

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE THREE WORLDS, II

The Three Worlds is a basic theory of Buddhism. The three worlds are kamadhatu, rupadhatu and arupadhatu.

These technical terms date from the primitive period of Buddhism. They appear in the early sutras, the Agamas and Nikayas. This proves that these terms were used by the Buddha himself. The three-world system was originally that of the Samkhya school of Indian wisdom, and the Buddhists adopted it.

Rupa means, in English, color--red, green, blue, yellow, and so on--appearance, form, body, phenomena. All that we can perceive with our senses is called rupa, from the four great elements to the atoms, or atomic elements of thoughts that haunt our mind. Rupa, therefore, does not include the state of Reality, but it does include the states of all phenomena--in other words, all that we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or think.

The state of rupa is subdivided into seventeen states, often called "heavens." These seventeen subdivisions are explained legendarily, theoretically, and empirically.

"Empirically" means that you can experience them in the samadhi of meditation. These seventeen states are used as the measure of the meditation practiced by students of Buddhism.

When these states are explained legendarily, they appear as the "mythology" of Buddhism. In the Western world these seventeen states of Rupadhatu have been explained by Western scholars as the "pantheon" of Buddhism. Western scholars failed

to grasp what Buddhism is talking about. They thought Buddhists were talking about Buddhist gods and goddesses, like the gods and goddesses of Greek mythology. They explained rupadhatu as they explain Mt. Olympus in Greek mythology--Jupiter, Eros, Diana, on a mountain top. No wonder they failed to understand Buddhism! No wonder they put no emphasis upon these three worlds. This means that Western scholars have failed to grasp dhyana, meditation itself, the core of Buddhism. In conclusion I should say they know nothing about Buddhism.

These seventeen states of rupadhatu were grouped into four dhyanas or the four stages of meditation, of Zen. There are three stages in the first dhyana, three stages in the second, three stages in the third, and eight stages in the fourth.

The first dhyana is called, legendarily, the region of Mahabrahma. Mahabrahma is the king of this realm. Mahabrahma is, of course, legendarily, the God Brahma. His name was Sikhim, which means fire, so he is the god who has a fire nature. He created words. His first creation was "A" (pronounced A-A-A), the first letter of the alphabet. Then he created all the vowels and consonants. All words belong to the state of fire. They have no form and no shape, but they have heat and convey the meaning of men's minds.

The first stage of this region of Mahabrahma is the words we speak. The second stage of this region is the meaning, or that which we are thinking. And the third stage, the highest stage of Mahabrahma, is the soul of our thoughts. It is fire.

Sokei-an's Lives

The Art Student, II

Many times in reminiscing Sokei-an tried to untangle strands of art, nature, man, daily life, and religion, as he called them sometimes, or brain, mind, heart, and soul, in his developing identity, but, like the lines of color put on the disc of a painting machine, as soon as the wheel turns, the colors mix as well as separate into patterns. So when Sokei-an says "I gave up art for religion," the "art" was already mixed in. To see it separated out as a pure color in his self-portrait is almost impossible.

Where you place the center of your activity makes your attitude toward life. You must understand this. From my view of my own life, in my youth I was using my brain and then later my mind, and heart. These days I am trying to use my own nature.

When Japanese children study they have to draw Chinese characters with a brush. They cannot make big characters, only small ones, so they use their fingertips. Then when they study character writing from a teacher, he will say, "Don't touch the table with your hand. Hold your arm in the air." The student will say, "How can I make characters this way?" His hand shakes. The teacher says, "Put strength in your shoulder and let your hand relax. Don't move your hand or elbow but draw from the shoulder." At first the child will hold the brush or pencil too tightly. He breaks the point of his pencils. Then the teacher will take the pencil from him until he is holding it so lightly that it can be easily slipped out of his fingers. Then there will be rhythm in the movement of the pencil-work--it will be free and easy. If a big character is to be painted, even the hip is used to give greater force to the flow of the lines. Then it is the whole body that is used--not just the shoulder.

All art has this knack.

People say, "Use your head!" But when you use your brain, you make many mistakes. Use your father and mother consciousness (soul and nature). Keep your mind and brain and heart relaxed and free.

When I was studying oil painting, my teacher said, "Don't hold the brush tightly. Hold the end of the brush very lightly, buoyantly, delicately. In such a way, hold your brain, mind and heart easily. Keep your strength in your nature and soul. Do you know how to do this? I am quite sure you have not yet found your soul and nature. You must find them! When you do--you will hold the upper structure of consciousness lightly so it can relax; so it can vibrate and take reaction and action easily. If you hold it tightly, the tension kills the function. You use your brain but not your nature. You must draw yourself down to the level of nature. Hold the brush lightly!"

