

ZEN notes



"Suppose a man should throw into the ocean a yoke with a single aperture in it. It is blown west by an easterly wind or south by a northerly wind. Now suppose there were a blind turtle in that ocean, and he came to the surface once in a hundred years. What think you, Monks? Would that blind turtle get his neck into that single aperture of the yoke?... Verily, that turtle would more quickly and easily perform that feat than a fool in his misery can be born as a human being once again."

Majjhima-Nikāya (iii, 169)

(At the time the Buddhists were developing the bodhi-sattva doctrine, birth as a human being, indispensable for initiation as a bodhi-sattva, was considered a rare privilege. Editor)



THE METAPHOR OF THE BLIND 龜

All souls are deluded, dreaming through the long, long night to see the sunlight in the eastern sky. The metaphor of the blind tortoise illustrates this waiting for the morning to see the sunlight of enlightenment.

The blind tortoise had an eye in the center of his lower shell. Swimming blindly in the ocean during kalpa after kalpa, one day by chance he came close to a floating log of wood. For one million years he had been waiting to rest. He crawled upon the log of wood. This log of wood had a knothole in the center from which the knot had fallen away. When the tortoise crawled upon the log, by chance the eye of his under shell came opposite the hole in the wood. The wood overturned and, like a miracle, the tortoise saw the blue sky and the sunlight.

It is as hard for us to hear the real teaching of the Buddha as for the tortoise to see the sunlight.

Such teachings as this were given by the Buddha to the young novices, the young monks of fifteen to seventeen, speaking to them kindly and wisely. SOKEI-AN, Feb. 1940.

THE FOUR NOBLE CONVICTIONS

SOKEI-AN SAYS

ALTHOUGH European scholars translating the Sanskrit produced the familiar terms for the Buddha's teachings known as The Four Noble Truths, the original word which has been translated truths really means "convictions." It means "to give up." My translation is "The Four Noble Convictions."

Reading about these Four Noble Convictions or listening to lectures about them, you soon discover that you are not really understanding them.

First, these Four Noble Convictions are not lectures which the Buddha gave to the five monks or disciples in Deer Park. Each of the four is but the title of numerous groups of lectures that were given by the Buddha. If you try to understand these four convictions by reading them as if they were titles of single lectures, you will be laboring under a misconception. The Four Noble Convictions are four groups, collections, or baskets of the Buddha's teachings, divided into these four different types by Buddhist scholars.

These four baskets are Cause of Agony, Agony, Cessation of Agony, Way of Cessation of Agony. Note that what I prefer to translate "Cessation"--*Nirodha*--is usually translated by European scholars as "Annihilation." My translation of these four terms--*Duḥkha-samudaya*, *Duḥkha*, *Duḥkha-nirodha*, *Mārga-nirodha-duḥkha*--is not "correct," but it does express their meaning. I have also changed the usual order of their explanation to the following: (1) The Cause of Agony; (2) Agony; (3) Cessation of Agony; (4) Way of Cessation of Agony.

All Buddhist theory can be put into these Four Baskets. When I read the English translations of Buddhism which were made by the Englishman Rhys Davids and found him writing that the Buddha gave this first lecture on The Four Noble Truths in Deer Park to those five disciples and that the Buddha repeated that particular lecture everywhere that he went, I unfortunately could not agree with him. These Four Noble Convictions cannot be presented in a single short lecture. Throughout the forty-nine remaining years after his enlightenment, all of the Buddha's teaching was on these "four" possible divisions; but it was not a single lecture given in a single day or even a couple of days.

DUHKHA-SAMUDAYA

The Cause of Agony

Samudaya means "accumulation."

Everything comes together and accumulates endlessly. The Buddha's idea of accumulation was not the accumulation of agony but the accumulation of our consciousness in its different states. For instance, the vegetable kingdom's state of consciousness has no agony. Then consciousness enters the insect, birds, animals, and finally man. So it means the evolution of man.

