind. And of course the men still have their own stag parties, many of them. But nowadays the family parties at summer resorts and on such occasions as this Christmas Eve party are much more common, and the happy informality that reigns is a pleasure to observe.

Our New Year was quiet. The young people went to Yasaka Shrine for the New Year fire, then on to Nanzen-ji to strike the great bell. Our dear Egyptian lady, recently returned from putting her daughter in school in Paris, drove down from Tokyo with her husband for the holiday, and the Kurt Brasches--Mr. Brasch is the specialist in Zen in paintings and author of two beautiful books on the subject--also were at the Miyako. It was delightful seeing them all again. The evening I visited with them I was struck again by the number of family groups staying

at the hotel. I was told that, whereas in the past hotels in Kyoto were practically deserted during the New Year holidays, this year all were filled to capacity and largely with family parties.

But much of the even very old remains. Carl ended the holiday season by going with Mayuzumi San--the most eminent of the modern Japanese composers, whose Nirvana Symphony some of you may have heard at a Philharmonic concert a little more than a year ago and of whom you will hear more in New York in the near future--to the old Hosso Sect temple Yakushi-ji, on the outskirts of Nara. There still (Yakushi-ji was founded in 680), the first fourteen days of the year, the few remaining Hosso Sect priests recite sutras before the great black Buddha from two until seven in the morning, in the strange and beautiful style brought over from China at the end of the seventh century.

Erege

Ryosen-an, Daitoku-ji, January 14, 1963
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restaurant keeper, who knew I was a Zen student, came and said, "Mr. Sasaki, you are eating your food in the flavor of the food cooked in our restaurant and you must certainly pay for that." I could not answer him at once but I told my teacher and he gave me the answer.

The restaurant owner came again and said, "You must pay me." "Yes," I said. I grabbed many copper coins and threw them to the floor and said to him, "Take the sound, but leave the money!"

About Tactile Food (*Sparsa-ahara*): When you are in the theatre you do not feel hungry. The stage is set beautifully, there is scenery, there are drums, so you do not feel hungry. Hearing music and looking at beautiful colors feed the body and mind.

About Mind Food (*Mano-samcetana-ahara*): Present consciousness is the place in which the mind food is preserved, not deep alaya or adana consciousness. Hope is a mind food, as I told you in the illustration of the man who was about to starve to death.

About Consciousness Food (*Vijnana-ahara*): In Hinayana Buddhism, present consciousness is the place for preserving this consciousness food. In Mahayana Buddhism, alaya consciousness is thought to be the place that preserves it.

Now I shall explain this a little deeper. I cannot explain it all at once, but must do so a little at a time--and give you stories concerned with this. I shall speak about this food of consciousness first.

The alaya consciousness is the storehouse for keeping the seeds of karma that you or I or anyone has committed. Keeping these seeds in the alaya consciousness we unconsciously beget future life. Therefore alaya consciousness, preserving the food within it,

nourishes the conscious life of sentient beings and supports consciousness through many incarnations.

Of course, the Buddha never spoke about alaya consciousness. In the Buddha's time there was no such term as "alaya consciousness." There was just one term--vijnana consciousness. But this was said by the Buddha: "The karma, as seeds, lies preserved in the Vijnana that carries it to the next life."

What is the Parted Food? There are two kinds of Parted Food: The rough, or coarse, and the smooth. All the soft, smooth foods, such as soup and gravy and jellies, are called smooth foods. In the Sutra of the Creation of the Sentient World (*Kisei-kyo*) the part of tactile food is included in smooth foods. This is very important to think about. Of course, there is no particular line between the food that is eaten and that which is felt when the taste on the tongue and the taste in the nose are involved. As a baby takes the mother's milk, at the same time it is material food and tactile food.

Those sentient beings who live in the lower heavens--Ashuras and Gandharvas--nourish their bodies by the odor of incense, or by the sound of music. The Japanese believe that angels eat the mist and that the demi-gods on mountaintops eat the rainbow. It is pretty hard to support demi-gods in New York, therefore.

