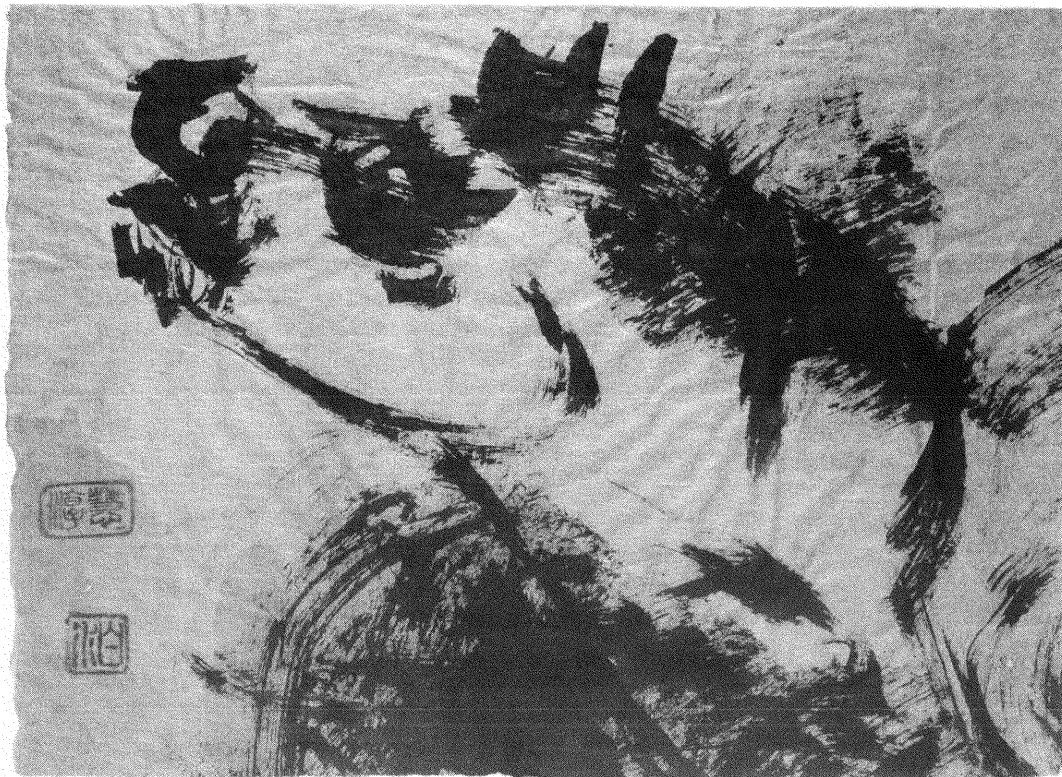


ZEN notes



SOKEI-AN SAYS

ON THE BUDDHIST COMMANDMENTS FROM THEIR FOUNDATION--1935

It is very easy to say that there are five commandments, or ten, but what is a commandment? Why did the Buddha establish the commandments for his followers? What was the result of those commandments? I think it would be very interesting if anyone could explain this.

When anyone studies Buddhism he finds there are three groups of records, the Tripitaka. European scholars translate this as the Three Baskets. These are Sutra, Vinaya, and Abhidharma. The Sutra Pitaka is Practice. The Vinaya is Commandments. The Abhidharma Pitaka is the philosophical part of Buddhism.

The Sutra Pitaka is the record that teaches the students the practice that leads to attaining enlightenment. The Abhidharma Pitaka is a way of explaining this attainment in philosophical fashion. Abhidharma is Buddhist philosophy. Vinaya is concerned with the actual life of the Buddhist: how the Buddhist makes his effort to follow the fundamentals. We call it a commandment but Vinaya is more than a commandment. It is the record of the Buddhist life.

The Vinaya consists of three elements: Sila, Vimoksha, and Pratimoksha. Sila is Buddhist action, the work of the Buddhist. Vimoksha is the measure of Law. By it we regulate our daily action. Pratimoksha is the mental reaction that follows the rule of Buddhism. When we take any action we feel it to be satisfactory or unsatisfactory, and as the result of this we are disturbed or contented. If I beat anyone, as a result of not observing the rule of Buddhism, I feel bad as a reaction. If I beat anyone and I realize that my action was impossible to

control, the result is not bad. In such a way we experience the reaction to our action. Another way to express it is that by action we attain more enlightenment. Each action carries us to attainment of wisdom.