I was an artist and studied art from the age of fifteen. I doubted

Sokei-an's Lives

all schools of art. Finally, I entered art having faith in Nature as my teacher. I began sketching outside, carrying my canvas under my arm. How I adored Nature! I surrendered absolutely. One day I walked into a farmer's garden and set up my easel. There I knelt and worshipped Nature with tears in my eyes. The farmer asked, "What is the matter, young fellow? Have you a stomachache?"

When I studied painting, I was not given paints and canvas, brush and color, for a long time. For many years I had only charcoal and a piece of bread in my hand.

You have to make light and shadow, light and shadow, until light and shadow are swallowed in your mind. Then later, when your eye is developed, you will see light and shadow in colors. When you see a nude, you no longer see light and shadow... but the outline of the body.

When I was learning to paint the sea, my teacher asked the students not to sketch at the seashore or copy the waves in ancient masterpieces.

"Without a brush or palette," he said, "go alone to the oceanside and sit down on the sand. Then practice this: Forget yourself until even your own existence is forgotten and you are entirely absorbed in the motion of the waves."

We all took our teacher at his word, and day after day in the summertime we went to the seashore--to the so-called Ninety-nine Mile Beach on the Pacific Ocean near Tokyo, and there we would stay all day long watching the waves.

When we came back in the evening to our lodging houses, we felt as though we were still at the seaside listening to the pounding surf.

Some young artists would stay there a week, then returning to their studies in the city, they would suddenly seize their brushes and paint the waves in the very rhythm of the sea.

This is our way of art and this is also a way of samadhi. You must transform yourself into the object you are confronting.

When we make contact with the outside, with consciousness or matter, whichever you call it--some Buddhists call it real or perpetual existence--whether your consciousness has proved it or not, the existence outside is real existence, not phenomena.

After we see that this real existence is a single mass of existence, then very slowly we perceive many different appearances within it. When I was motoring on Long Island, suddenly our car came upon an immense garden of tulips; three or four acres were covered with only one color, that of crimson tulips. You could call it a "crimson" field. Then you would begin to discriminate, to see one part and then another. It was like an artist's learning to use colors. When you first look at a landscape, you might say "pale"--the sky is pale, the tree leaves are pale also. Later you would say the sky is blue, the trees are green; and later still you would find many different shades of blue and green--blue-green, yellow-green, lemon--you will see as many colors as you have learned, thus defining many different shades. Your

eye must be trained to divide all these different shades of color.

I studied painting at the Richard Partington California Institute of Art .In the beginning,I used only one color to paint the sky blue. My teacher,Mr. Partington,complained: "You are painting what?Sky?" "Yes, I am." "Then paint sky,don't just spread material on the canvas." When we look at the sky,every minute the color is changing. While I looked away,mixing blue to match the sky, even as I was doing it,the sky had changed. I am sure you understand this. The knack of seeing different shades of color can be applied to seeing human life. If you say someone is bad or someone is good it is like saying the sky is blue--nothing can be accurate in your thinking. "Good" and "bad" are names. We look at everything by these names and we always think about everything by these names; this is a naive and inaccurate way of thinking. Because your mother said "bad," it is bad; because your father said "good," it is good. And you teach this to your children and never think about it. Your brain doesn't work until you get into some real predicament.Then you must think about it yourself,and you must make a judgment yourself.

You see smoke behind your house and think there must be a fire;this proves accurate. You say: "Where there is smoke there must be a fire." Then you see a cloud over New Jersey that looks like smoke and you think there is a fire.This time it is not accurate at all.

When your discernment becomes accurate you will not make this mistake,you will know.When you come to

life,you know death. When you know light,you understand shadow. When you realize enlightened mind you can comprehend deluded mind.

There is a Chinese saying: "When the women and the horses become fat, you know there is a war in the future." The tree is green,but when you see the first leaf falling you know that autumn has come.

But our thinking is not this accurate.In the beginning,our view of the outside is not accurate and our discernment is not trained,so our thinking is not always correct.

I studied art more than ten-fifteen years,but I gave it up,because an artist must make something besides his own daily life--paint something. So his own daily life is not true daily life. (He is making something else.)He must express more than the ordinary person,must make something extra. It annoys me a great deal.

When I was a boy,I was looking at a lotus pond in the autumn. All the petals were brown and the leaves and stems were dying. And yet the whole thing was really very beautiful! I could not put in nor take out one single stem.

