Zen Notes

SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE FIVE BUDDHA SKANDHAS

There is nothing to be compared with Buddha's skandhas. His skandhas are those of one who is beyond all things. His skandhas are those of superlative enlightenment. For Buddha's enlightened mind is "without leakage." The usual five skandhas are those of "leaking mind," but Buddha's skandhas are non-leaking mind. Everyone's mind is like water that is leaking out of a broken tub. When you meditate a little while, you see, you feel, you realize that many things are leaking out of your mind. Buddha's mind, however, is in the state of no-leakage, the state of Nirvana.

The Chinese translated this term to mean the five divisions of the body of Dharma. The body of Buddha is constituted of these five parts of mind-essence. In Hinayana Buddhism these five parts of mind-essence are the Buddha's Dharmakaya. They are like five branches that are connected into one Dharmakaya root. In Mahayana Buddhism the Dharmakaya is the body beyond Buddha himself. It has no parts. In Hinayana, Buddha's living body itself is a Dharmakaya which comprises the five virtuous parts, shila-skandha, samadhi-skandha, prajna-skandha, vimukti-skandha, and vimukti-jnana-darcana-skandha.

Shila means precepts. It is usually called commandments. Human beings have this compass innately in their minds, like the compass on a ship that always points to the North. When the ship turns to the East, the compass turns North; when the ship turns to the West, the compass still shows North. So human beings have this direct pointer in their minds. You drink wine, but if you drink too much, you put your hand to your head and say, "Why have I drunk so much!" Your compass is pointing to keep the balance.

Buddha's shila-skandha is detached from all the offences that the usual human being commits. Buddha's every act, the karma that is created by his body, by his mouth, by his mind, all are entirely free from any of the offences that are committed by human beings. Buddha attained the essential body that possesses the virtue of commandment. The commandments that Buddha observes are not commandments imposed upon him by someone else, as are the commandments that the monk observes. The monk observes commandments given him by his teacher; you shall not kill, steal, lie, commit adultery, etc. The monk takes these rules to observe. But for Buddha, the observation of commandments is simply a spontaneous act; it is instinct. Because he has this essential body of commandment, his acts are spontaneous. Whatever he does, he always acts in accordance with shila. Buddha's essential body of commandment is Dharmakaya. Buddha's Dharmakaya has this virtue innately. When we observe and study commandment, we realize all of a sudden that this is the essential body of commandment. So we do not need all those books of rules; we can throw them in the fire, for all essential law is written in our hearts.

In my opinion, monks who observe the commandments finally reach this essential body when they realize that all law is written from our essential mind, for they have become those who create law. Buddha attained this, so everyone took him as an example and followed him. How to observe the commandments

母と子の再会

SEPTEMBER MEETING WITH MRS. SASAKI

I met Mrs, Ruth F. Sasaki (at that time Mrs. Everett) in the late 1930's at 63 West 70th Street which was then the humble dwelling of the Zen priest, Sokei-an Sasaki and the meeting place of *The Buddhist Society of America,* later *The First Zen Institute of America.*

That meeting was the beginning of one of the great friendships of my life. We corresponded frequently through the years. My family and I were often guests at her house. Indeed, I was able to tidy up many a chapter of my doctoral dissertation at 124 East 65th Street. Bodine (my wife) and I were rarely able to persuade her to be our guest. But Bodine occasionally spent the night with her and was able to enjoy a much needed change of pace from the constant pressures of being housewife and mother of three. Rosamond, our eldest, spent the night there on one occasion. Neville, our youngest, asked permission to bring his fourth grade classmates for a visit one afternoon. I am sure that particular group from the Ethical Culture School (Fieldston Elementary) will never forget their visit to Mrs. Sasaki's house where they were shown some of the beautiful art objects collected over the years by their gracious hostess who, of course, showed them the lecture room where members of the Zen Institute used to meet Wednesdays and Saturdays to hear a reading of one of Sokei-an's teisho read by one of the members.

