

ZEN notes



SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE THREE WORLDS

The Three Worlds or dwelling places (Tridhatu in Sanskrit) are named kamadhatu, rupadhatu and arupadhatu.

The place for sentient beings living in kama (desire) is kamadhatu, the first; the place for sentient beings living in the senses is rupadhatu; the place for sentient beings living in pure consciousness is called arupadhatu. For convenience, I have simplified all these various meanings in English and called them the world of desire, the world of seeming, and the world of non-seeming.

The word *kama* in Sanskrit comprises several meanings; desire, intention, purpose. The sentient beings who live in the three worlds, according to their own karma that they produced in the past chose their dwelling-place and must live there whether they like it or not.

The Three Worlds is a very old teaching of Buddhism. It appeared first in the 17th Volume of the Miscellaneous Agama, the Samyukta Agama. In the Lotus Sutra, in the second volume, it is said: "The Three Worlds are not safe. They are like burning houses."

Before I explain the meaning of the Three Worlds, I shall explain the place of the Three Worlds as a doctrine in Buddhism. But first we must know what Buddhism is. Many people talk about Buddhism, but they don't know what it is. Is it philosophy? Is it religion? No one seems to be able to answer. Some say, "Buddhism is not a religion." Another says, "Buddhism is a philos-

ophy." Someone else says, "Buddhism is ethics." "Buddhism is pure psychology." Misunderstanding comes from an ignorance of Buddhism and the sutras.

The Abhidharmakoshashastra, which consists of nine chapters, gives us a measure for understanding what Buddhism is as it includes its basic teachings.

- (1) The place of the four great elements (This means the materialized world)
- (2) The roots of consciousness (This is the world that is the organs of the senses)
- (3) The place of conscious beings (The Three Worlds)
- (4) The theory of karma
- (5) The deluded soul (the sleeping soul)
- (6) The awakened life
- (7) Wisdom (enlightened wisdom, of course)
- (8) The samadhi of complete unity (between existence and non-existence)
- (9) Non-ego

The destruction of attachment to ego is the conclusion. These are the basic doctrines of Buddhism. If you study and meditate on each chapter, in the end you will realize there is no ego. For this reason, scholars concluded that this is the Hinayana school of Buddhism and call the Abhidharmakoshashastra a Hinayana shashtra, because it places emphasis upon destroying ego. It was written by Vasubandhu.

The Tridhatu is discussed in the third chapter of the Abhidharmakoshashastra. It is the explanation of the places of conscious beings which have various consciousnesses:

Handwritten text in a vertical column, likely a title or description, enclosed in a decorative border. The text is written in a stylized, cursive script.



Sokei-an's Lives

THE ART STUDENT

Sila, the Sanskrit word for the three groups of commandments--established by the Buddha himself, leading to the attainment of virtuous daily life, participating in the benefit of human social life--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. Our mind is like that wild horse. When we take anyone from outside into the temple we must train this wild horse... 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... he loses his dilettante attitude.

During their first period of training, the disciples of the Buddha observe the commandments that are already established. They live under this severe rule like new soldiers in a regiment. Sometimes the rule is harmful to or out of order with modern life, but they must follow and imitate. We do not care, we just do

it. In the study of art, 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 second group of commandments through which 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. Now each one can see through his own eyes. He does not need to observe commandments established by anyone else; he finds 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 he does not need to continue studying 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. The one who has accomplished this second period of practice is sometimes called the "Buddha who is alone." He has completed his attain-

ment, but he has not yet taken any action with relation to the outside.

The third period is that of the bodhisattva. Like a horse trained for a long time 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 spontaneous, 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 everything as he likes. And he so expresses his spirit. This is the action of the bodhisattva.

When I was about nineteen I was studying sculpture from the Egyptian to the Greek Renaissance to Roman to modern French. I made copies of all those plaster of Paris statues. Then I studied from life for three years.

I realize that the world in which I was living at the Imperial Academy of Art was entirely different from the outside.

Once in my art school we had a female model who had a baby and every now and then she had to leave and go feed it. While she was posing for us, her breast dripped milk. One of

the students held a cup under her breast and caught the milk and we tasted it--it was very sweet.