I bowed down to Nature and tried to understand--if I could solve this mystery,I would know something.This question haunted my mind for a long, long time.Then I solved the question after I went into the Zen monastery.

One day I went out to sketch with my easel and palette; I made the colors,looked and tried to sketch--but I simply could not work. That was when I gave up art and went to the monastery. There I found the answer to the question which opened

the gate. When I understood--art no longer lured me; I knew that art did not matter.

I was an art student when I was young, before I came to the monastery. I made copies of all those plaster of Paris statues and then I came into nature and I saw that nature is the best artist in the world, and I bowed to Nature and I made my obeisance. I was a true-hearted artist and I sketched out of doors with tears in my eyes. Of course I was a fanatic, but when I came to the temple I had no difficulty to pay homage to my teacher. I will bow down to the truth though this is a man of flesh. And I paid my obeisance from my true heart. It made it easy for me to get into Buddhism. I really threw myself down before Buddha.

I came into religion through art. I knew there must be some other way, through the daily life, but from that humility before great Nature I came to the gate of religion, of Buddhism.

Zen students understand that the conclusion of Zen is daily life, but there is one more stage--that is Art. It is not so easy to come to this!

An artist's painting of a dancing figure on a wall is different from the dancer in living flesh. The life depicted on the stage is different from similar scenes in real life.

So, we say that every-day life is the conclusion of Zen--but in this everyday life there are many degrees. Zen students must observe this!

"Standing upon nowhere is the foundation." So do not stand upon any particular place---stand upon everywhere.

We stand upon Dharmakaya. This is the foundation. And it is an art.

THE FOUR STAGES OF DHYANA

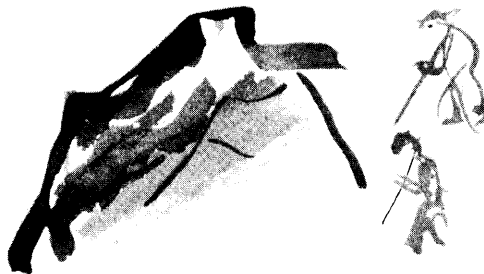
In the first stage of dhyana, in the beginning, we have the purpose of thinking--we think "purposely"--and then we think naturally. When we have the purpose of thinking, we think we must attain enlightenment. "What shall I do to attain it? I asked my teacher about this. He told me to observe the problem this way and to use my mind and to think about it purposely. Then we think naturally. It is like a dream with which you have nothing to do. Your mind is in the possession of nature. It works like lightning. These two

activities of mind disappear in the second dhyana.

I have come to this country three times. The first time I came with my teacher. He asked me to stay in this country and study English after he had returned home. I was left here alone with no one to ask any questions of and no one to measure my meditation. So I came to the sutras--to find some measure for my meditation; and I opened my eye to this description in the forty-fourth volume of this sutra, the Ekottara Agama, and I realized this was the measure.

My friend who lived in the mountains in Oregon asked me to come to Oregon and spend the summer with him and help him. In the daytime we were dynamiting tree-stumps and transplanting new trees on the mountains and in the woods of the Rogue River Valley near the town of Medford.

Every night I meditated in the woods, taking my dog with me as protection against poisonous snakes. At five o'clock in the morning when the first train whistled across the valley, I awoke from my meditation. I meditated on the four dhyanas from the first day of May to the end of September--every night. Without my teacher it was very hard to measure how deep I went into meditation. First verbal thinking disappeared; then natural thinking disappeared; third, my mind was filled with tranquil joy. It is like waking up on a beautiful spring morning, seeing the sunlight pouring through the window, and hearing the birds singing and no trouble in the world. For a moment you forget yourself; you are full of joy. But this joy has also an element of the lower stage, and this state of joy will disappear in the fourth stage. In the fourth stage you abandon yourself completely and forget that you are breathing. There are eight more stages above this.



Brahma thinks "A," which has no meaning, but it is fire. He vomits the last word of Sanskrit, and it is also fire.

According to the Buddhist legend, when the Buddha was born, Brahma appeared with a golden net, which he spread on his lap, and in which he received the holy baby. Then he handed the baby to the god Indra (Human Mind), who was the king of Knowledge. This is legend. The soul of words and thoughts received the baby and handed him to the mind of man. You must understand Buddhist legends in such a way.

When the Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, Brahma again appeared. But before that, when Shakyamuni Buddha was about to attain the highest enlightenment, Brahma had also appeared and told him stories about the heaven of Akanistha, the highest stage of rupadhatu. He told stories of an old Buddha who had attained this stage. This means that Shakyamuni Buddha attained the highest stage of rupadhatu before he attained final enlightenment.