In talking about the Vinaya, we find there are many intricate considerations. We can divide all the commandments of Buddhism into three groups. The first group is the commandments established by the Buddha himself. The second group is the commandments that lead to the attaining of daily virtuous life. The third is for the participation in the benefit of human social life. By these commandments we benefit you in your daily life. By these commandments we help you and give you benefit. I shall explain these three groups of commandments, which include all the commandments of Buddhism.

There are two types of Buddhism: the arhat type and the bodhisattva type. The arhat is the monk type and the bodhisattva is sometimes a monk, sometimes a layman, but always has some relation to actual human life, while the monk type of Buddhist cuts off all relation with human life, has nothing to do with others.

The commandments established by the Buddha were for the seven groups of Buddhists of his time. 1. The monk. 2. The nun. 3. The student monk (novice). 4. The student nun. 5. The girl novice (not admitted into the Buddhist community, Sangha, yet. In three years novices decide whether to return home or enter the convent). 6. Laymen come and go; sometimes they come to the temple with the monks and sometimes they stay home. 7. Laywomen are the same as laymen. These are the seven groups of Buddhists, and each group has a particular commandment. Every Buddhist follower

Dear Everyone:

RECENTLY I received the Minutes of the March meeting of the Council of the New York Institute. I think I am not violating any confidence by quoting one paragraph from them:

"The Council noted that 33 requests for free information have been received in the past month from Baptist groups throughout the South. They seem to be giving courses about Zen. A newspaper article received recently indicated that they are alarmed about the 'large numbers' of Buddhist missionaries who are 'trying to convert the 70 million Americans not affiliated with any church.' The article mentioned that several persons of 'Anglo-Saxon extraction' have become Buddhists in Georgia."

The paragraph was of particular interest to me for two or three reasons. First of all, because our papers here for several weeks have been carrying news accounts as well as special interview articles on an evangelistic campaign which the Baptists are conducting with great vigor. The official title is the Japan Baptist New Life Movement, and efforts are being made to show that the impetus for this movement have come from Japanese adherents in Japan. However, from the number of lay and clerical evangelists who have come from other countries to assist in the campaign--the Mainichi says "the current movement is participated in by some 100 prominent Baptists from all over the world in the fields of sports, opera, television, science, and industry"--and from the vigor and skill with which it is being conducted, it seems clear that the Baptist Church as a world organization is the major force behind the movement here.

The second reason I was interested in the paragraph in the Council Minutes was due to the fact that last autumn I received a most courteous letter from a Dr. Copeland, of the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina, requesting permission to quote from my pamphlet *Zen, A Method for Religious Awakening*, in a study-book he was preparing for use in Southern Baptist Churches, and entitled *Christianity and World Religions*. This permission I gladly gave. Recently I received a copy of the book from Dr. Copeland. It contains presentations of the major faiths of mankind, with instructions for forming study groups, and detailed programs for courses of study. The need for such study on the part of Christians is stated at some length in the first chapter of the book. Let me quote some excerpts from it:

"About thirty-five years ago, missionary strategists were being reminded that the greatest rival of Christianity was not the non-Christian religions but 'a worldwide secular way of life and interpretation of the nature of things'... While secularism continues today as a formidable rival for Christianity and other religions everywhere, it is yet true that this is a time of revival of the non-Christian religions.... Now Islam is organizing missions in an attempt especially to win Africa to the Moslem faith... Buddhists also, for the first time in history, have

organized missions to the western world. Likewise, centers of Hindu missionary propaganda may be found in the large cities of our own country and Europe... no doubt this reverse traffic of missions from non-Christian to Christian [lands] will increase... Secular faiths, as well as bona fide religions, are competing for the loyalty and devotion of the world's people. Their voices demand the commitment of men and women to something less than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And their voices are loud and constant.