We use another word for the idea of accumulation today. We say "organized body" or "organization." A house is an organization of lumber, iron, steel, and the like. Human life also is a wonderful organization; human society is an organization. The Sanskrit word *samudaya* must not be translated merely as "the cause of agony." Much more must be said if we are to begin a real understanding of this word. A house--like human life--

has organization. If its roof refused to stay in its place, if its pillar wearied of standing up all the time, and if its floor resented being trod upon by men's feet, that house would become all disorganized and that would be agony.

Now if life is agony because it is an organization, what is the cause of organization? In the first cause there is organization, as in an acorn there is an oak tree. So, if anyone makes a cause, he must expect agony.

DUHKHA

Agony

In the collection of teachings on agony, there are many sutras. The Buddha observed that human life is agony. In English agony has a terribly pessimistic sound. In Sanskrit, *Duḥkha*, "agony," is a synonym for labor, or work. So, work is agony! Of course, if work is agony for him, the human being will have no happiness. Even while resting he must think of the work that is needed to make rest and leisure possible. On Sunday in America he often thinks of himself as a prisoner because he must work on Monday. The Buddha taught that we must accept life as it is, that by accepting our agony and the necessity of our labors in life, we find happiness. There is no happiness without *duhkha*. Seeking only happiness, a happiness without *duhkha*, man will never succeed. The Buddha taught that all those who attain happiness will find *duhkha*.

Life is agony because in life there is an accumulation or organization. Therefore we must accept this conviction. The Buddha said life is agony. He observed the daily life of men around him. In the hot climate of India everything grows very fast and dies very quickly. Life was very hard and too short to do what one wanted to do. There

was poverty, sickness, hard work, and death. Life was very difficult in India. Of course there are more agreeable climates. The conditions vary. The circumstances vary. In China, droughts and floods made life a gamble--sow the seed in the ground and wait for the harvest. No one in China could have much wealth so they abandoned all desire and followed the course of Nature. Thus the Chinese developed the attitude not to work--good fortune will come from some corner all right. In Tibet there are six months of winter. They are all wrapped up in blankets, eat once every three days. So the Tibetans meditate very deep thoughts! They must escape into the field of religion because life is agony.

Perhaps America, France, Italy will say, "Oh no! Life is joy." Or some fellows in Greece--that lovely country with productive goddesses--will say something similar. Conditions of a particular country and climate make its religion and give it to human beings. America hasn't found its own religion yet. Americans should have their own religion according to the climate and conditions of their country.

People think agony is like a stomachache, a toothache, shame, abuse, or something of that nature. But the Buddha's idea of agony was entirely different. He said that life was agony because he saw that it is mutable, that things never stay in the same place.

In a sutra it is written that when the Buddha was a child he once sat under a tree while everyone else was working the farm land around him. He saw a big worm on the earth eating little worms and an even bigger worm came along and ate the big worm; and then a snake appeared and swallowed that bigger worm.

The Buddha, who was seven years old, realized that life was agony, that there is a struggle for life in the world. This depressed him and he did not enjoy his life. These lines you should understand as allegorical.

The Buddha's life wasn't a happy one because the country where he was born was so very small, about the size of Long Island. The population also was small. It was an independent country, but it had to pay tribute every year to Magadha's emperor. When the Buddha left home, he met the Prince of Magadha, Bimbisara, who promised the Buddha that if he became enlightened, he, Bimbisara, would become his first disciple. However, when the Buddha was a child, his country was always being threatened by Magadha. At least we know that from that day when he saw the struggle for life as he watched the farm work and the snake eating the big worm, the Buddha became a little philosopher and kept to himself.

His father did not like this and tried to make his son happy. According to the sutra, he was surrounded by three thousand beauties day and night. So he abandoned his life. No wonder, surrounded by three thousand beauties! There are other stories.

He never saw the outside of the castle and was always surrounded by walls. His father asked him to go outside in order to be able to see the castle from there. On the day that he went outside through the castle's Eastern Gate, he saw an old man lying on the ground. The man's skin had changed to the color of the earth. "What is this?" the Buddha asked his follower. "Highness, it is death." He did not recognize death until that moment.

The next day he went out by the

West Gate and saw a sick man, his face old and white. "What is this?" he asked. Thus the Buddha recognized sickness. By the South Gate he saw beggars and recognized poverty. By the North Gate on the fourth day, he saw one who had shaved off his hair, standing strong and powerful on the corner, holding a bowl in his hand and begging.

