

ZEN NOTES



SOKEI-AN SAYS

FOUR PRINCIPLES OF BUDDHISM

I attained awakening by practicing a very few principles. My followers should attain awakening by practicing these few principles. If one has time, it can be spent reading many sutras, but I did not study Buddhism in any such way. I stuck to a few principles and I found awakening. I have been explaining these principles ever since I first came to New York, over and over again.

ANITYA At the very beginning it is necessary to understand anitya. Anitya is mutability. Everything changes phase every moment. There is nothing in the world which has eternal existence. Everything changes its nature constantly. Like the swirling and racing clouds in the sky, everything is changing. Science today supports this view, but human life is so short that we cannot perceive all the gradations of change. If we could live ten or twenty thousand years, we might see the great changes on earth and in the solar system.

Western people for long believed that after a man died he would stay somewhere and await the Day of the Last Judgment. To us each moment is the last judgment. We transmigrate and reincarnate according to the karma we have committed. Good karma, bad karma or indifferent karma makes us transmigrate and reincarnate. To me this present moment is the last judgment. I am paying back the karma which I committed in the past; the karma which I am creating will carry me into the future. We await no future. We receive reward or punishment in this present moment. Of course, by our own effort we make our own future.

ANĀTMAN Ātman means self. Anātman means non-ego or selflessness. Everyone thinks that each human being has an ego which is his own and which was made especially for him. Nothing exists alone or separate. All existence is relative. No one exists alone, separate, or apart. If my parents had not existed, I would not exist. There is no separate ego in the world.

Anātman says in effect, "I have no soul which is mine. I can do nothing except in relation to others." The water in a glass is essentially the same water as in the bottle; the water in the bottle is the same as in the reservoir. All the water of the world is the same water. I cannot claim the water which is my soul as mine.

(please turn to the last page)

ZEN AND THE RELIGIOUS FEELING

I was a child of a Shinto priest, and, as a child, I had faith in the Shinto God. The Shinto God has no physical body, is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. He exists everywhere and is not localized to any particular place. To my childish mind, God was wonderful and infinite. The Shinto God, according to that faith, protects us in every way. A Shintoist has no idea of a God who punishes; he believes only that if he commits any errors God will feel very sorry about it.

It is also believed in Shinto that a personal soul which is sacred or has force will become a god after death. The soul of a warrior or of an Emperor, it is believed, will be such a god after death. Shintoism has eight million gods and goddesses. When I first became acquainted with Christianity, I felt that it was rather logical that there was a jealous god in the world. (With all those millions of Shinto gods about, I could understand there being one god who was jealous.) Unlike the Christian, however, the Shintoist never thinks of angels.

When I entered the Zen faith, I realized there are no gods, no goddesses, and no angels outside of us. Zen teaches that God is yourself. Christian Science and the Quakers teach that God is within us, but Zen teaches that God is yourself. Your self is God. It is not necessary to discuss within or without.

I felt at first that the universe had become very small, squeezed within my size; and I did not enjoy that feeling. A Christian who enters Zen also must feel that God is very small when squeezed within himself. I am very certain that you cannot press your two hands together and worship yourself immediately because you feel very small and discouraged. You feel that there is nothing that you can do to invoke God in your prayer; you feel that you are lost and have become faithless and godless.

I fought against this feeling of helplessness for a long, long time. I thought there must be some way out of this helplessness if I have this small miniature of God which is myself in myself. It is not easy to take seriously the idea that God is yourself, yourself is law, your mind is law, your body is law. Before such thoughts as these we can lose the religious feeling. Oh, it is logical enough. We accept the idea as the conclusion of logic and reason. Perhaps, we think, we will have to discard the religious feeling of inspiration and adoration. In such a way we come to think when faced with this Zen at first.

Many people dislike this self-God-like Zen. I am not protected by God, they say. I am a mere man and there is no God! Zen sneers, some say, at all other religions as superstitions. Zen tries to annihilate all religious feeling--just like Soviet Russia! Other voices are heard, saying, "Nothing can help us, perhaps, but science." "I want something, but with this self-God-like Zen I can find no God to ask for it. Will not life become dry and worthless?"

I think this feeling is in all cultured people, not merely those who follow the self-God--but all people, agnostics, sophists, or sceptics.

