

ZEN NOTES



The First Zen Institute of America celebrates the Nirvana of the Buddha on February 15th. February 15th is also the day on which the Institute was first established. And it was Sokei-an's birthday. In 1942 Sokei-an wrote the following message to commemorate these several events. The word "studying" as here employed by Sokei-an is meant in the sense of practicing, not learning from books. For our students it is particularly meaningful at this time, for their Zen study under a Master resumes this day with the return of Miura Isshu Roshi for his second visit to the Institute. A new landmark is thus passed! The first intimation of Roshi's coming, which coincided with the completion of our first twenty-five years gave us great hope for the fulfillment of our dream to have an American Roshi. Today our dream enters the realm of actuality.

IS THERE SOME BENEFIT FROM STUDYING BUDDHISM?

February 15th is my birthday. I have reached sixty years in this human life. I have been following the Buddha's teaching from my twentieth year.

What have I gained studying Buddhism for forty years? I could not make any accurate answer immediately. For about twenty years I thought I was greatly benefited by Buddhism, but in the last twenty years I have been "ungaining" everything I had learned. In the conclusion I should say I have gained nothing.

There have been many from ancient times who asked this question. In the sutras it is asked. "Is there some benefit in Buddhism? By the study of Buddhism can you benefit your life? In the sutras the answers are written also. One answer is "No." The other answer is "Yes."

One day Ananda was standing beside the Buddha, fanning him. The Buddha asked Ananda: "Is it going to rain today or not? Do you think that the monks can beg food today in the town or not?"

Ananda did not answer the Buddha. Instead he left the place where the Buddha was and went among the monks. He told them what the Buddha had asked him, then he asked them: "Is there some benefit in asking such questions?"



I do not observe this passage of Buddhism from its worldly sense but from an entirely different standpoint. The Buddha came to this human world and taught us for forty-nine years and caused 5048 volumes of sutras to be written, but from our standpoint this amounts to just one drop of rain. In the conclusion the Buddha's forty-nine year sermon is just: "Will it rain today?" or "Nice day, isn't it?" Through these forty-nine years we have heard from the Buddha no more than the question: "How do you do?"

Nothing has changed in human life; no evil has been conquered. Physically, perhaps, we have conquered epidemics, and we have conquered distance, but mentally we have conquered nothing. There is no beneficial deed that human beings have performed in these 2500 years since the Buddha taught us. From the Buddha's standpoint, he just told us something and we gained nothing. So Buddhism brings no profit to human beings.

Then why should we follow this teaching and promulgate it? Why should I sacrifice my own desire, my family, and put on the Buddha's robe and speak about Buddhism? What is the benefit?

When Ananda asked the monks, "What is the benefit in asking such questions?" the monks answered: "Asking about the condition of the weather, asking whether the alms-begging will be easy or hard today, we, the monks, can think about the weather and about alms-begging intentionally, and by this attitude of thinking something with a concentrated mind, with intention, looking up at the sky and carefully observing the movement of the clouds, or stretching out the palms of our hands into the air trying to feel the drizzling rain, or stretching the body up on tiptoe and observing the faraway town and the movement of the people in the streets, we, the monks, can decide what robes to wear, whether it will rain or not, and which way to go, and we can give warning to the people following us. And by transmitting to the people of the future world this knowledge of knowing something accurately, we can benefit our followers to attain enlightenment. This is why we think the Buddha's asking us such insignificant questions brings great benefit upon us."

There are two ways then of coming to a conclusion on this question. When I think of these two answers I think I gained nothing by studying Buddhism, but by my warning you that by studying Buddhism you gain nothing, you will be brought to thinking accurately what to do about following this Buddhist monk and listening to his Buddhist sermons.

The term which I have been using, however, this "gain nothing," I must explain to you, for its meaning is entirely different from the usual interpretation of the words "gain nothing."

Ikyu Zenji, one of the famous Zen Masters of Daitoku-ji--I belong to Daitoku-ji--said, "What a rascal is he whose name is Sakyamuni Buddha, coming to this world and bothering many people!"

What was his point?

