

ZEN notes



SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE VOICE OF THE FOX In primitive Buddhism there are two different collections of teachings. Primitive Buddhism is that which was established by the Buddha himself, those teachings that were told by him. Not all the teachings of Buddhism came from the lips of the Buddha. Many came from the lips of his disciples and the patriarchs of later generations. The Agamas (the doctrine of Being) are a collection of the teachings, and the Jatakas (stories of the Buddha) are another collection of the Buddha's teachings. Some Buddhist historians said that the Agamas and Jatakas came from the first thirteen or fourteen years after the Buddha's Enlightenment. Afterwards, they say, he gave his disciples the higher teachings, the Prajnaparamita (the six perfect practices of morality) and then, ten or fifteen years before his death, the Buddha taught the still higher teachings, such as the Saddharma and the Mahanirvana. But Buddhist scholars of today believe that those higher teachings are not the Buddha's own.

There are many hints of the higher teachings in the primitive Agamas and Jatakas. The Buddha's teachings are limited in their nature, quite primitive. If you read his own teaching today, you can sense its antiquity, that it is really of the time of two thousand five hundred years ago. I call the Buddha's teaching Primitive Buddhism; the higher, more developed, more mature I call Mahayana Buddhism. We find many interesting Buddhist stories in the primitive records, the Jatakas. We read them as such, but behind these stories you will be able to see Buddhist thoughts, if your eyes are strong enough to penetrate. On this occasion I shall speak of the idea

of resurrection in Buddhism as given in a fable from the primitive Jatakas. It is a very short story of no more than five or six lines. It begins thus.

Once upon a time there was a wild fox in the mountain of Satah in Beema. Beema is a hot country south of India. Today you call it Burma. One day a lion pursued him and he ran, ran like an arrow through the field and forest, ran until he dropped into an old open well. For three days he was in the well and then he opened his heart and he received death. Just before he died, he said: "Everything is mutable, everything is changeable, we must die once anyway. I am sorry that the lion couldn't get me to eat. I would have fed him if I had known I must die in a deep well. I tried to save my life. Now I must die for nothing. At least the lion might have been nourished. Not only am I dying for nothing but my dead body will spoil the water of this old well and make it unfit to drink. It is ill karma that I made in the past. Now I repay it all. Now I understand because I relinquish every desire I had. I envy those who attained enlightenment before they die. If I attain a future life, I will search for Buddha and I will accomplish the highest enlightenment." Then he opened his heart and gave up his life.

The great archangel heard his words. In Buddhism there are many angels, demi-angels, demi-gods, demons, and devils, all mixed up. This one was Indra, the guardian god of human beings. He lives on top of the earth, like the other angels, but his power lies in his beautiful palace at the summit of the sacred mountain of Sumeru. He has affinity with human beings. He is the archangel of his class of angels. He heard the voice of the fox. He came to save the fox as

Dear Everyone:

AT the conclusion of their meditation practice each night the students at Ryosen-an recite three times successively the Four Universal Vows:

Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to save them.

The delusive passions are inexhaustible; I vow to uproot them.

The gates of Dharma are manifold; I vow to enter them.

The Buddha-way is supreme; I vow to complete it.

I have no doubt but that you recite these Vows in New York at the end of your meditation periods also, for all meditation groups in Japan conclude their practice thus. And, probably, as is also the case in Japan, you recite them on many other occasions as well.

The Four Universal Vows, which every follower of Mahayana Buddhism takes in one form or another, has a long history. Originally the vows were closely related to the Four Noble Truths and expressed the intention of the followers to make these Truths known to all men who were ignorant of them in order that, through their realization of the Truths, all men might attain final Nirvana.

With the passage of time the theories regarding the meaning and import of the Vows changed somewhat, as did the wording of them, but in no school were they discarded. The various sects of Chinese Buddhism each developed their own formulas and interpretations. The Shingon Sect has five vows, the Jodo (Pure Land) Sect has six vows, the Tendai and Zen sects each have four.

The earliest Zen text containing the formula of the Four Vows in approximately the wording used today seems to be the Tun-huang version of the Sixth Patriarch's Sutra. There the Sixth Patriarch explains these Four Universal Vows and exhorts his disciples to recite them three times successively.

