

ZEN notes



SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE SAMADHI OF FIRE There is a very famous Zen poem:

We do not need beautiful scenery
around us

To practice Zen meditation.

When we quench our mind we feel cool
Even in the flame of fire.

When we meditate in the heat of summer, we always recall this poem. Zen students take refuge in meditation in all circumstances: when we are depressed, when we are ill, when we are in poverty, when we are in flight. While others wander, the Zen student returns to his seat and meditates. So to us, meditation is our home.

On Sunday mornings we meditate here; then from this meditation we go out to perform our life. Next Sunday we come back here. When we are stricken with illness we need meditation; when we have lost our position we return to meditation; when we must risk our lives, we start with meditation. And we return to meditation.

In ancient days in my country, warriors came in the morning to meditate in the temple. Then they went to the battlefields, fought bravely, perhaps died. War lords, when their castles were about to fall, seized by the enemy, returned to their meditation seats to meditate upon emptiness.

When I was young and it was examination day, before I went to school in the morning I would close my books and go to my seat to meditate. If, in the examination, a very difficult problem appeared on the blackboard and I was in a quandary, I meditated to quench the palpitation of my heart, for I had found that my brain worked better after meditating.

Meditation is the final decision. Sometimes it is the first step to death. You forget everything in meditation. To us meditation is returning to the bosom of God. We are free from all external turmoil.

It is very difficult to practice meditation when you are in trouble. Naturally you have no courage to do it. You just run amuck. It is better to practice meditation before your mind is upset. Western people are not in the habit of doing this. But to us it is a completely natural thing to be quiet when we are in difficulty.

In Japan, about four hundred years ago the abbot of Erin-ji, Kaisen Osho, had a student and patron who was a famous war lord. I once went all over that temple with my teacher's brother and saw its huge "gate," itself a building. There is a large hall downstairs and in the upper story is the hatto (the hall in which lectures on the sutras are given). We climbed many stone stairs, passed this gate, then went along a path paved with stones to reach the main temple building.

Oda Nobunaga, one of the greatest of the war lords of Japan, attacked the followers of the war lord who was a patron of this temple. Some of the soldiers, under the leadership of a man named Sasaki, ran into the temple.

The abbot gave them sanctuary. In ancient days when an abbot accepted refugees into his temple, it was the unwritten law that he could not be forced to give them up.

The leader of the attacking force said to the abbot: "If you do not give up that Sasaki I will burn down the temple." The abbot refused.

The gate was set on fire. Five hundred monks and the abbot took refuge



upstairs. The five hundred monks and the abbot seated themselves in the posture of meditation and without moving were annihilated in the samadhi of fire. It was at this moment that the poem was recited.

So to us meditation is not only for quiet moments. To practice meditation we cultivate our forces of courage and valor. When you Christians are in some predicament you join your hands and with your prayers invoke God to guard you. You are very happy to have faith in a God somewhere in the sky. We do not have faith in a God outside ourselves. We come back to meditation. There is no running around in the fire, shouting or scratching at the wall, dying like a cat or a dog. We die accepting the fire. It is our faith.

I think this decision is very important in life. About six years ago, in 1932, though I did not say anything to any member of my temple, there was just one month's rent in the bank. And not many people at my lectures. Today I see six people. At that time six people were a crowd and I would say, "Today was very successful." I was holding on by a hair. "One month more! Then I go somewhere else." I did not talk about it. If, when we are in a predicament, we speak about it and make a disturbance, we hinder the natural development.

I return to meditation. In the morning I get up, sit on my couch and meditate. Meditation is the conclusion of the Zen sect. Meditation is our religion. Speech is not the crystallized center of my sect. Meditation is the most sacred moment to us. You do not need to practice for hours. During the day, when you start to do something, sit down and the heart pumps in its natural

rhythm. After you eat your food, meditate for five minutes quietly. Meditation is exactly like that.

When I went to Boston a newspaper man tried very hard to make me say that Zen is the sect of the Japanese army and navy. I just smiled and did not hop into his hand. I said, "I wonder whether the Japanese army knows about Zen or not!" But I say to my students: "Warriors have no time to work with complicated philosophy. Zen is their religion."

So Zen is important in this period.