Quite a long time ago, I came into that corner and struggled to make some way out of that limited existence. After a long while, I came to this conclusion: I am making myself limited by my own reason. It is ego or selfhood. Of course, Buddhism emphasizes that we must destroy ego. But how to destroy it was my problem! Of course, I studied the sutras and also realized much from meditation. I thought. Your *I* is not yours; it is an *I* which belongs to the universe; it belongs to all the potential power of the universe. The *I* of the fish, an insect, a cat--all are the same *I*: the *I* of God.

I accepted that. I am not my *I* but the *I* of God, many *I*'s embodied and many *I*'s unembodied, latent *I*'s that sleep as in the trees and which will develop later to become an *I* again. Of course, I don't think "*I am.*" *I am not existing.*

Thus through this limited self I tried to find some avenue to go out, to enlarge. Of course, I must be selfless, non-ego. I felt or thought, I am some body of water which was born in the ocean in some shape; and I broke that utensil and my water united with the other water. Then myself was not so small. My body keeps the seed. My body nourishes the seed. My body bears all those seeds and sees all those existences. Well, then, this present physical appearance of Mr. Sasaki is not myself, but the four kings of the four quarters. Earth keeps the seed, the god of earth. Water nourishes the seed, the god of water. Air carries sound, the god of wind. Fire shines on things, the god of light. I have four great gods within me and I am four great gods. Slowly I realized myself. Now I didn't feel I was alone in the universe. The radio apparatus in me began to sing again. The prayer which I offered to God was not to a God who was severed from or connected with others. To follow my own law I offered prayer. I decided I must cultivate my wisdom to see outer existence and man's universe. I must cultivate confidence in the outside and thereby keep my own confidence. I must not violate promises I make. I must work very hard and keep my own soul's dignity. If I violate my confidence in ME, I cannot find any confidence anywhere.

I remembered once when I was a child of about thirteen or fourteen, I was walking a country road alone. I met a boy. He looked at me. He looked about like me. It was a wonderful experience. I felt I was not alone. This is not a self-God existing alone. I made an avenue to escape from that lonesome, squeezed feeling of a self-God which I described earlier. I returned gradually to the feeling of God as taught by Shinto and Christianity. And I am in the faith of Zen. My helpless feeling was my own error. It should not be so. In Zen we should also feel the immense nature of God.



Dear Everyone:

OUR summer is drawing to an end. Actually we count September fifteenth as the day when the heat ends and the autumn cool begins. Most years during the last weeks of August the nights gradually become fresher and the heat of the day less intense. This year has been an exceptional one, however. Our rainy season, which came late, was preceded by two or three weeks of heavenly weather. The azaleas, too often beaten by rain just as they reach their height, were magnificent for weeks. It seemed as if there was to be no rainy season this year.

But finally the rains did come, together with ever-increasing heat. Even with the official ending of the rainy season, the rain and humidity did not come to an end, however, for immediately typhoons began to move from the southern seas. Fortunately no typhoon has as yet struck Kyoto directly, but as each passed near we had strong winds, almost unbearably heavy atmospheric pressure, and cloudbursts of water. We feel the approach of these tropical storms long before they reach our neighborhood, and wait rather anxiously, watching the newspapers and listening to the radio, for reports on their movements, for they can and do leave havoc in their wake.

In Japan people seem to be more conscious of the vagaries of the weather than in any other country I have lived in. Perhaps it is due to our houses here being so open to it. But nowadays things are changing and changing rapidly. Most of the new houses being built have four solid walls, punctuated with windows and doors, no glass and paper *shōji*. Tens of new apartment houses are going up, just banks of boxes with no verandahs or gardens. All the department stores, banks, movie houses, and restaurants are air-conditioned. Whereas in the old days on summer nights most people sat at home on the verandah or on a bench in front of the house fanning themselves, drinking barley tea, and taking the evening cool, this summer they have flocked into the movies, the patchinko parlors, the coffee shops, to take advantage of the *reibō*, as air-conditioning is called here. Crowds throng the streets. The roads are overrun with motor-cyclists, their girls behind or their families before and behind, cooling themselves by speed. Innumerable small privately-owned cars, something quite recent in Japan, driven by inexperienced drivers on what we used to call "joy-rides," to say nothing of the night sight-seeing buses, augment the noise and confusion.