But it went a little further. Some students sucked the milk from her. And then the teacher came in. He was furious. "What is this? What is going on? Gentlemen! What are you doing--this is terrible. I'll lose my job. Do you want that? Never do such a thing again."

At noon we were told that the principal of the school wished to see us. Such a commotion! "Are you children? What have you done? Where is your morality? How old are you? (We were twenty-one, twenty-three, some older.) Must we re-educate you in morality?"

Well, we supposed, perhaps it could be said that from his point of view it was immoral, but to us there was no immorality. However, we would observe the rules and not do it again.

Mabel Reber, who was present at the tea-party at which these notes were taken, said; "The professors had never thought of making such a rule before."

Sokei-an, laughing. "On that milk!"

Mrs. Everett: "There was a terrible scandal in Hinsdale once. A young man said openly he wanted to taste mother's milk--it was a scandal--everyone thought it was terrible."

Edna Kenton: "There is a story that old John D. Rockefeller had to live for several years on mother's milk. According to the story he had a herd of some twenty nursing mothers who provided his daily food."

Sokei-an: "I think it would be nice in old age to suck milk--in old age..."

SEEING PURELY

The question of art and "morality" was to come up many times--usually in discussions about rupadhatu.

Many times my friends asked me if I was not disturbed by seeing nude women while studying from life. (One time when we exhibited nude statues in Japan a policeman came and put a handkerchief in front of some of them.) I said, "The woman is a beautiful object to me." But my friends could not believe this.

One day (in 1937) a religious teacher, a Christian, came to visit me and saw my sculpture. He said; "You are a monk and you study sculpture! How is it possible?"

I answered: "All monks must study sculpture--first from life--then they abstract the beauty and make ideal images. They hope to carve the statue of Buddha."

"But those stream-lines (he gestured)--how is it possible that your mind is not disturbed?"

It was hard to answer him for he was not an artist; but any Zen student or art student will understand the distinction between objective and abstract ideas.

Rupadhatu is the world existing before you *exactly as it is*, without being related to your knowledge of names and not bespotted by your own desire.

When I go to a ladies' dress salon --I don't want to buy a dress. I see the beautiful garment, perceive the beauty of the dress, but it has nothing to do with me. I am not in kamadhatu, I am in rupadhatu. An artist goes to the country and sets his

easel in the fields. He has no desire to possess the land; he is at that moment in rupadhatu. But how about the farmer?

People are not trained in abstracting their minds from objective existence so that they may see purely. When you see purely--aesthetically --then you see the human figure in rupadhatu. The world of rupadhatu exists for your sense perceptions--not for your desire. You may go to see beautiful women performing on the stage in the nude, but do you dream of sending love letters to them? To see something beautiful without wanting to possess it is the state of rupadhatu. It is a state that you can attain.

CARVING BUDDHA

In the big ocean of sculpture I studied Buddhist figures as well as nudes. Finally I went back to carving Buddha.

One day my Zen teacher asked me: "How many years have you been studying sculpture?"

"About six years."

"Carve me a Buddha."

About fifteen days it took--and I brought it to him.

"What is this?" he said, and threw it out of the window into a pond.

It seemed unkind, but it was not. He meant me to carve the Buddha in myself.

This incident refers to the questioning of Hou-ben by the Sixth Patriarch so is doubly applicable to Sokei-an as the Sixth Patriarch's Record was his favorite study.

the consciousness that appears in the sentient being who lives in desire; the consciousness that appears in the sentient being who has no desire, but has senses; and the consciousness that appears in the sentient being that has no sense organs, but has mind. These make up the three different worlds.

The Buddha described these three worlds and made these three worlds a staircase of meditation to ascend to nirodha-samadhi, the samadhi of complete annihilation. The three worlds, explained by a metaphor, are like an egg. The yolk is kamadhatu, the white is rupadhatu, and the outside of the shell is arupadhatu. In the center of the yolk is naraka--hell. The outside disappears into the chaos of the infinite. So sentient minds have hell in the center.

We must draw a line between this kamadhatu and rupadhatu in our own life. When I go to the Grey Salon and look at ladies' dresses, I see the beauty of the dresses but my mind does not desire them. I do not wish to buy them. I am therefore living in rupadhatu, not kamadhatu. When an artist sees the statue of the Venus de Milo, he perceives the beauty of the form but it doesn't arouse the usual conception of "woman" in his mind. His mind is entirely isolated from kamadhatu in this case and lives in the world of rupadhatu. One English word particularly applies here. It is purely the world of "aesthetics."