This temple is very small, very poor. Today is Sunday. If between Monday and Saturday you will come back for one moment to meditation it will be like a drop of cool water to a bird. I am very proud of having kept this temple for eight years. *Reconstructed by M. FARKAS*

For Dr. Suzuki's version of the Erin-ji story and poem, see *Zen and Japanese Culture*, p. 78-9. This story has a special interest for Institute members, as the Sasaki pursued was a member of Sokei-an's clan and Miura Roshi was formerly the head of Erin-ji (ZN II/4). Tracking down its details proved difficult, though I was informed that "Every Japanese schoolboy knows it." If inaccuracies remain in my reconstruction of the notes of Edna Kenton, the only person of the six present to note what Sokei-an said on July 17, 1937, I shall be grateful to any Japanese schoolboy who will correct them. ED.

The AP photo reproduced is of the Rev. Quang Duc, who burned himself to death to protest persecution of Buddhists by the government in Saigon, Viet Nam, June 11, 1963.

THE BUDDHIST INVASION From where we sit a new East-West confrontation would seem to be possible. We had heard that 570 Southern Baptist clergymen and lay leaders, complete with cowboy band, had launched a \$1.5 million campaign (*News-week*, Apr. 29) to promulgate Christianity, Texas style, in Japan, but that a counter-immigration here on the part of Buddhist missionaries was anticipated came as a surprise. Our first intimation was in the form of a trickle of inquiries about Zen Buddhism from the southern United States. A number of these requested free literature for twenty-five to fifty Baptists making a study of Buddhism. Within a period of six weeks or so, these requests mounted to more than one hundred. If each request represented only twenty-five persons, this meant that there were at least twenty-five hundred interested persons in an area which previously had rarely, if ever, been heard from. Why were the Baptists studying Buddhism?

Then came an article clipped from a Texas newspaper:

BUDDHISTS WIN CONVERTS IN AMERICA, SAYS BAPTIST

A Baptist-mission executive said today that Buddhist missionaries from Japan are winning converts on the West Coast and in Georgia.

Dr. Clarence McCullough, Atlanta, here for a Baptist-student missions conference, said the Japanese missionaries are entering this country in great numbers seeking to interest the 70 million Americans with no church affiliations.

Dr. McCullough said several persons of Anglo-Saxon extraction in Georgia now are followers of Buddhism.

Is it a fact, as the southern Baptists, apparently girding their loins, believe, that Japanese Buddhist missionaries in "great numbers" are among us?

An investigation of our Buddhist periodicals shows that there is a certain effort among Theravada Buddhists to revive the Buddhist missionary movement, dormant for the past fifteen hundred years, after its original successful sweep from India throughout China, Japan, Tibet, Korea, Burma, Thailand, Ceylon, and a variety of smaller territories we can scarcely identify by name. The January and February number of the Buddhist monthly, the *Maha Bodhi*, carried an article by Buddhadasa P. Kirthisinghe which states that an existing vacuum in the U.S.A. could be filled by promoting Theravada Buddhism. This effort should be properly organized and directed, Mr. Kirthisinghe says. A suggestion is made that it would be more realistic if lay missionaries were sent rather than monks in yellow robes. For "Americans, who enjoy the highest standard of living, cannot be made to confront monks with shaven heads and robes symbolizing abstinence all at once, as it may create a certain amount of apprehension. These people would be best influenced by lay intellectuals like U Chan Htoon of Burma and Dr. Malalasekara and later brought to the attention of venerable monks."

The main reason given for this missionizing attempt is to bring about world peace, as Buddhists feel that theirs is the only religion that can harmonize the world, Christianity having proved unsuited to this. The leaders of Buddhist countries have not turned deaf ears to the call. Under the patronage of the Burmese Ambassador U Win, it is reported, nearly \$3 million has been

raised in eight Buddhist Asian lands-- Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, India, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Formosa and Japan-- for the purpose of building a vihara in Washington, D.C.

However, except for attempts to encourage the modest growth of Buddhist activities among the Japanese-Americans who make up the greatest part of the population of the Buddhist churches of America, no major stepping-up of interest in approaching the general American public has as yet become apparent among Japanese missionaries. Indeed, among Theravada Buddhists, it is possible to detect a faint tone of criticism of the religious leaders of Japan for allowing Neo-Zen in the United States to grow, without orthodox direction, into an exuberant but weedy tangle.