Our quiet garden affords a retreat from all this, and we have scarcely stepped out of it these recent weeks. Sometimes we have supper on the lawn--a rarity in Japanese gardens, but giving us the delight of walking on the earth in our bare feet. Until late in the evening we sit on the verandah overlooking the pool and, above the incessant whir of the electric fans, listen to the songs of the various insects and the croaking of our frogs. Seldom have the dark and sodden clouds opened for a few rays of moonlight to come through. Due to all this heat we decided to close the library and the meditation hall for the last two weeks of August and the first week of September.

Gary Snyder returned in the late spring after over a year's absence, part of which time was spent on an oil tanker. He has taken a romantic little hermitage in a valley at the foot of Mount Hiei. Jan, a young Hollander, came to us via South Africa and England. For some months he lived in Daitoku-ji Sōdō, devoting himself both to zazen and Japanese language study. Now he is living with Walter at Rinkō-in. His year of language study is over and he is now putting all his effort into Zen practice alone--sanzen, zazen and *samu*, 'practical work.' Two American university graduates arrived in May from San Francisco. They, too, are working at Japanese language and zazen, as well as gradually orienting themselves to life in Kyoto. Their stay will probably be for a year or more.

We have had several transient members this summer as well. Mrs. R., also from San Francisco, stopped here on her way home from a leisurely trip around the world that included a long stay in India. There she had some experience in Yoga practice, with the result that her sitting was a cause for envy among some of the other sitters who are not so supple as she. Much to her regret, Mrs. R.'s plans to remain throughout the winter were brought to a sudden halt by affairs in America that demanded her immediate return. Another summer student was a young woman from Tennessee who has been teaching in a Tokyo women's college. Though her vacation permitted her to remain only a month, she seemed to feel that it was the best she had had in her three years stay in Japan.

Two professors of philosophy from American universities have also sat with us. One was able to remain for four months and a half, the other for only a month as he was on his way to spend the larger part of his sabbatical in India. Interestingly enough, both these men came to the same conclusion, namely, that practice was *basic* in Zen, that without it there is really no Zen. Professor W., who remained the longer time, found to his surprise that the experience of long sitting was so interesting and satisfying that his appetite for reading--which he had expected to give a great deal of time to--vanished of itself. He had no problem in disciplining himself in giving up intellectual activities so-called. He simply had no wish or desire to pursue them

during these months. He has come to understand that the emphasis put upon Zen students' not reading books during the early period of their study is based as much upon inner disinclination as upon external discipline. He told me also that he felt books on Zen were useless in imparting what Zen really is and, for those who wanted to practice it, even a serious hindrance, for they only increased the number of false notions that eventually had to be rooted out and destroyed.

It is interesting to observe the reactions of "professional" intellectuals when they contact living Zen. Their response to it and appraisal of its values are very important for the future of true Zen in the West, especially when they are teachers whose ideas are likely to have at least some influence upon the many students to whom they will lecture in the future.

The final O Sesshin of the summer period at Daitoku-ji Sōdō was held the last week of July. Gary, Jan, and Prof. W. lived at the Sōdō for the entire week. Gary and Jan have both progressed in Japanese to the point where they can have sanzen with Oda Rōshi at the Sōdō. Prof. W. walked twice a day to Ryōan-ji and back, a good twelve miles in all, for sanzen with Gotō Rōshi. Our two San Francisco young men have come to sit so well--they had done some sitting practice before coming over--that they could go to the Sōdō for the long evening meditation, though they are not yet ready for sanzen. Phil, who is also taking sanzen with Oda Rōshi, went only for the evening sitting, since he is busy in the library during the day. So our Institute feels that its students are showing real progress.

One of the pleasant events of our summer was the visit from Miss Yoshida, whom everyone affectionately calls Penny. Though most of you do not know her personally, it is she who, until the first of this year, quietly kept the Institute accounts, sent books out to you, and did the infinite number of small tasks that no one ever notices being done except when they are not done. Penny took a quick flight around the world this early summer, stopping off in England, France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, Thailand--where she saw our old friend Prok Amranand and his family--Hongkong, and finally Japan.

Washino San and I went up to Tokyo to meet her. Arriving a day or two early, we did a little sight-seeing and visiting.