"What is this?" he asked.

"Highness, it is an ascetic."

"What is an ascetic?"

"Highness, it is one who has left his home to pursue truth. A human being cannot walk straight, but he walks straight."

"So there is truth in the world."

"Highness, yes."

The seed of asceticism was sown in his heart on that day. Agony thus planted in his heart from childhood, he decided to give some meditation to human beings in order to keep them from agony.

Under the Bodhi Tree, the Buddha attained three convictions before his final enlightenment. Those three convictions made him realize the world is agony. These three convictions were: 1) Changeableness; 2) Emptiness; 3) Non-ego, that there is no human being.**

CHANGEABLENESS

"Well," some person says, "My wife was a beautiful girl, but beauty isn't eternal. Now she's eighty years old and not beautiful anymore. She can't even smile. I still love her but she's in the graveyard." Nothing stays in this world. Such is changeableness. Life is mutable.

EMPTINESS

Another of the Buddha's convictions is Emptiness. I thought this existence is existence, but what I see does not exist. The scientist might say this bowl is electrons and protons, jumping around like grasshoppers. The Buddha did not say

this; he perceived this in meditation.

Nothing exists alone in the universe. There is a famous proverb of the Buddha's: "If that does not exist, this will not exist." Nothing can exist alone. Fishes in the sea can never taste the salt water because they cannot know it without comparison. Fishes in the hot springs never know heat. The child will say, "Mother, the fish will be cooked in the hot springs." "No, child. The fish doesn't feel the heat because he was born in hot water." That is the theory of agony.

When I was twenty years old another monk forced me to drink four glasses of beer. Everything looked different!



They all thought I was
"Hello stones" I said

Little pebbles looked different. I couldn't walk. When I returned to the monastery, all the monks were aghast. I said to my teacher, "When I am enlightened, I will become a great actor, a great story-teller, a great monologist!" He said, "Very good." When I became sober I realized what I had said.

According to German philosophy elemental existence is noumenon. In Sanskrit this is *Akāśa*. So truly this is Emptiness and we are trying to grasp this. We are living in a dream and do not know we are in a dream. Sometimes I dream that I am in Japan. How does such a dream come? In this dream I think, "I must write a letter to America!" I wake up in this house in America. Very glad.

Fundamentally, in this empty world we are living a subjective existence, in our thoughts, our minds. When we come to this conviction we will have a great question: "Is this life worth living?" Men have two attitudes to this question. One will say, "I will live in truth." The other says, "I will live in power." The first one will be standing on the line of death and will accept death at any time. The second will use weapons. Both of them are human ways, but you must understand both of them even though you choose your own.

NON-EGO

The third of these convictions that led the Buddha to realize that the world is agony is Non-ego. Non-ego means that nothing exists alone. If my father did not exist, I could not exist. All is relative. Nothing is absolutely individual. The human being can be analyzed into the four elements, human consciousness into five stages, the so-called Five Skandhas. Rupa (the outside) and Vedana (the senses) are like a box and cover. Samjna (thoughts) are the inside. Also inside is Vijnana. It is eternal, universal, not yourself. Samjna is like water in a well, but Vijnana is like water in the ocean. You are a part of it. You are not individual. But human beings think that they are individual and fight this Non-ego.***

The three terms, Changeableness, Emptiness, and Non-ego cover a very large part of Buddhist teachings. You must attain a detailed knowledge of them by your own meditation.

*(I attained awakening, Sokei-an said elsewhere, by practicing a very few principles... 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. Editor)*****

I said that if anyone makes a cause he must expect agony. Therefore we must find a place where there is no cause and no result. But if we are living in this wheel of cause and result, how can we find this place?

DUHKHA-NIRODHA

Cessation of Agony

The Buddha said, "Well, Nirodha will give you the place where there is no cause and no result." Nirodha is annihilation. Therefore annihilate all that you have and you will attain enlightenment, Nirvana. Because of the difficulty in understanding what the Buddha meant by "annihilation" many have had misconceptions about this teaching. After the Buddha's death his despairing disciples thought they could annihilate their agony by killing themselves, but the wise Mahakashyapa said, "Annihilation is not the way. Keep his teachings forever."

