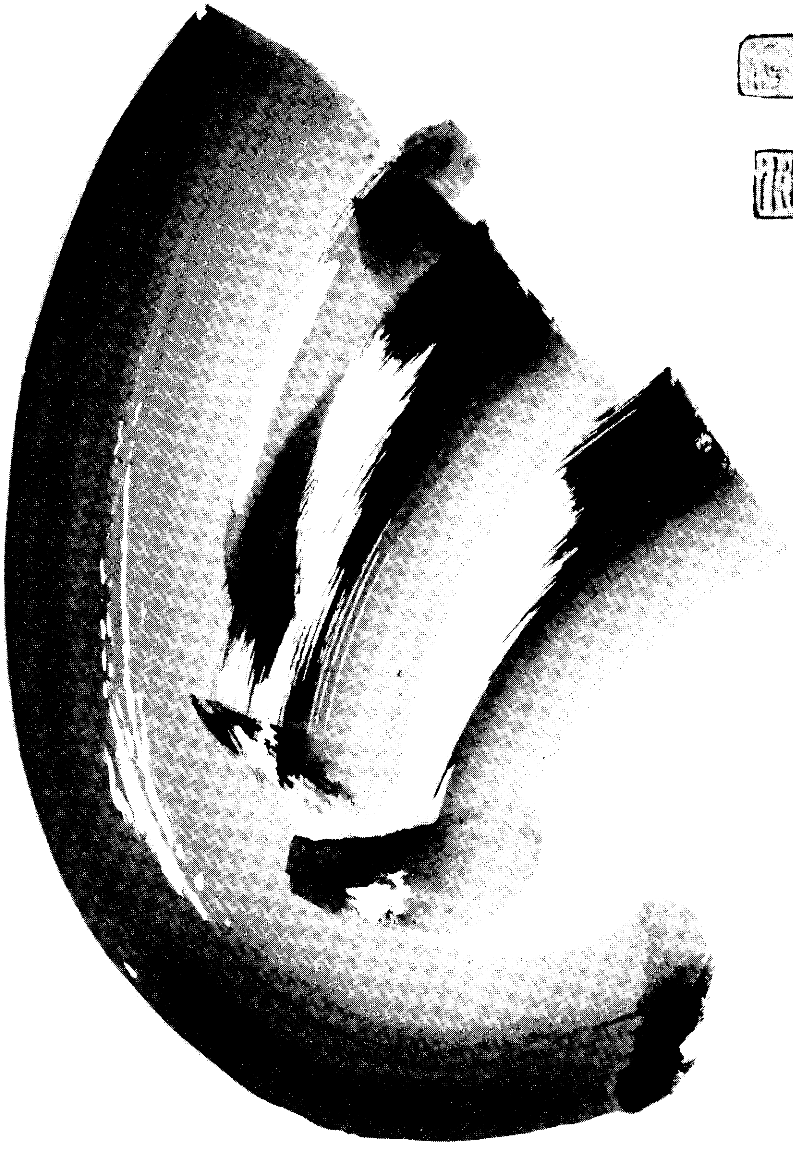
zen notes



SOKEI-AN SAYS THE THREE BODIES

The Three Bodies of Buddha, the triune body of Buddha, in Sanskrit, Buddhatrikaya, are not three different bodies, but three aspects of the one body of Buddha. The first body is called the Dharmakaya, the second the Sambhogakaya, and the third the Nirmanakaya, *kaya* being the word for body. To describe the relationship between these, a moon metaphor is frequently used in which Dharmakaya is the body of the moon, Sambhogakaya is the light of the moon, and Nirmanakaya is the reflection of the moon on water. The Trikaya is a profound doctrine, analogous to the Trinity in Christianity, and as difficult to understand. I am not eager to speak about it.

Sambhoga has been translated by Monier-Williams, the well-known Sanskrit scholar, as "enjoyment," and Sambhogakaya as the "body of enjoyment." But we cannot translate Sambhogakaya this way. "Body of unity," or "body of yoga" would be better because the Sambhogakaya stands between two things--between all outside, or phenomena, and all inside, or noumena. Of course I do not mean that phenomena is only outside and noumena only inside, but I speak about them as "outside" and "inside" for convenience.