" These competing religious claims constitute a challenge to Christian conviction... This is no time for halfhearted commitment. There are flaming faiths in the world today with devotees fanatically convinced that what they believe is right. Any religion which does not believe in its own unique worth and the necessity of its propagation cannot hope to survive, much less accomplish a world mission. It is also imperative that Christians study the non-Christian religions... This is because of the growing prominence of the non-Christian religious propaganda here."

Since Buddhism, particularly Zen Buddhism, is of interest to the readers of this letter, let us see what our author has to say here. After a short but quite objective account of both Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism, he quotes an obviously English writer as follows: "Buddhist monks and Burmese students, as well as Buddhists in other nations of Asia, are calling to their religious fellows to support a world mission of Buddhism-- " to save the world from Christianity, which has failed to prevent the so-called Christian nations of the West from involving mankind in two world wars, with the threat of a third and even more dis-

astrous one." "

Our author is much concerned with the recent Buddhist World Congresses which seem to have " brought into union, or at least into vital fellowship, the two great branches of Buddhism"; over the establishment of a missionary Training College in Rangoon, Burma; and over the fact that " Shinshu, the strongest sect of Japanese Buddhism, by the mid-1950's was maintaining 130 missionaries on the American continent". Furthermore, " careful plans are laid to introduce Buddhism into so-called Christian countries where there is now disillusionment with Christianity, especially among intellectuals." And finally, the " conversion" of " many of the young intellectuals of America-- the 'beat generation'" is " said to be a reaping of the harvest planted over fifty years of Hindu and Buddhist missionary efforts in the metropolitan areas of America... Though in this aspect Zen may be little more than a fad in America, it is still true that some Westerners have been converted to a serious espousal of this religion [Zen] . One of them, Mr. Christmas Humphreys, founded the Buddhist Society in London in 1924 as a center from which information about Zen could be disseminated."

As for my part in the Zen movement, I am designated " a Chicago native who converted to Zen and is now a Zen priestess directing a temple in Kyoto, Japan." The quotation taken from my previously mentioned pamphlet is that on page 5 which begins, " Zen holds that there is no god outside the universe who has created it and created man. God--if I may borrow that word for a moment--the universe, and man are one indissoluble existence, one total whole, etc..."

Analyzing the appeal of Zen to westerners, our author states that it lies,

perhaps, in "a flight from dogma and doctrine." in that it "promises peace and tranquility without well-defined morality." It has "the attractiveness of a religion of tolerance." "Besides this," he goes on to say, "there may be a Western guilt complex for the sins of Western domination of the Eastern World." But there is still another element that can be almost invariably discovered. This is the "obvious relief in getting rid of the idea of God as an independent sovereign, personal Will with whom man must reckon." And as a last emphatic point, putting together two quotations from Alan Watts' *Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen*, he says: "So the holy God of the Bible, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, must first be reduced to 'something one can take or leave.' Then one comes to rest in the 'vast region...where at last the self is indistinguishable from God.' Therefore, is not the real appeal of Zen the modern--but ancient--flight from God through enlightenment?"

Turning to Christianity, our author says: "Christianity is the only religion which consistently, from its beginning until now, has made a universal claim and believed itself destined to become the world religion." That tolerance is demanded of Christians face to face with non-Christian religions goes without saying, but "the Christian's tolerance is that of one who believes that God has spoken a final word to all mankind in Jesus Christ, who is *the way, the truth, and the life*." Arnold Toynbee's proposal that "Christianity should get rid of the belief (which he [Toynbee] admits is intrinsic to it) that it is unique" is "in effect, asking Christianity to convert to another religion. For if Christianity ceases to hold to the unique revelation of God in the incarnate life,

sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ, it will have purged away its essential nature...The crux of the matter, then, is that Christians believe that God has acted uniquely and finally for man's redemption in Jesus Christ. To forsake this conviction of uniqueness is to abandon Christian faith."

And finally, in discussing the Christian attitude, he says, "Christianity is different from all other religions, simply because it is the religion which the gospel produces and the religion which witnesses to the gospel." "Therefore, in the face of the loftiest moral and religious achievements of the non-Christian religions, [the Christian] declares boldly the message of salvation in Jesus Christ which brings conversion and regeneration."