What is known as the "Tun-huang" text of the Sixth Patriarch's Sutra is one of the many texts discovered at the beginning of this century in the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas at Tun-huang. Tun-huang, in what is now western Kansu Province, was in T'ang times the last Chinese outpost on the edge of the Gobi Desert. Since the caves were sealed probably not later than toward the end of the 10th century, all the material contained in them is of earlier date, and is believed to range from the 3rd to the beginning of the 10th century. If you are interested in refreshing yourselves on this important discov-

ery, I suggest that you get out your CAT'S YAWN and turn to page 14.

The manuscript of the Sixth Patriarch's Sutra found at Tun-huang does not bear a specific date, but it is certainly earlier by three hundred and fifty years than the text by that title compiled in 1291, and which was the only text known and in general use until the Tun-huang text was discovered. The Tun-huang version has not yet appeared in English translation. However, Dr. Wing-tsit Chan of Dartmouth College has been working on a translation and we are promised that it will be published in the near future. We await this translation with the greatest of interest. The compiler of the Yüan version, as the 13th century text is known, states that he expanded the material in the three old texts he had collated with such additions as he felt would be useful. These "additions" have made his version twice the length of the Tun-huang text. Though we will never want to give up the Yüan text, certainly we shall be closer to the Sixth Patriarch's own teaching and expression in the early version.

But to get back to the Four Vows. The objection is sometimes raised that it is illogical to vow to save numberless sentient beings before one has saved oneself. But when Shakyamuni first determined to seek an answer to the problem of suffering, his aim was not to solve this problem for himself alone, but for all other beings as well. Hinayana Buddhism, stressing the more obvious aspects of the

Buddha's enlightenment, set up as its ideal the Arhat, he who seeks primarily his own enlightenment. Mahayana Buddhism, however, grasping the full import of Shakyamuni's experience and his subsequent life, found its ideal in the Bodhisattva, he whose own enlightenment is but the first step in his career of helping others to attain theirs. For the Mahayana Buddhist, with the true awakening of the desire for enlightenment spontaneously arises the awakening of "the compassionate heart," that is, the desire and intention to share this enlightenment with others. Zen Buddhism is Mahayana Buddhism, and the vow which the Zen follower takes is the Mahayana vow. The vows to destroy the deluding passions, to enter all the Dharma-gates, and to complete the path of Buddhahood, are taken in order to fulfill the first vow, the vow to share with all fellow sentient beings the fruits of the practice, whether they be few or many. Only when the first vow has been fully taken is the Zen follower ready to begin the practice.

Recently, in talking one evening with our students here about the meaning and the importance of the Vows, I spent some time in discussing the difference between the statement of them in the Tun-huang text and that in the Yüan text. As you will yourselves see in a moment, there is an important difference between them. Reading over the Sixth Patriarch's explanation of the meaning of the vows, which follows immediately after their statement, in the Tun-huang version we find that he interprets them in

a truly Zen way, bringing them right down to each person right where he is at this moment. The Yü'an version has more or less incorporated this truly Zen interpretation in its statement of the vows themselves, and still more specifically in its rendering of the Sixth Patriarch's following explanations.

I felt that just then I could not take the time to translate the explanations given in the Tun-huang text, and so, to illustrate to our students here the interpretation the Sixth Patriarch had given, I went to the four English versions we had of the Yü'an text: The Wong Mu-lam text edited by Dr. Goddard, and by Mr. Humphreys; the new translation by Charles Luk in his *Ch'an and Zen Teachings*, Third Series; and that by Sokei-an, still in manuscript. With none was I entirely pleased, for different reasons in each case. But particularly it seemed to me that all miss the simplicity and directness of the Sixth Patriarch's statements, and the limpidity of his expression, as evidenced in even so late a version as the Yü'an. At this point I sat down and made my own translation from the Yü'an text, and this I here offer you for better or for worse. The selection is taken from the 6th chapter, except in the case of Dr. Goddard's rendering, where it will be found in the 2nd.

.... Good friends, I shall now make known to you the Four Universal Vows. Each of you must give heed and listen attentively.

The sentient beings within my own mind are numberless; I take a vow to save them.

The delusive passions within my own mind are inexhaustible; I take a vow to uproot them.

The Gates of Dharma within my own nature are manifold; I take a vow to enter them.

The Buddha-way within my own nature is supreme; I take a vow to complete it.