There is a metaphor found in old Indian Buddhism of a mirror in the sky. When the mirror hangs in the sky, nothing is reflected on its surface. If it fails to perform its function--to be conscious of its own existence--it disappears. For without outside there is no inside, neither is there anything between outside and inside. The consciousness that is called a mirror is between the outside and the inside, like the hinge of a door or the link of a chain connecting two entities. Therefore it is called the Sambhogakaya, the body that joins two sides.

When you listen to a Buddhist sermon, you must realize that you are listening to something about yourself. I am not talking about something that is in the sky; I am talking about your own consciousness, your own mind, the mind that is clear as crystal, your consciousness of yourself. Buddhists are not talking about something remote, but about something very close to you. For the Buddhist, "God" is not living far away; the Buddhist "God" is living in your own mind.

The Sambhogakaya functions two ways: the first is toward others; the second is toward itself. Toward others is to see the outside--mountains, rivers, lakes, cities, farms and villages, men and women, and all animal life. It is also to be conscious of varying conditions. Today I feel very hot; I take off my coat. Today I feel very cold; I put on my coat. Now I am sleepy, so I sleep--and so on. The Sambhogakaya's function toward itself is to introspect its own existence, to meditate upon its own existence, as I meditate upon my own mind.

From Here I Sit

Sokei-an's Lives

MR. YEITA SASAKI - Woodcarver

Yeita Sasaki (who was later to be known as Sokei-an) began his professional career in art as a dragon carver, a rather specialized vocation, it must be noted, but one which in the Japan of his middle teens which coincided with the last years of the nineteenth century, had a sure market. His mother believed it impossible for a boy of sixteen to support himself on such a slim foundation but let him go on a walking tour of the mountain temples in the province of Joshu for one year.

With his tools on his back, he would visit a temple to repair its dragons or whatever, living on temple rations as long as the work lasted, it may be supposed. Then he would be sent on to another temple and so make his way from village to village.

Of a curious nature, visiting around at temples was a great pleasure to him, a pleasure shared today as well as yesterday by many Japanese, who like nothing better than a pilgrimage tour. Accommodations might leave something to be desired from a hotel-hopper's view but to a travel-hungry young man with a trade to insure a welcome, a mat of space, a bowl of rice and pickles, and an occasional hot bath were more than enough. And the mountain temple people were always ready for a yarn. Even without his professional skill, young Yeita would probably have received a welcome in the isolated places he visited, for he always had some stories to tell or news to bring. His eye was ever alert for what was to be seen and once seen, never forgotten. Was it not of one of those temples he told in 1942?

In China or Japan, monasteries are built on a mountain top or on the edge of a cliff. From there you can see a thousand miles before your eyes. In winter, when the valley is covered with snow, you feel you are in a world of silver. No color is before your eyes. In the valley it is so quiet. In the daytime when the monks are meditating, if there is any sound in the temple it will be only that of a mouse or a rat.

Not much has been recorded of his instruction in woodcarving, but he seems to have had a "knack" for it. *"When I was studying woodcarving,"* he noted of himself, (he seems to have been about fifteen when he started), *"I was afraid I would hit my hand with the heavy hammer that I was striking from the elbow. Then my teacher showed me a big arm angle, saying, 'Swing from the shoulder.'"*

One evening at Mabel Reber's in Greenwich Village in 1936, his reminiscence of the following year (probably 1898) was recorded by Edna Kenton, the historian of the Institute and Mabel's sister.

I had my carving tools and I had earned my way by temple carving through the Japanese Alps! But I had to sharp my tools--a long time it took me to learn that--seems to me four, five years. And to sharp my tools I must have a stone--a very fine stone, very expensive, and I was without any money to buy it.

"Go to see your uncle," my mother

told me. "He has plenty of money. Take him some of your carvings--ask him to look at them, and tell him what you need. Wear your father's robes and make him a call."

So I put on my father's robe--not his priest's robe, of course, and because my father was a very big man and I but a boy of sixteen-seventeen, I was too short for his robe and it trailed behind me as I bowed before my uncle.

He looked at my work and asked me many questions. He looked at my tools too, and asked me if I intended to make woodcarving my lifework.

"I wish to," I said, but I have a hindrance. "My tools are not well sharped. I haven't got a good stone."

"What kind of sharping stone do you wish?" he asked me.

"I wish the finest," I told him, "the sharping stone that comes only from the province of X."

I do not know whether it is really so, that the finest sharping stone comes from that province, but it is from that province only that the very fine stone comes, and it is a fact also that the province of X was my uncle's native province. I'm not sure--but perhaps his love for his native province was flattered a little.