We spent a delightful afternoon at the Tokyo home of the Marquis Moritatsu Hosokawa looking at a few of the hundreds of black and white paintings by Japanese Zen men in his wonderful collection. We had much to talk about, as Hosokawa San studied Zen in the Daitoku-ji Sōdō when he was a young man and has since kept up his acquaintance with Zen men and his admiration for Zen thought and art. He has made a specialty of collecting paintings by the Rinzaï Zen Master, Hakuin Ekaku. I am hoping to have five or six reproductions of Hakuin's paintings as illustrations for ZEN DUST, so that you who do not know his work may

have a glimpse of the vigor, originality, and versatility of this great man who, in the eighteenth century, revived Japanese Rinzai Zen.

With Penny, Washino San and I made a pilgrimage to the Great Shrines of Ise, the first time I have ever been there. Perhaps because I had heard so much about them and because the weather was blisteringly hot, I found this most sacred place in Japan not so impressive as I had anticipated. One reaches the shrines walking on wide and well-kept gravel roads, through old cryptomeria forests. Above the high wooden palisades one sees the cross-barred roofs of the simple white wood buildings and occasionally, when the wind blows back the white curtain that should protect the inner court from profane eyes, a glimpse of one of the lesser buildings. But only for an instant. Here as everywhere else in Japan today, the crowds of sightseers, school children, tourists, swarm about. There is no quiet anywhere. How can the old gods speak to one through the babble of voices and the incessant crunch of hundreds and hundreds of feet on gravel.

The increasing crowds and the swift changes in Japan were forced vividly upon us on other of our sight-seeing trips with Penny. The new western style hotel at Kashikojima, where the famous cultured pearl farms are located, is pretty enough but totally lacking in the charm of even the simplest Japanese inn. A new sight-seeing highway has been completed on Mount Hiei, sacred to Japanese Tendai Buddhism. The views from the highway are superb, but the beautiful green stillness of the deep cryptomeria forest, broken only by the singing of nightingales and the occasional sound of a distant temple bell, is gone forever. Now, an amusement park covers the summit, sight-seeing buses disgorge their hordes of passengers at stations near the more accessible temples, and loudspeakers set at various points blare out directions or popular tunes. Driving back early from Arashiyama on the night of O Bon was well-nigh impossible. Some twelve or more miles of sight-seeing buses, moving nose to stern in a continuous line, stretched from Arashiyama back into Kyoto. Each carried seventy-five or more passengers.

Japan is changing indeed, but the problem lies undoubtedly in the fact that I, I'm afraid, am not. But do try to come to see this lovely country before all that was so charming and so delightful is gone forever, never to return.

Ryōsen-an
Daitoku-ji
September 2, 1959

Quint F. Sasaki



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(continued from the first page)

God too is selfless. God did not create a soul with self. My will-power and my wisdom are not mine. According to my past karma, I have a strong or a weak will, a strong brain or a weak one.

To the oriental, we are *we*. It is like the editorial columns in the newspapers, always *we*. Sometimes in Japan if we must use "I," we write it in the margin or very small. We are ashamed to assert an "I" that stands like a tall telephone pole!

NIRODHA The third of my basic principles is Nirodha or nothingness. Western people always think of God as creating us and having a scheme in his mind. Such an idea of God is, from our viewpoint, very small. Our God has no self. God has no vision, does not scheme, and does not create. Everything was there from the beginning; it was not shaped or formed like this and made color, steam, liquid, solid, and man.

ĀKĀSA The original aspect of existence is what we call Ākāsa, the fourth principle. All the universe is Ākāsa. We observe all the phenomena of this universe through our five senses. In meditation when objective existence vanishes endless space appears. Observing this space we also observe that it has duration. Space cannot exist without duration. Space and time is the form of our consciousness. Just as color, sound, taste, and touch are the properties of the sense organs, space and time are the properties of our consciousness, so we cannot get out of space and time as long as we exist.

Where we have no consciousness, we do not call this Ākāsa any more because there is no time or space. We call it Nirodha.

Through these four principles I entered Buddhism. Later I meditated on the Three Bodies and the Five Skandhas, then I attained awakening. I did not follow any Buddhist scriptures.

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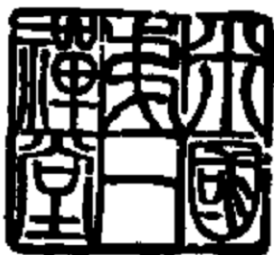
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