Good friends, has the assembly not said, "Sentient beings are numberless; I take a vow to save them?" Thus I have spoken, but it is not I, Enō, who saves you. Good friends, the so-called sentient beings within your own mind are the deluded mind, the deceiving mind, the evil mind, the jealous mind, and the vicious mind. All such [minds] as these, every one of them, is a sentient being. Each [of you] must save [them] yourself through your own intrinsic nature (self-nature). This is called true salvation.

What does it mean "to save [them] yourself through your own intrinsic nature?" It means to save the sentient beings of wrong view, delusive passion, and stupidity within your own mind by Right View. When you have Right View you use intrinsic wisdom (prajñā) to destroy the sentient beings of stupidity and delusion. One by one you yourself save them: wrong view is saved by right view; delusion is saved by enlightenment; stupidity is saved by wisdom; evil is saved by good. Such salvation as this is called true salvation.

Also, " the delusive passions are inexhaustible; I take a vow to uproot them." This means that by the intrinsic wisdom of your own nature you completely eradicate the mind which gives rise to erroneous thinking.

Furthermore, " the Gates of Dharma are manifold; I vow to enter them." You yourself must see into your own intrinsic nature and always act in accordance with the correct Dharma. This is called true entrance.

Finally, " the Buddha-way is supreme; I take a vow to complete it." When you are capable of being humble in all circumstances, your actions will be true and correct; when you are detached from both delusion and enlightenment, intrinsic wisdom will continuously flow forth; when you discard [your conceptions of] both the true and the false, you will see the Buddha-nature, and in that very moment the Buddha-way is completed. To ceaselessly recollect this practice, this is the teaching of the power of the Vows.

As I said earlier, the Sixth Patriarch, with his true Zen eye, penetrates to the immediate and concrete problem before each one

of us and presents it to us to handle at this specific moment. We must be deeply grateful to him and to those who have preserved his teaching so faithfully for us through the centuries. In the end, however, I think we must embrace both the Zen and the Mahayana meaning of the Vows. There is no conflict between them, after all; the Sixth Patriarch's way is the way to completely fulfill the Mahayana Vow.

But as a little aside, personally I have always been of the opinion that " saving" sentient beings need not necessarily mean only bringing them to the Buddhist enlightenment. This is, of course, the ultimate goal. But there are small " savings" we can perform in our everyday life--a smile, a word, water to a plant, a pat to a dog or a kitty, even an affectionate glance at a rock or a flower. For human beings are not the only sentient beings, you know.

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his spirit was departing. Through the sky he came, faster than the wind. All his angels followed him, trailing their veils. They covered the entire sky with their wings outspread--all feathers, fluttering over the entire sky. They reached the well.

(The story is very simple, but if you are familiar with Buddhism you will know the description has depth of meaning.)

The archangel peered into the dark well and said, "I have not heard true teaching in a long, long time. In this shadowy world there is no true teaching. Just now--before you opened your heart--I have heard this extraordinary teaching. Please come up to heaven and teach us."

The fox said: "My archangel, there is no true teaching in the world that you can accept after you have heard it. When you have heard *Nothing* you really know the moment that has value. But if you try to understand the word I am speaking, if you try to understand the true teaching as teaching, your position is higher than mine. Lift me up, I shall speak the true teaching of the sacred sage."

Then the archangel took his long trailing scarf, covered with a gossamer of raindrops, and he dropped it into the well and pulled out the fox. And all the angels who were following the archangel twined their veils of gossamer together and adorned them with jewels to make an altar for the fox. The fox ascended it and they bore him to the highest heaven on the altar. This is all of the fable.

European scholars who read these stories--the Jatakas--think them of negligible value, having no philosophy, no human morality. They call them mere

fables. Reading them literally they miss many things. I shall disclose the inner meaning of this fable. From this you will find in it the idea of resurrection in Buddhism.