This is indeed a stirring call to the cohorts of Christianity to face the serious threat offered their god-given right to unique religious supremacy in the world by enemies now being marshaled against them, and to defend it with the utmost courage and vigor, always confident of ultimate and complete victory. You may say that this is only the view of one man belonging to one sect of Protestant Christianity. But, as a matter of fact, I admire Dr. Copeland's book and his attitude. He has been quite objective and fair in his presentation of religions other than his own. The work contains no hidden innuendoes and no unpleasant aspersions. But especially I like his clear and unequivocal statement of where Christianity stands and where Christians stand. On the basis of their complete faith in the uniqueness and truth of the revelation, he and all other real Christians are impelled to make every effort to refute the teachings of other faiths and convert their followers

here and now. There will never be another opportunity. Proselytizing zeal to a greater or lesser degree is a demand which Christianity of its very nature makes on those who testify to it. There can be no compromise.

With Buddhism the situation is quite different. What Shakyamuni taught was not a revelation from some superior power without. It was self-revelation from within. From the first the teaching held that each man must save himself; there was no savior outside himself. With the passage of the centuries that saw the development of the Mahayana, many other teachings were admitted under the Great Cloud of Compassion. Men were recognized to be different in their immediate capacities, if not in their basic nature. If not all were capable of reaching and comprehending the final and ultimate truth, truth to the degree that they could assimilate it and be comforted by it should be available. But always the realization of Ultimate Truth through oneself was the final goal.

Dr. Copeland, like many other sincere and earnest Christians, too easily attributes to Buddhism a proselytizing zeal resembling his own. How vigorous the early Buddhist missionaries were, we do not know. But on the whole, history would seem to indicate that Buddhism has been able to enter and hold sway where there was a need for it and a reaching out for it. Our Christian friends need not worry unduly about the vigor of the present Buddhist missionary movements. Would that they were more and better organized, though not more aggressive! The Japanese Shinshu missionaries have been in America for many years, for the purpose of ministering to the religious needs of the Japanese communities in America. It has been, on the whole, only since the

last war that they have welcomed Caucasians into their religious groups. Whatever increase there may be in the missionary activities of other Japanese sects in America can be traced only to the requests of more and more Caucasians for assistance in understanding these Buddhist doctrines, or for instruction in the practices connected with them. Here in Japan, as those of us who live here know only too well, no effort is made to "convert" us. All the effort must be on our side, and the disinclination, even what at times seems apathy, to accept us, takes much persuasion to break down.

About the Burmese missions to Europe I can speak with no authority. That they have made some progress over a period of many years is obvious, but here again, if I understand aright, the characteristic Buddhist attitude has prevailed. As it was stated on the notice above the door of Sokei-an's first hermitage in New York: "Those who come are received; those who go are not pursued."

I shall have more to say about this from another angle next month.



Ryosen-an,
Daitoku-ji.

May 7, 1963

Published with ZEN NOTES

Vol. X No. 6, June, 1963

observes the commandment for his group. For the second type of Buddhist, the bodhisattva, there are no ("established") commandments. This is the foundation for the Buddhist type of life.

Sila, the Sanskrit word for the three groups of commandments, means fence. When you try to keep a horse in a field you must build a fence to keep it in. If you place a wild horse within this fence you will have a hard time controlling it; you must have a bridle and a trainer. A strong man will mount the horse and beat and train it so that man can use it. I once saw a circus cowboy try to ride a wild horse, but it would not obey and threw him. Our mind is like that wild horse. When we get anyone from outside into the temple we must train this wild horse. If we offend him, even a very little, he will become pale and then flush, he will shout in an angry voice, and we must make a commandment that you shall not be angry. When these untrained young men and young women meet anywhere, their first action is to make love to one another whether society permits it or not. They take that action or they are afraid to take that action and try to avoid taking it. So a commandment must be made. When an untrained young man walks the street and someone splashes water on him he gets very angry, but with training he will only smile. All this takes place during the five year period of training for the young monk and nun.