We human beings were happy and simple, but because of the advent of Sakyamuni Buddha we became terribly worried and very busy. He bewildered



us. And when we awoke to Reality, he gave us nothing. We found ourselves exactly where we were before.

Someone said Buddhism is like a toothache. When you are attracted by Buddhism, you go to the temple, listen to the monks' lectures, give up your pleasure and time, buy books, bring them home, read them without sleeping, spend your life, ten, fifteen, twenty years, and in the end realize: "I was all right in the beginning, there was nothing to gain." Well, the toothache is over, isn't it? When the tooth is aching you run amuck, but when the pain is removed, you just smile to yourself: "It is over." I feel the same way. I went through such terrific agony studying this Zen; I lost everything I had and gained nothing. But this "gained nothing" is wonderful. I am satisfied.

When Bodhidharma came to China, the Emperor Wu-ti, of the Liang dynasty, 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 have been converted to Buddhism. Does my doing so bring any benefit?" Bodhidharma answered, "No benefit. There is none!"

We are still chewing this question as a koan. Many students study it. Why did Bodhidharma say: "No benefit. There is none."?

Gaining benefit by doing something is an entirely human problem. If I am gaining something from Buddhism I am not following Buddhism. This idea of benefit is such a small idea. Must there be something to gain from everything you do? Of course today is a day of utilitarianism, we are utilitarianists. Every moment we are thinking, what can we gain from this? To spend a whole life and in the end gain nothing? A wonderful conclusion to accept and make the basis of human life!

This "gain nothing" in Buddhism is called by another term, also-- *anasrava* in Sanskrit-- the state of no delusion. No delusion means no filth. *Anasrava* means the destruction of filth or delusion, purified of filth. The Chinese translate this as "no leakage." Desire is a filth and delusion is a filth; clinging to a conviction all one's life is a filth: all these are filths. When a human being rids his mind of these filths he attains the state of empty mind. It means the dead weight of mind is removed; your insignificant mind-stuff is voided and you become pure-minded, simple-minded. This doesn't mean you become stupid, however, it means you become wise. You can see everything clearly for all mist is removed from your mind; the shimmering haze ceases, you attain *samyag-drsti*.

Some scholars translate this *samyag-drsti* as "right view." Its meaning is "seeing correctly," according to the knowledge of Buddha. I sometimes think it might better be translated "legitimate view." I am still thinking about this. When you look at something with "legitimate view" you don't look at it with like or dislike, emotion or delusion or notion, but according to Law.

The Buddha attained Nirvana and entered it today. This "gain-nothing" is always the conclusion of Buddhism, so on Nirvana day once again I bring this teaching to your attention.

THE MOST PRICELESS THING

The Venerable Nyogen Senzaki, perhaps the most romantic figure in the Zen world today, who makes his home in California, when asked to comment on an exhibition of paintings made by Japanese artists, began his remarks with a question: "What is the most priceless thing in the world?" Some people, he went on, would reply that a diamond was the most priceless thing in the world. A little thought, however, would prove them wrong. A diamond has a price, hence cannot be price-less.

"The most priceless thing in the world is the head of a dead cat," he said. "You cannot sell it at any price." He then told of some fish in Tibet, which, when the weather is right, come out of streams, make their way across fields and climb trees from the tops of which they enjoy the sun and air and get a view of the world. "That," he noted, pointing at the pictures, "is what artists offer you in their works--a view of the world. And each view is distinct from every other. You can buy the paper and ink or paint, but you cannot buy the view. It is price-less."

From an article in the Los Angeles Times, Aug. 22, 1950

CHINESE CHARACTERS

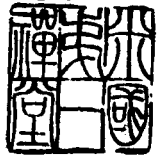
目 eye
 見 to see the 目 eye of 人 man
 This character was originally the picture
 正 of a 止 foot walking in — straight line.
 Its meaning is straight, correct, genuine, right.
 正見 The characters used to translate *samyag-drsti*
 right view.

Published monthly by

THE FIRST ZEN INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, INC.
 156 Waverly Place, New York 14, New York

zen notes

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 Zen Institute of America, Inc.



Vol. III, No. 2, February
 1 Year \$1.00
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