He said, "Yes, the finest sharping stone comes from the province of X. That is true." And he turned my wooden image that he held to all of its angles, very carefully.

Then he said, "Very well, child, go back home and be a good son to your mother. I will order a sharping stone from the province of X, one of the very finest. Go back home and wait till the postman brings it to you. It will be sent to you personally."

I waited for many days--two, three weeks. Then one day it came, addressed to me, "Mr. Yeito Sasaki."

It was a sharping stone of the very finest. I began at once to sharp my tools. I was very happy that day.

It was Mabel Reber's impression that it was this same uncle who made it possible, a year or so later, for Yeita to go to Tokyo, to work there for an entrance to the Imperial Academy of Art, and to become one of eighteen personally selected students to work under the sculptor Koun Takamura.

The two years after the walking trip through the Japanese Alps, during which he was able to earn about thirty-five cents a day, enough to sustain his cash needs, Yeita spent woodcarving in a factory in Yokohama, where he lived with his widowed mother.

Later on, in America, the skill he developed was to prove of value, our notes attest, for throughout the greater portion of his life, woodcarving was to be a principal means of support.

When I came to this country as a woodcarver, the studio boss asked me, "Are you good?" I answere, "No, I am poor, but if you use me you will find what I can do." "This is not a school of carving!--and I did not get the job.

I was discouraged, but one of my friends said, "This is America. You must say: 'I am the best artist in the world--$75 a week!'"

I went back another time and said this. The boss accepted me at once!

For several years, I led a wandering life, finally reaching the city *of New York in 1916, when I was 34. The first night was spent at the Great Northern Hotel on West 57th Street. Next day I went to Yamanaka Company who sent me to Mr. Mogi's carving shop on East 23rd Street. I worked there at night, painting boxes, repairing art, carving ivory and wood. My carving tools, cherished from the age of fifteen, provided me with a hand-to-mouth livelihood. Next year I met Mr. Mataichi Miya of the Yamanaka Company (who was to play an important role in the founding of the Institute later on).*

1922 Returned from a Japan trip to Seattle, thence to New York and resumed work in art repairing. During my stay in Seattle I supported myself and my family by working at art repairing and woodcarving.

1929 In May of this year (after a second trip to Japan), back at Mr. Mogi's shop and also wrote the Chesterfield Furniture Company of Long Island City for a letter of recommendation (had been with them in 1925-26 painting furniture) which gained a place with Mr. Farmer, who had an art shop in which various small art objects were made and repaired.

1930 in a letter:

My daytime is used for work in my usual line of art, so that I may have a foundation for my future work. A note by Edna Kenton: With Mr. Miya's return from a trip to Japan more repair work came from Yamanaka's and orders for carvings as well, small figures that paid $25.00 which were then sold as lamp standards or whatever for $150 to $200.

Years later, in 1939, Sokei-an was persuaded to give a few American "girls" lessons in woodcarving. He was still cherishing his carving tools and continuing to make small figures in lightweight wood. Some of his disciples were made gifts of these and each bore some resemblance to its recipient, perhaps more inner than outer. His work bench, too, which hangs in our office, itself a work of art, was not safe from the tools of his trade. How many times we saw him sitting at it, tools and some small object in hand! But we none of us learned to be woodcarvers, though we labored with the tools.

"*For one year,*" he threatened us, "*you will practice sharping. That is the way in my country.*" And he would lovingly extol the virtues of his special sharping stones. "Sharp" is not a word often used in a Buddhist's vocabulary. But from Sokei-an we did learn something of its meaning as we practiced "sharping our tools."

1943 My last entry on woodcarving is from a letter Mrs. Sasaki wrote from Washington, D.C. She had been visiting Sokei-an at Camp Fort George Mead, in January 1943, where he was interned.

"Osho," she wrote, "looked better than I have seen him since he left home. He is very busy carving a dragon cane for the Colonel, a work he thinks will take a month to complete." I cannot now lay my hands on it, but my recollection of a later note is that the Colonel was more than pleased with Sokei-an's last dragon.

When I came to this country I found that there was a Christian sect called the Quakers and that these Quakers meditate upon themselves and empty their minds in order to receive the revelation of God. When your mind is filled up with something it cannot receive the revelation of God. So they empty their minds in order that the revelation of God may flash through it. This is something like Buddhism. But I observed that often, when they stood up and talked, what they said had little inspiration. They ought always to wait for real inspiration -- then they could speak.