Or consider anyone who studies art. When the amateur thinks he is a good artist, he buys all sorts of materials. When he goes to art school he is told to throw away all the colors and brushes. He is given one chalk or stick of charcoal only and must draw in black and white, or he is made to work with plaster

of Paris. For five years he is trained that way so the amateur artist is killed and he now follows the method of previous teachers. In that way he loses his dilettante attitude.

In the Buddhist group of Shravakas (the disciples of the Buddha), all monks must observe the commandments that are already established. They eat at eleven in the morning. At nine in the evening they go to bed; at five they get up. They live under this severe rule like new soldiers in a regiment. This is the first period, during which the student of Buddhism obeys commandments that are already established. Sometimes the way is harmful to or out of order with modern life, but we must follow and imitate. We do not care, we just do. Everyone knows the head of the Venus of Milo is too small for her long body, but as beginning artists we copy without complaint.

Then we come into the next group where we may attain daily life in good order. After you have trained your horse for several years you can take the bridle off and let it go free. It can go to and fro in the garden. So it is trained and good. It shows its beautiful polished body and graceful manners and lovely eye. It becomes entirely different from the wild horse. When monks have been trained for ten, fifteen years in the temple their mind is serene whatever they look at. When they look at women, their mind is serene; there is no desire. Each can see through his own eyes. He does not need to observe commandments established by anyone else but he will find the commandment that is natural to himself established in his own body for his own mind. It is as though one puts on shoes made especially to fit his own feet.

When he is an artist, at this point

Copyright 1963 by The First
Zen Institute of America, Inc

THE FIRST ZEN INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, INC.
113 East 30th Street, New York 16, N.Y.

Vol. X, No. 6, June, 1963
Mary Farfas, Editor
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY

he does not need to study plaster casts, he goes directly to nature. The landscape painter confronts Great Nature, the sculptor confronts the real body. The Buddhist studies from his own actual mind and body. He does not need to read the Sutras any more, or listen to lectures. Zen is the Buddhism of that type; Zen follows no written Buddhism. We find Buddhism in our own mind, in our own soul. Yet this type of Buddhist stays alone, without relation to the outside, as the horse who is still alone in the garden before it has been taken to the race. In Buddhism this second period is sometimes called the "Buddha who is alone" (Pratyeka Buddha). He has completed his attainment, but he has not yet taken any action with relation to the outside. Salvation has been completed for himself, he has saved himself, but he does not exert himself to save others.

The third period is that of the bodhisattva. Like a horse trained many years in its own ranch, it is now led out into the yard to run a beautiful race. When the monk leaves the temple to enter the town or city and act among people, like this horse, he runs like a dragon. There are no rules, there is no particular role for him. His daily life is extemporaneous, but he never misses any particular point. He is fast, but he does not get off the track. It is as when an artist, without a previous design, without a model, takes the chisel and carves the marble directly. He makes no plan. He works without stop or error. And there is no particular rule. It is not of such and such a school, or

even a new type. No. There is no name for it. But he never makes a mistake. He makes anything, as he likes. And he so expresses his spirit. This is the action of the bodhisattva. The bodhisattva makes his action for salvation. We always have our entanglement in our mind but we will annihilate it; there is endless desire but we will control it. There is a goal above to attain, but we will attain it. As Buddhist salvation, we take the other's agony away from him. We give nothing to him; we take away whatever he has in his hand. The other is trying to let go, but he has no power. It is so with attachment, which is the cause of all agony. But the bodhisattva makes the other open his hand and give away that to which he is attached. The mind becomes quiet. Then in turn we give the other that which he needs.

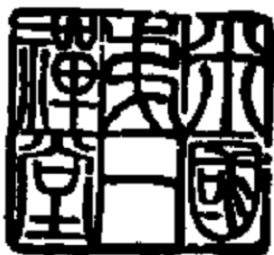
During the first period, the monks observe the two hundred and fifty commandments of the Buddha. During the second period, they practice, and they observe the six paramitas and the eightfold golden path. During the third period, action is the expression of the Four Vows of the Bodhisattva.

Reconstructed by BRIAN HEALD



Copyright of Zen Notes is the property of the First Zen Institute of America, Inc., and its content may not be copied or e-mailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download or e-mail articles for individual use.

**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**

美國禪一第協會