On October 16th of last year, the 70th anniversary, Japanese reckoning, of the introduction of Buddhism to the United States, Dr. Malalasekara, the Ceylonese Ambassador to the UN, exhorted the forty-odd Japanese delegates who were in process of inspecting existing Buddhist organizations. "I have a special message to the high ranking Buddhist priests and scholars of Japan. You have a grave responsibility to fulfill. You come from the richest Buddhist nation in the world. Some of the money you spend for elaborate funerals and beautiful temples must be directed toward the publication of millions of Buddhist tracts and books and the establishment of a chair of Buddhist studies in every university on this continent."

To the best of our knowledge, the forty-odd priests and scholars addressed on this occasion--and long since returned home--are the main body referred to by the Baptists as the "entering Japanese missionaries." Other than

these, not more than half a dozen Japanese priests have reached our shores (some for only brief visits) with the intention of interesting Americans of non-Japanese ancestry in Buddhism. During the first half of the century, there were only two, Sokei-an and Nyogen Senzaki, who could be called missionaries to Americans of other than Japanese extraction, unless Dr. Suzuki can be so labeled.

The purpose of the Japanese who have worked to introduce Buddhism to Americans is worthy of some examination at this time. I am not referring to the primary desire to transmit the teaching, but to the special reasons that have prompted particular efforts. One such reason is a desire to defend Japan's religious climate against its detractors. In his talk on the occasion of the first official presentation of Buddhism to the United States, at the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, Kinza Riuge M. Hirai stated his desire very clearly: "There are very few countries in the world so misunderstood as Japan. Among innumerable unfair judgments, the religious thought of our countrymen is especially misrepresented, and the whole nation is condemned as heathen."

In New York in 1939, Sokei-an said, in almost the same words: "Oriental civilization must be brought to this country. We have been misunderstood."

In presenting Buddhism to America, one of the main intents has therefore been to show that the Japanese are not heathen or uncivilized; not that their religion should be adopted, but that it should be respected.

Mr. Hirai, later in the same talk, defended the Japanese against the Western charge that they had not become

Christians. "But you will... say, why... is Christianity not so warmly accepted by your nation as other religions? This is the point which I wish especially to present before you.

" There are two causes why Christianity is not so cordially received. This great religion was widely spread in my country, but in 1637 the Christian missionaries, combined with the converts, caused a tragic and bloody rebellion against the country, and it is understood that those missionaries intended to subjugate Japan to their own mother country. This shocked all Japan, and the government of the Shogun took a year to suppress this terrible and intrusive commotion. To those who accuse us that our country prohibited Christianity, not now, but in an historical age, I will reply that it was not from religious or racial antipathy, but to prevent another such insurrection and to protect our independence that we were obliged to prohibit the promulgation of the gospels.

" If our history had had no such record of foreign devastation under the disguise of religion, and if our people had had no hereditary horror and prejudice against the name of Christianity, it might have been eagerly embraced by the whole nation...

" Really there is no sectarian in my country. Our people well know what abstract truth is in Christianity, and we or at least I, do not care about the name if I speak from the point of teaching. Whether Buddhism is called Christianity or Christianity is named Buddhism, whether we are called Confucianists or Shintoists, we are not particular; but we are very particular about the truth taught and its consistent application... the consistency of doctrine and conduct is the point on which

we put the greatest importance. Therefore, unless the inconsistency which we observe is removed... our people will never cast away their prejudice against Christianity in spite of the eloquent orator who speaks its truth from the pulpit... and we will not join Christianity as long as they think that it is western morality to preach one thing and practice another."

According to their statements, Japanese Buddhists who present their religion to the United States do not necessarily mean to "convert" Americans to Buddhism, in the sense that Christians use this word. Rather it is hoped that the study of Buddhism may "convert" Westerners from false practice to true practice. In January 1937, Sokei-an said: "I myself am convinced, from thirty years' experience and observation, that the Westerner who studies Buddhism must open his eye at the same time to unrealized values in his own Christianity. This is not my imagination; it is a fact. I am not trying to convert Christians into Buddhists, but I hope that Christians will more and more use the jade of Buddhism to polish the jade of Christianity." In December 1938, during the celebration of the Buddha's Enlightenment, at which new disciples were accepted, he also said: "My mission is to give a true knowledge of Buddhism to the American people. I do not intend to convert Christians to Buddhism; but if there are those who have some mysterious relation to this religion called Buddhism, and if they wish to be converted into the Sangha of Buddhism, I shall not refuse to introduce them and admit them into the Buddhist Sangha."