The sense organs of touch, taste and smell belong to the world of desire, while the organs of the eye and ear function in the rupadhatu.

We may divide our sense organs

thus in two different ways. Our sense of taste, however, sometimes isolates itself from the idea of eating, or the idea of eating from the desire to eat. A winetaster tastes purely and has no desire to drink the wine. He may be completely intoxicated at the end of the day of tasting many, many wines, but his mind remains on the taste, the pure taste, of wine and has no desire for it. But at the end of the day he may go home and ask his wife to go to the corner to buy a bottle of cheap wine for him to drink with his dinner. He drinks this cheap wine with great pleasure--he enjoys drinking it. Here he is in kamadhatu. But purely tasting wine is in rupadhatu. So we cannot place even all those lower sense organs always in the kamadhatu. Sometimes even those lower sense organs isolate themselves from kama, desire.

Without desire the world that appears before our eyes is just a "seeming." When a farmer, for instance, sees a field he thinks of the price of the ground and how much he can harvest in crops in the autumn. The farmer cannot isolate his desire while he is looking at the field. But when, on the other hand, a painter looks at the field, he doesn't care about the price of the land or the amount of the harvest. He sees only the beauty of the field.

The story of Pygmalion, the artist who carved from pure delight in seeing, in rupadhatu, the world of form, and finally fell into the world of kamadhatu, the world of desire, when he fell in love with his own handiwork, illustrates these two

worlds.

There are six places in the kama-dhatu and seventeen places in the rupadhatu, and four places in the arupadhatu. Arupadhatu is the purely mental, metaphysical world. There is nothing that has form in it, but it is not absolutely empty. There are thoughts in this state. A sentient being in this state has no body, no purpose, no intention, but it has its own invisible body. This body is called the primary body. In meditation, the sentient being who lives in this world conceives nothing but space; first he enters into space. His empty consciousness enters into space, infinite space (akasha). Meditating upon this infinite space, he realizes duration, he realizes that space has time. Space is not merely an extension, but it has duration. And it has not only horizontal extension, but it extends perpendicularly. It is time. Consciousness enters time as my foot enters my shoe. Consciousness enters time and consciousness realizes that it has life; and consciousness realizes space and time are its own extension. It is not material, objective existence, but space and time are its own expression of its own constituents. In this endless space and in this endless time he meditates and he forgets his own existence. This is the third state.

Space is a mirror; time is a mirror. Reflecting each other, they reflect no shadows between them; there is no consciousness here then. Forgetting your own conscious existence, consciousness falls into absolute oblivion, forgetfulness. But from this emptiness consciousness

revives once more. Through time and space, through the seventeen spheres of rupadhatu and through the six spheres of kamadhatu it rises and realizes the existence of the entire three worlds. But these three worlds are not your own thoughts. You are not creating or thinking about this entire existence; you are possessing all these entire three worlds in your own nature. Therefore, this place is called "neither thought nor no-thought."

Some Buddhist schools place one more state upon this and call it nirodha-samadhi, absolute annihilation. So this absolute annihilation is different from that absolute emptiness in the third stage of arupadhatu.

There is endless material in these three worlds, but I am explaining just the outlines of it. I am sorry it is so awfully complicated, but there is no way of explaining this by the method of a so-called "popular" lecture.

THE IMAGE OF BUDDHA

When a monk named Hou-ben visited the Sixth Patriarch, he was asked his profession. "I am a sculptor." "Let me see your work." Hou-ben was at a loss.

Several days after, Hou-ben made a clay image of the Patriarch. It was about seven inches high and Hou-ben had exhausted his skill upon it. The Patriarch said with a laugh: "You know how to portray my figure, but not my Buddha-nature."

This incident alludes to a still earlier story demonstrating that it takes a Zen eye to picture the Buddha since only thirty-two of his thirty-three holy signs are visible.

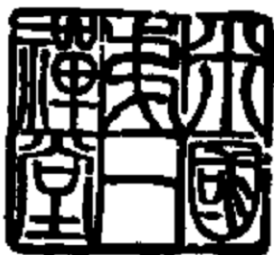
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