The Buddhist way is to meditate upon oneself and to penetrate to the depths of one's own consciousness. So this consciousness is like a mirror that has two surfaces, one toward the outside and one toward the bottomless inside. On the surface to the outside there are many reflections--mountains and rivers, men and women. On the surface to the inside there are no reflections; only infinite Emptiness is reflected. But this infinite Emptiness is not empty; it possesses omnipotent power. Emptiness, in Buddhism, is not empty like an empty bottle; it is filled up solid. But this solid inside is pure, uniform and immobile so that it looks empty. When you mistake this Emptiness for empty emptiness, you fall into agnosticism and nihilism. IT is not void emptiness; IT is solid Emptiness.

This Sambhogakaya is your present consciousness. You are aware of it. You have it now. Sambhogakaya is axiomatic. It proves its own truth by itself. Without any debate, without any demonstration, you can believe in your own consciousness, your own awareness. This awareness itself is God in Buddhism. We call it Buddha. The God of Buddhism is very plain. This awareness which I have and which you have, is uniform. It comes from the same source. So we see the same forms, the same colors, etc.

This present consciousness is called Sambhogakaya. Do not think I am talking of something else. I am talking about the consciousness that is burning incense, speaking to you, drinking water. Western people call it " I " We don't call it " I." We don't need an " I." It is Sambhogakaya. It is Buddha's second body.

And what is the first body then? The first body is that bottomless Emptiness. IT is omnipresent; IT fills the universe. IT fills time--past, present and future. IT is pure; there is nothing to IT. IT is pure time and space. So, in it, Buddha does not feel time and space. There is no time and space. IT is His wisdom, His omnipotent power. But there is no way of looking at IT from the human side. We call it Dharmakaya. IT is the first body.

This consciousness appears in a person. This person performs his daily life. The consciousness that works in the performance of daily life is called Nirmanakaya, the Body of Transformation: transformation into the bodies of butchers, fishmongers, emperors, presidents, soldiers. It transforms its body into all occupations, all instruments. This body of transformation, the Nirmanakaya, is symbolized by the image of Avalokiteshvara who has a thousand hands holding a thousand instruments, and in the tip of each finger, an eye. We call it "Thousand-eyed Avalokiteshvara," or Kwannon.

The Sambhogakaya is symbolized by the image of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, in Japanese known as Fugen. Fugen sits on the back of a huge white elephant with six tusks. These six tusks represent the six consciousnesses--eye, ear, nose, tongue, skin and mind. The whiteness of the elephant symbolizes uniformity. Fugen is neither man nor woman, and has a very naive face.

The Dharmakaya is always symbolized by a child, by Monju in a child's form, because the child does not yet realize his conscious existence.

I don't like to talk of Buddhism in Christian terms, but sometimes there are analogies between the two religions. The Three Bodies of Buddha may be likened to the Trinity in Christianity. The Nirmanakaya is the equivalent of Jesus, the Sambhogakaya the equivalent of the Holy Ghost or the Christ Spirit, and the Dharmakaya the equivalent of God.

ADAPTABILITY Day by day, moment by moment, intrinsic adaptability in accordance with circumstances reveals itself.

Sometimes it does not work by itself. We have to dig it out to use it. You hear the Buddha's teaching--it is the soul whispering, the voice of the soul. You call it "conscience." Sometimes you listen to it. But it is very hard to take its order. "Don't eat any more sausage!" "Just a half more," you decide.

It is the sorrow of the human being that we know the law but cannot obey it. "Well," some old monk says laughingly, "perhaps that *is* adaptability." I think I agree. After all, adaptability is not always as cold as ice.

When you understand adaptability in accordance with circumstances, you will understand the unity of all existence--the unity between this and that, you and me, the entire world--all is just one soul working by the same law of adaptability. When we understand this law, we understand the law of unity of all existence. We also understand the law of society, of the human being, of nature--the law of everything. The same law works in the human heart, in the tree, and in the weed. When I was studying painting, I understood very clearly that the same law was working in the human being as in the leaf, the tree. Now it works in Sokei-an in New York. Giving lectures in this terrible language is the position he must accept. We accept everything.

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Mary Farkas, Editor

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Sokei-an Sasaki

First Zen Institute of America
113 E30 Street
New York, New York 10016
(212)-686-2520
www.firstzen.org

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