

ZEN notes



S O K E I - A N S A Y S

"The Zen Sect reveres Bodhidharma as its founder. According to the old chronicles, Bodhidharma was the son of a king of South India, who left his homeland, reached the Middle Kingdom after a long journey, and proclaimed a new way of enlightenment; who at an audience with the emperor told him to his face that the erection of Buddhist temples and images and the recitation of sutras as well was useless, then crossed over the broad Yangtze River on a reed, for nine years sat cross-legged facing a wall in a temple cloister until both his legs fell off from decay, and finally transmitted to his disciple Eka the Seal of Mind, that is, the patriarchate of his school."

ZEN'S BODHIDHARMA When Bodhidharma came to China, the Emperor Liang Wu-ti asked him a question. "I am building many temples, and I have made a law permitting a man to become a monk; many men and women are converted to Buddhism. Is there any benefit in my doing so?"

Bodhidharma answered: "No benefit. There is none."

The Emperor asked Bodhidharma, "What is the highest and most sacred principle in your teaching?" Bodhidharma said, "There is neither highest nor sacred in my teaching."

Eka, a Confucian Taoist scholar, came to make an interview with Bodhidharma. As Bodhidharma paid no attention to him, he went away. Three years later he came back, but again Bodhidharma paid no attention to him. This time he returned after three days and stood in the snow outside the cave all night while Bodhidharma meditated. In the morning Bodhidharma saw him there in the snow. Eka bowed and begged Bodhidharma to open his honey-gate of Dharma.

Bodhidharma said: "You cannot beg for the precious Dharma in such an arrogant manner. To attain this treasure every one must go through fire and water."

Eka thereupon cut off his arm and offered it to Bodhidharma as a proof of his sincerity.

Bodhidharma said: "Throw away your filthy arm. I don't want it. But what do you wish?"

Eka said, "I feel uneasy. My mind is not relaxed. I wish to attain complete relaxation of mind."

Bodhidharma said: "Fetch me your mind and I will relax it for you"

In Japan, every child gets a roly-poly, sitting-posture Bodhidharma as a toy. The parents buy it at a souvenir store and bring it home for the children to play with. You kick it, it rolls over on the floor, but it always comes back to the right posture. This is a symbol of the Zen student's posture of mind. It is so important to us that a Zen master made a toy out of it.

Some Bodhidharma roly-poly dolls come in a set of six. Open one and there is another inside, and another inside that. The inmost is often a grain of rice. This inmost is a symbol of *sho-nen*, the Japanese expression for right mind attitude. Though you pass a hundred koans, or a thousand, or a million, without this right attitude of mind you can hardly call yourself a Zen student. And, it is sometimes said, though many may become enlightened, few practice *sho-nen*.

Japanese people use the word *sho-nen* in many ways. When silk stockings lose their shape, they may say, "These stockings have lost their *sho-nen*." When a child is naughty or unruly, the mother will say, "Keep your *sho-nen*!" And when the children cry at supper, the father scolds them: "Keep your mind in *sho-nen*. Take shape!" Zen warriors, about to meet their opponents with the sword, first come to position, give a shout, in that moment creating *sho-nen*. In the tea ceremony, also, *sho-nen* is cultivated. At first the students are very stiff and awkward, but as they grow to mastery they become more and more pliant.

Zen students always practice this *sho-nen* when they have time. When they have nothing to do, they come back and attend to *sho-nen*. Putting their body in shape, their mind takes shape also; it is straightened and doesn't play a merry-go-round tune. And when they get into the struggle of life, they keep this *sho-nen* always in

mind; they keep their shape. When we lose our shape we cannot call ourselves Buddhists. The Buddhist attains Reality; then, standing in the state of Reality, he performs his daily life. It is proved in profound meditation, but it must be practiced in daily life. Of course it is easy to practice keeping your mind in shape when you are sitting quietly. Continuing this practice in daily life is what makes a true gentleman, warrior, artist; it makes everyone strong and of a profound nature, no matter what his profession. It is this part of Zen which has so greatly influenced the art and the daily life of the Japanese people. It is not a small thing, this *shō-nin*. It is the core of Zen, that which makes Zen a religion.

The scroll-painting bears the name *Gyoku Sha* and the following inscription:

Jinsei nana kōmōbi
Ya oki.

Seven times knocked down;
Eight, get up!

The eight (count them!) Bodhi-dharmas were discovered in a Greenwich Village Shop, Japan Folk Craft, 172 West 4th Street. The owner, Mr. Iwasaki, kindly allowed us to reproduce this painting, and also furnished us with a translation of its calligraphy. We are trying to render this and other sayings into striking English without losing any of the flavor of the original. If any of our readers would like to try their hand at this one, we shall be happy to print the most effective.

人生七十古来稀

李易水



BODHIDHARMA'S ZEN

To experience Bodhidharma's Zen, there is no need to destroy this existence. You are facing everything. Without making yourself a single existence, without making your consciousness be absorbed into nothing, you suddenly realize that this existence, "I" and "that", are your original nature. You cannot say a word about it, cannot divide this existence into two pieces, mind and matter. Of course in that moment all color, sound, everything altogether--but without changing the nature of mind and matter--disappear. This is what is known as sudden enlightenment, Bodhidharma's Zen.

WAS BODHIDHARMA A REAL PERSON?

This question has been almost as much chewed over by scholars as have the koans on Page 1 by Zen students, yet the answer is still uncertain. For a recent (1951) survey of the tradition in the light of modern historical criticism, see Heinrich Dumoulin's 'Bodhidharma und die anfänge des Ch'an Buddhismus', *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. VII. Our capsule biography of the legendary Bodhidharma comes from Mrs. Sasaki's translation of this article into English for the use of the New York members of the Institute. For more details of Bodhidharma see also CAT'S YAWN, Page 6, and D. T. Suzuki's *ESSAYS IN ZEN BUDDHISM, FIRST SERIES*. But be warned: the history books are of no avail when it comes to the classic question each Zen student must answer from his own experience: "What was Bodhidharma's purpose in coming to China?"

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正念

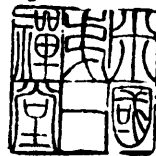
Chinese li, benefit, profit. Considerable light is shed on the connotations of "benefit" in Vol. 1 of Fung Yu-lan's *A HISTORY OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY*, particularly in the Mo Tzu chapter.

Japanese shō-nen, right mind, right mindfulness, the right attitude of mind. More on this another time.

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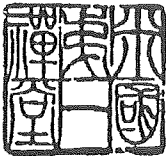
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