Years later, in 1958, when Neville had become a young naval officer flyer stationed at Iwakuni, Japan, he and one of his friends visited Mrs. Sasaki at her home in Kyoto. He and his friend observed with her one of the fire walking rituals and were permitted to meditate with Goto Roshi's students at his temple. He wrote Bodine and me in glowing terms of their visit to Ryosen-an, which temple had been restored by Mrs. Sasaki for Daitokuji.

Through the years of our friendship our correspondence kept us in touch with the affairs of our families, but most of it concerned the problems of the Zen Institute in New York, its establishment on a firm basis, its structure for the future, the search for a qualified roshi who could carry on where Sokei-an left off.

I had always hoped one day to visit Japan to meditate and to study Zen there. Mrs. Sasaki was very blunt in letting me know the difficulties one would face in Japan; nonetheless she kindly consented to write a letter of recommendation for me. I had also to line up letters from many others for my proposed sojourn in Japan; one of the kindest was from Sir George Sansom; he, too, warned of tremendous difficulties and endless frustrations to be encountered in Japan. Unfortunately it was not to be. Instead, I was invited to be visiting professor at the University of Göttingen for their spring semester of 1958 and to push on with my research on a Benedictine scholar and polymath of the early fourteenth century in whom I had been interested since my studies at Columbia University with Professor Lynn Thorndike. Again in 1965 (my next sabbatical) I was called to collaborate in Munich with the German Institute for Mediaeval Research (Deutsches Institut für Erforschung des Mittelalters) which wanted

to publish the political essays of my Benedictine polymath, Engelbert of Admont, in a series of texts known as the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. My chances of seeing my friend, Mrs. Sasaki, seemed very remote.

At last, in 1967, after a severe illness in Munich had hospitalized me there for a month and curtailed what work I could do forever, even at my regular post in the History Department at the University of Pittsburgh, I learned that Mrs. Sasaki planned to visit New York in September. I immediately wrote her to ascertain the most convenient time for me to see her again after so long. My university cooperated by arranging my hours and classes so that I could be in New York at the time she suggested would be best for her.

Saturday, September 16th, at 2 p.m., it was arranged that I should accompany Mrs. Sasaki to the graveside of Sokei-an in Woodlawn Cemetery. Later that afternoon we had a good talk at her hotel. That evening was a family affair. Bodine and my daughter, Rosamond, who lives and makes her living in New York, joined Mrs. Sasaki for dinner at her hotel. We talked about her family of growing grandchildren and of our own.

Sunday at 10 a.m. I had another visit with Mrs. Sasaki, this time alone except for her companion, Washino San, whose favorite pastime when she visits the U.S.A. is to watch television. My visit lasted two hours. Without my knowing it that Sunday morning visit was to be the last time I saw my friend, Mrs. Sasaki.

But that visit is not the last time I shall ponder what we talked about. Somehow, in those two visits with Mrs. Sasaki, the one on Saturday, and then especially the one on Sunday morning I understood better than ever before the whole thrust of her life and its purpose, the whole business of any living, of living more meaningfully-more constructively (as she had come to experience meaning). The "Why" of human life became very clear, very straightforward, very direct, very simple, and very wonderful. Questions which we had often discussed through the years no longer appeared significant. The complex problems of the latter half of the twentieth century, its politics, its economics, its society, its culture, all became relatively unimportant as we talked. Instead, the most important thing that anyone can do is to do what he is convinced he must do--after thinking(meditating) about it--in short to be oneself. Nothing else matters in this great work except one's own attitude. If you are a fisherman, fish; a student, study; a teacher, teach; a philosopher, philosophize; a soldier, fight; a policeman, maintain law and order.

In brief, Mrs. Sasaki affirmed for me the faith in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha that she had held for many more years than I. I shall never forget her encouragement to ponder again my own problems, associations, duties and aspirations. She affirmed, most convincingly, the facts of Buddhism and of Rinzai's Zen teaching which had seen her through thick and thin.