We must understand that in Japan, the adoption of a teaching is not thought of as a negation of the old, but as an ac-

ceptance of the new. To continue Mr. Hirai's remarks in 1893:

"Be they heathen, pagan or something else, it is a fact that from the beginning of our history, Japan has received all teachings with an open mind; and also that the instructions which came from outside have commingled with the native religion with entire harmony, as is seen by so many temples built in the name of truth with a mixed appellation of Confucianism and Taoism or other isms and the Buddhist and Shinto priests; as is seen by an individual Japanese who pays his or her respects to all teachings mentioned above... In reality Synthetic religion, or Entitism, is the Japanese specialty, and I will not hesitate to call it Japanism."

In refusing to become Western-style Christians, therefore, the Japanese feel they must make clear that they are not refusing the truth of Christianity, but the bigotry of Christians.

The recent ugly incidents in Vietnam, in which the Buddhists (70 percent of the population according to *Newsweek*, June 17, 1963, 80 percent according to *Time*, June 14, 1963 but less than 50 percent according to *The Buddhist*, a Ceylonese periodical, May, 1963) are trying to hold their own against a Catholic-dominated government that, among other things, will not let them fly their religious flags on the Buddha's birthday and wishes to impose on them a system they have not accepted, seem to have carried us right back four hundred years. Once again we have a monk demonstrating the immovable posture amidst the flames that consumed him. Once again, in the name of nonviolence, monks are prepared to maintain their position at all costs.

Even the most cursory reference to the past should indicate to the missionaries of both sides that they are going to have hard and expensive rows to hoe in each other's countries. If Eastern missionaries are indeed preparing to invade the West in general and the "Anglo-Saxon" South in particular with the object of converting the "invisible enemies" (as Sokei-an used to call those who was trying to convert), they had best read Western periodicals first and be reminded of the advice allegedly given by the Buddha to the venerable monk who wished to venture among the "Westerners" of his time, 2500 years ago:

"But Purna, these are violent,

cruel, and furious men. When they get angry and curse you what will you think?" "I will think (answered Purna) that they certainly are kind and good men, they who address me in insulting words, they who are angry and curse me, but who do not beat me with their hands nor with stones." "But," said the Buddha, "if they do beat you with their hands and stones, what will you think?" "I will think that they are kind and good men, since they do not attack me with clubs and swords." "And if they do attack you with clubs and swords?" "I will think they are kind and good since they do not kill me." "And if they do kill you?" "I will then certainly think that they are kind and good, since they deliver me with so little pain from this vile body." "Very well, very well, Purna," replied the Buddha; "With such perfect patience you are allowed to fix your abode in the country of these violent men. Go, Purna, yourself delivered, deliver others; yourself arrived at the other shore, bring others there; yourself having attained Nirvana, conduct others to it." MARY FARKAS

ANGLO-SAXONS Recently, in a NY Times article, an English anthropologist, Geoffrey Gorer, said:

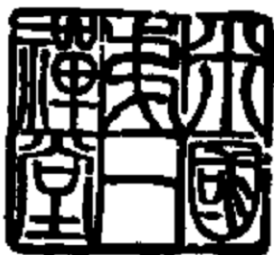
"In any precise, scientific meaning of the term, the 'Anglo-Saxons' do not exist; they are a figment of 19th century philological fantasy, akin to the 'Aryans' invoked by the Nazis and their predecessors. True, both Angles and Saxons were among the numerous invaders of the British Isles in the first millennium of our era, but to the best of my knowledge, there is no reason to suppose that they had a stronger or longer-lasting impact on the original population than did the numerous other invaders of those centuries--the Romans, the Jutes, the Danes or the Normans, for example.

"All that one can ascribe, with some certainty, to the Angles and the Saxons is the contribution they made to our vocabulary... and, with considerably less certainty, the genes responsible for the tall, blond, blue-eyed physical type which is somewhat more common in the population along the east and south coast of England than the rest of the country..."

"Anglo-Saxon" as used in the southern United States we can only suppose is a variant of "Caucasian," another strange word to hear applied to persons who never saw or hoped to be one.

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