About Tactile Food: Silk and linen clothes are also food. These foods that are eaten by the mouth or smelled by the nose or that are felt by touch belong to the Kamadhatu, the World of Desire. But part of this tactile food that is not so heavy belongs to Rupadhatu, the world of Vedana, of sensation only. You might call it aesthetic food.

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Beauty is also a food--to see beautiful things. Relaxation in meditation is also a food. Ecstasy and joy in meditation are also a food; so are all kinds of samadhi and the deeper samapatti. These are not usually classed as a food of mind, but remain as part of tactile food. Of course, you cannot draw an exact line between. When you are very anxious you feel heat in the stomach, so mind and tactile feelings are not exactly separated. Those sentient beings who are living in Arupadhatu--Brahmakayika, Abhasvara, and Subharstna--eat this fine food of meditation and samadhi. In the same way, one cannot be a Zen student without meditation. The Zen student needs a quiet moment every day. The Buddha explained this, and his explanation is very queer, but interesting.

"What kind of sentient beings are nourished by tactile food?" Those sentient beings who were born in eggs are nourished by tactile food. Birds are nourished by the heat of the mother hen. If the mother bird goes away and never returns, the chick will die in the shell. Babies in incubators are pathetic--they have material food but it is not from the mother's bosom. They lack the mother's tactile food.

What kind of sentient beings are nourished by mind food? This is the Buddha's answer: Fishes, tortoises, turtles, snakes, frogs, and crocodiles live by eating mind food."

This is very strange! I can certainly agree that human beings live by mind foods, but why these turtles and frogs and crocodiles?

Of course, the Buddha used these as examples of the types of men. Turtles and tortoises are in endless meditation. Turtles in their shells, and crocodiles, meditate endlessly. They are nourished by their thoughts. And the Buddha told other stories.

The crocodile gives birth to its eggs under the sun, in the sand, and covers them, but returns when the time comes and digs the eggs out of the sand, and then they hatch. But if the mother is killed before the time to dig, or does not return to uncover the egg, the baby crocodile is found dead. There are some thoughts indicated here. The mother's mind, from a distance, nourishes the child. Very interesting. We find such things many times in human life. Of course, higher sentient beings live by thoughts.

A man may dress elaborately--put

on a headdress, jewels, cosmetics, carry a fan in his hand--but if his mind is not nourished by thoughts, he is merely a skeleton. However beautifully a woman's face is painted, if her mind is not nourished by meditation, she is like a painted grasshopper. To use this food of mind is very important; without it we cannot live.

Of course, love is included in this food of mind. In the case of the crocodile, the mind is love. The mother communicates her love to the child through the ether and keeps the child alive in the shell. At the time the child hatches from the egg she tears the sand away and takes the baby out. The mother educates the child while it is in her bosom. This is also food of mind.

What kind of sentient being eats the food of consciousness? The Buddha said, "Those sentient beings who fall into the deeps of hell, without eating any food at all live by eating their own consciousness.

A disciple asked, "Does the hell-dweller eat any material food?"

"Oh, yes! He must swallow burning blood, eat molten iron in freezing and burning agony and tortures of suffering." They take destructive food, but consciousness nourishes their life.

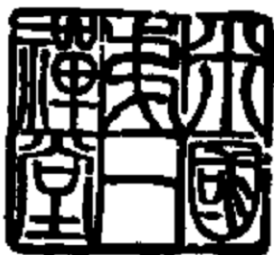
And then those sentient beings who live in the first three stages of Arupadhatu keep themselves alive by this consciousness. In the first stage of Arupadhatu there is nothing but space. In the second stage there is only duration of consciousness--in modern terms, space and time. In the third stage is emptiness. It is the state of consciousness itself. In the center of consciousness it appears to the consciousness as emptiness. Of course, there is nothing to be conscious about--a fire cannot burn itself; a sword cannot cut itself. The real center of the Consciousness Food is the highest Arupadhatu. My own idea is that there is something else that eats consciousness food. Perhaps all Zen students will agree with me, but I cannot explain it now. There is no word to explain it.

Well, I put some extra thought into these stories. The commentaries in the Abhidharma on the Four Foods do not always correspond to each other. Various shastras explain the Four Foods differently. There is very little difference, but there is a difference.

Reconstructed by KENNETH PATTON

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