Especially moving to me among many illustrations from her own experiences with life were her accounts of her life in Japan since she went to live there in 1948. Briefly, her teacher Goto Roshi tried everything he could think of to persuade her that her job

in life was to return to the U.S.A. and to Europe as a Zen missionary. She did her best to persuade him that such a role was not for her. Instead, she made it clear that she would not budge from her conviction (that she had come to over the years) that her task was, instead, to work ceaselessly at the *Record of Rinzai* with all of its complexities of T'ang colloquial Chinese, at koans which were often badly rendered from Chinese into Japanese and even worse into English. When Goto Roshi found that his sanzen student, Mrs. Sasaki, would not obey him, he was furious. Obedience to the commands of one's roshi is traditional in Zen.

During the five years or so of Goto's anger with her, Mrs. Sasaki never ceased to be his student in all other respects. She continued to send him a gift at the customary times, e.g. birthday, New Year's, etc. She continued to show her gratitude for his accepting her as his student by sending gifts of tea and other items she had come to know he enjoyed. Nor did she ever cease during that difficult time to practice zazen. She encountered much vicious gossip during those five years, some of it downright harmful to her scholarly enterprises; this gossip spread even across the Pacific. Persons whom she had counted on heavily to assist her in her difficult work revealed themselves as temperamental, gullible, unreliable; in many instances purveyors of gossip themselves.

Then, curiously, Goto Roshi sent Mrs. Sasaki a note thanking her for one of the gifts that she had sent him as was customary among his students. He asked her to come and have tea. Within a year, all was as friendly as when Mrs. Sasaki had first been accepted as his student. Curiously, too, with the passing of Goto Roshi's fury, however, the attitudes of all those who had once worked with her and whom she had brought to Japan to work with her as well as those Japanese on whom she had once counted so heavily and whose minds had been poisoned by the vicious pools of rumor changed their minds. Not one of those persons but returned to ask Mrs. Sasaki's pardon for harboring false opinions of her.

In sum, when I last saw Mrs. Sasaki that unforgettable visit Sunday morning, September 17th, 1967, she was full of vim, vitality and enthusiasm to get back to the important work awaiting her in Kyoto. Before I left to return to my job at the University of Pittsburgh, however, she left me with such an overwhelming conviction of the value of thinking through one's own problems, of the value of being true to one's best and, most important of all, of the deeper value of sustained meditation throughout life that I shall always be grateful to her.

George B. Fowler, LL, Ph.D.
Prof. Emeritus of History
(Ancient and Mediaeval)
University of Pittsburgh

was an instinct with Buddha. The pigeon returns to its own nest, though it is not educated to do this. It is his natural orientation. So we, from bewildered, conscious acts, return to the instinctive observation of the commandments. This is our homing instinct.

The baby chick knocks on the inside of the shell to let his mother know that he is ready to come out. At almost the same moment the mother hen pecks at the outside of the shell and the shell is cracked so that the little chick can emerge. A Zen master has this same instinct. When a pupil comes to the point he takes him and pulls him out. Sometimes, however, the master must push the pupil back again into the shell. A chicken cannot do this to the baby chick. A Zen master can pull the trigger twice, but even he cannot pull it a third time.

Samadhi: Buddha's original mind is beyond all afflictions and sufferings. It is calm and tranquil. Buddha's original mind instinctively has its samadhi, its tranquillity. This is threefold. Samadhi in Emptiness ("shunyata") is one. He observes that the world is in agony, but that no one in the world has an ego. No one suffers. Therefore, essentially, suffering belongs to deluded mind. When one frees oneself from one's ego and from the residence of one's ego, he will attain to the samadhi of Emptiness. Thus he conquers the ego and attains Emptiness. When he attains Emptiness, he attains the state of No-form ("Alakshana"). Everyone has a form--as man, woman, animal, insect, but he is freed from all limited forms--all objective existence. Then he reaches the state of Annihilation ("Nirodha"). The state of Annihilation is the state of Nirvana. He realizes that all his desires and hopes are quenched. All sentient beings are converted into this Nirvana. He realizes that there is no Buddhism to be promulgated and that there are no sentient beings to be saved. He relinquishes three things: ego, form, all purpose. Thus he returns to his own tranquillity, his own samadhi.