In Buddhism everything has a symbolic significance. All fables have two or three meanings. A fox in Buddhism symbolizes intrinsic wisdom. The fox is always a symbol of this. It is strange, but a fox is regarded as a wise and mysterious animal. If you go to Japan you will see a charming fox carved in stone in a beautiful design in front of the shrine or at the gate. Sometimes there are two foxes, one on either side, or a fox may be carved on the shrine. When I came to this country, at an inn in Idaho called the Wild Fox there was a fox carved on the gate, but the fox was so very ugly and hateful that I didn't want to look at it. I recalled the charming foxes carved by Japanese artists. They do not really look like foxes but there is some sacred nature in the long slanting eyes and the sharp pointing nose. They are shown holding a shining jewel and grasping a key in their jaws. The key is reason, to open secrets, and the radiating jewel is our Wisdom. Wisdom is the foundation of reasoning, reasoning is the function of Wisdom. The fox has these two faculties, Intuition--Wisdom--and reasoning. Wisdom is Intuition and reason is the function of Intuition. The fox is a philosopher. In this country there are not many stories related to the fox, but in Japan, China, and India there are many.

Sometimes in the summertime the rain falls and the sun shines brightly at the same time and you can see the rainbow. All Japanese children will say: "Oh, the fox will marry today." Somewhere there is a nuptial ceremony for the fox,

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for the sun is shining with the rain.

In the fable the fox has suddenly met a lion, who pursues him. What is the lion? The lion also has much symbolical meaning in Buddhism. In a Chinese store you will see the image of the god of Intrinsic Wisdom mounted upon a golden-haired lion, which is in turn mounted upon a five-colored cloud. This is Manjushri, the god of Intrinsic Wisdom. The wisdom of God is intrinsic wisdom. When it mounts upon the lion, the lion carries it and this lion is standing upon a five-colored cloud, the five senses. What is the golden-haired lion, the lion mounted upon the five-colored cloud? He is absolute objective existence. When you look at everything objectively it has no name, no color, no sound. You call it noumenon. When you look at it subjectively it is phenomenon--that is the way you usually look at it. Without observing this true existence you cannot understand the true meaning of the universe. If you take all color, smell, sound, taste, etc., away and look at it, it is noumenon. The lion is its symbol. Noumenon is mounted upon phenomenon and the god of Intrinsic Wisdom mounted upon noumenon pursued the fox (human wisdom) until he dropped into the old well. The well is darkness. You realize nothingness, darkness, emptiness. It is an old well, a dreadful well. If your mind misleads you and you drop into that dark well there is no sound, no taste, no touch, no thoughts--nothing--no place to exist. "No place" in the Buddha's world is Hell. No time, no space, no one, no zero--some sort of nihilism. But

you must drop into that well to attain the truth. You must destroy everything once to attain. The human mind naturally falls into this well when man realizes true objective existence and the five false senses. It is natural to drop into Nihilism. Your age cannot prove anything. Many die there in the well and never come out any more.

The archangel is the god of the human mind, soul, thoughts. Do you know your thoughts? When you are pursuing everything on the outside, very simply, you do not realize them. You are thinking something continually, but if you are not aware of it, it is nothing. You are merely a basket for beefsteak and eggs and bacon. Your thoughts are always running like water. But there is a principal thought, which is the guardian. What is the principal thought? Awareness, recognition. Thought and awareness together make up your abstract power of conception. Then you are aware of your thoughts, they truly exist.

The archangel came with his following angels, wings covering the sky. This is mind. When you meditate and you lose yourself you exist purely as mind and this mind covers the whole universe.

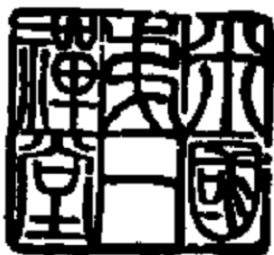
With wings outspread he came to the well and dropping his gossamer veil (vesture) took the fox out of the well to the altar. That was all. The human being has vestures, true awareness has no vesture. Thought is the vesture to the soul, and a human being has both vesture and soul. He dies with the vesture. An animal has but one vesture and dies naked. Humans have many vestures. You must recognize this and leave them--discard them, throw them away. To attain awareness you must take them off, all the vestures.

The guardian archangel trailed his gossamer vesture and the fox caught it and came out. How does awareness come in deep meditation? In your absolute nothing a star comes to your mind. In that awareness the Buddha was suddenly enlightened. Entire nothingness brings this awareness. Then endless thoughts come. You will see the whole world once more, you will find your place. Your flesh is the flesh of yesterday but now your thoughts are different. Without passing through annihilation you will never reach true awareness.

Reconstructed by BRIAN HEALD

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