When he attained final enlightenment, Shakyamuni Buddha realized that his attainment was very lofty. He did not believe that any sentient being could understand it. His work had come to an end. He wished to enter Nirvana immediately, as he did not need to live any longer, but Mahabrahma appeared and entreated him to stay in this world and promulgate his knowledge. So the Buddha changed his mind and decided to come down from the mountain to the village at the foot of the mountain and promulgate his knowledge of en-

lightenment.

His highest enlightenment could not be spoken in words, but the Buddha conceived the highest possible words that he could use to convey his knowledge of the highest enlightenment to mankind. The highest words he used, we say in our school of Zen, he spoke when he showed the golden flower to the assembly of his monks and when he divided his seat with Mahakashyapa.

After his death, when he was about to be cremated, he pushed one foot through his coffin. Mahakashyapa grasped the foot and raised it reverently to his forehead. We consider this the Buddha's last sermon. These are very profound teachings.

The region of Mahabrahma is burned to ashes in the last conflagration of the kalpa. Toward the end of the kalpa we have a minor catastrophe--the catastrophe of the sword. When that time comes, all men hate each other because of their egotistic desires. Everything they grasp becomes a weapon, and they kill. Every word they speak changes into a weapon. That is the sign of the end of the world. Today we feel it is the end of the world.

Then the next disaster is an epidemic. Everything that is eaten becomes changed into poison, and disease is in the air, and disease is in the fire. In the end there is famine, with nothing to eat or drink.

Then comes the great catastrophe.

The great kalpa fire sweeps through the universe and burns the sphere of the thoughts of men. The region of Brahmaloка is first burned. All souls escape to the second dhyanaloka, the second heaven.

The second heaven is called Abhasvara. It means "shining voice." This second dhyanaloka is the heaven of water, not the body of water itself, but the element of water. Fire cannot burn it. All sentient souls run from the fire to stay there.

And the second catastrophe comes. After the fire, a million years' rain washes everything away and the second heaven, Abhasvaraloka, also is washed away. The stage of mind is burned by fire and the stage of quietude, wisdom, like stagnant water, is destroyed. So this quiet state of meditation is not the eternal state.

Then sentient souls escape to the third heaven, the state of absolute purity, air, Subhakrtsnaloka. Subha means "beauty" "beautiful." Krtsna means "the state which is created pure and beautiful." It is the essence of the soul which is pure and transparent--the state of air.

But this state will also be destroyed by the third catastrophe, the hurricane that blows everything into nothing. The whole universe is completely wiped out.

These are the three dhyanas, or heavens, of rupadhatu, each of which contains three heavens within itself, together making nine heavens. Eight more heavens remain.

One more thing I must say about these three heavens. According to legend, after the first catastrophe, the universe is again created slowly. The fire is ended by rain and the rain is ended by wind and the fire-born earth becomes cool again. And the soul, that went to the highest heaven, comes down again to earth, from Subhakrtsna to Abhasvara--to

Mahabrahma and to earth.

In the first heaven the soul says, "We came from the same god, Mahabrahma. We are different in our forms, but our mind is the same; we have different bodies, but the same mind. The words in which we are speaking have different meanings, but the spirit of the words is one."

In the second heaven, the sentient beings have uniform bodies, but their minds are different. "This body of mine is the same in you and in me and in everyone, but the feeling perceived in the mind, which is called vedana, is different." Embracing that feeling in the depths of your bosom, you feel, according to your past karma, joy, relaxation, abandonment. The mind you embrace in the bosom of the soul is one, but the feeling is different.

In the third heaven there is one soul. The beings have uniform body, uniform mind.

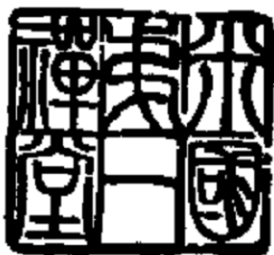
These are the measures of meditation. They are explained in the forty-fourth volume of the Ekottara Agama. You may prove it all by looking up this reference.

So when you study Buddhism very carefully, you find that all these mysterious tales are very carefully explained in the earliest sutras. There is no need to invent new ways of meditation. These types of meditation are called Tathagata Dhyana. And they differ from the Bodhidharma dhyana.

Buddhism went to China, and then to Japan, and then to Europe--and it rotted.. You must not follow such meditation. You had better meditate according to the old ways of meditation.

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**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