Prajna: Buddha attains the perfect wisdom of the original nature of Dharma ("dharmata"). When we observe the koan, "Before your father and mother, what was your original aspect?" its destruction will bring the attainment of that perfect wisdom that is the innate nature of the whole universe. The koan is not a thing that you are to think about. It is a thing to be destroyed. When you have the power of wisdom, all koans vanish like snow or fire. When you have no power of wisdom, the koan bothers you. The koan saturates your mind, stains the color of your mind, tarnishes your mind. Use the strength of your mind to destroy the koan. The koan is a touchstone to test whether your wisdom is pure gold or not. Prajna skandha is, therefore, the original wisdom of Buddha. It is like the light of a lamp. I do not add light to the lamp. Electricity has light of itself. If anything is combustible, electricity destroys it. Buddha's prajna is like fire. With his power he burns it and reduces it to ashes. Thus he solves all the questions of sentient beings. It is his instinct. When he destroys all the questions of sentient beings, he is free from all the bonds of afflictions, free from all the bonds of suffering and doubt. Thus he attains emancipation. He is not residing in forms,

neither in color, nor sound, nor mind-stuff. He reaches the state of Nirvana, but he embodies all the virtue and potential power of Nirvana. One who attains the state of Nirvana doesn't die. He feels that he has really touched the magnetic center. It gives him strength. When he is weak, he is all entangled. When he becomes strong through many years of training, as Buddha trained himself under the Bodhi Tree, he destroys all the traps and snares. He leaves them behind. He attains emancipation, vimukti.

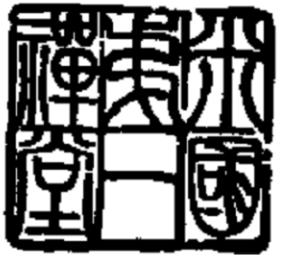
Vimukti-jnana-darcana-skandha: When one has attained emancipation, vimukti, he knows that he has attained entire emancipation. He is aware of his attainment. Without this awareness you cannot say that you have been emancipated, enlightened. This is something which you can really grasp, though grasp is not a very good word. It is better to say that this is something that you can embody yourself in, as I am embodied in this body and know that I am here. A charlatan cannot do this. Without this awareness you cannot teach anything to another. This awareness of emancipation is called in Buddhism " the wisdom that is attained subsequently." First, you enter the universe of Dharmakaya without clear awareness. You stand in the middle of the Dharmakaya like a newly hatched chick or like a newly born infant when you have just passed your first koan. Then day by day you gather this awareness. Your awareness goes into all the details, all the branches of sentient life. As a baby grows up day by day--gains his awareness of his father, of his mother, of the taste of milk, of food. You must have this awareness in the world of Dharmakaya. A human being must have awareness of his emancipation, awareness of the wisdom of complete emancipation.

When you attain the essential body of commandment you realize the form of commandments. You are like a fire that burns the whole field, like water that covers the entire field, or like a wind that sweeps everything away. The form of commandment usually stands on the sambhogakaya standpoint. With this power of commandment you can destroy everything. Then you will come into the written commandment, the nirmanakaya view.

By observing the commandments, you gain tranquillity in every place. By this tranquillity you will attain wisdom. By this wisdom you will attain awareness of emancipation. One who attains Buddha's skandhas will be supported by the lower sentient beings--devas, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, garudas, kinmaras, magoragas and kumbandhus.

Zen notes
Copyright 1968 by The First Zen Institute of America, Inc.
Published monthly by 113 East 30th Street, New York, NY 10016
Vol. XV, No. 10, Oct. 1968
Mary Farkas, Editor

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

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