The Buddha said, "Do not make any cause." I have said that in the first cause there is organization. The first cause is Avidya. To escape agony we must know what this first cause is. Avidyā,

often translated as darkness or ignorance, really means unconsciousness, unconsciousness of our own consciousness. It is as you are when you are in your mother's womb. But note that even in this natural state there is unconscious movement--as puppies with their eyes still tight-shut suck their mother's teats. So unconscious movement takes place. By moving yourself you awake to your own consciousness. If you strain yourself in meditation and use your brain, you awake. If not, you don't.

So first there is unconsciousness, or latent consciousness; second, unconscious motion; third, awakening in consciousness--that is, first, Avidya, second, Samskara, third, Vijnana. Of course if you try to force this process, Nature will tell you, "Mind your own business!" For latent consciousness is like a little sensitive plant or tree. When you go away, it opens its leaves.

The Buddha said of those seeking to be enlightened. "They are like the blind tortoise, always swimming in darkness, with no opportunity to see the sky."

This Picasso-esque character for turtle and tortoise is a picturograph of a tortoise. A tortoise is an animal with its flesh inside and its bones outside, says the gloss, a serpent's head, claws, a shell and a tail. The cracks which appeared in the scorched shell of the tortoise were used in divination and lottery.



Merriam-Webster says for tortoise: Any reptile of the subclass Chelonia; a turtle... In China it is an emblem of longevity. For turtle: Some writers have tried to restrict the term turtle to the aquatic Chelonia... calling the others tortoise... The restriction is not warranted by modern usage, though sea turtles are rarely called tortoise, and land turtles oftener tortoise than turtle.

The Buddha meditated on the chain of causation from beginning to end and from end to beginning. His final enlightenment produced the four doctrines of this religion called Buddha Dharma. Westerners call this Buddhism.

Buddhism has a beautiful fiction about Nirodha, "annihilation." The Buddha told his disciples in hyperbole that at the end of the universe ten suns will appear in the sky. We have one sun and that is hot enough for us when summer comes. When we see ten suns it is the end of the universe. A conflagration will sweep the sky and all will become ashes. Then these ashes will become Akasha or Ether. Akasha will become Shunyata, Absolute Emptiness. The world will come to an end. All souls will die and return into Shunyata, Emptiness. But this Emptiness itself does not die ever. This Emptiness lasts forever. It has omnipotent power to create a new world, a new universe.

Emptiness is a living being, so has active power. It has will-power and it starts movement in the quietude of the universe. This motion will all of a sudden spring as the ripples spread from the center of a pond to the shore, only it will spring without the need of any stone to cause the ripples. It will spread from the heart of the pure, empty universe which has no center and is omnipresent.

The motion will begin all of a sudden from everywhere, and then according to the law of creation or crystallization, this Emptiness will create the universe once more, without forgetting what has happened in the old universe. Thus there is a relation of causality--cause and effect--between the old universe and the new one. When it is created it will be a copy of the old uni-

verse, but perhaps in a different state entirely, both physically and mentally. The human being will live, but perhaps with different sense perceptions.

Buddhist Emptiness, therefore, is not total emptiness, otherwise nothing would be created again. According to your theory, if you cast a stick of incense into the fire, it will cease to exist and will become smoke and heat; then gas; liquid someday--frost or snow--and rain into the rivers where fish will swallow it and it will come as food to our mouths again! Everything will change its face from appearance to emptiness, but in the Buddhist's belief nothing will be destroyed.

This is a very important part of Buddhism--understanding the omnipotence of Emptiness. This Emptiness takes the place of your God. It is perfect and it is complete as Emptiness. It is limitless, infinite, has all power of creation--the complete law of crystallization; but it does not refuse to become Empty once more. It creates but it does not attach and it will accept annihilation. It will not refuse to undergo distortion or incompleteness. It will appear as the moon in the sky and sometimes as the moon print in the waves--so beautiful that a monkey, seeing it in the water, joined his hands to catch it and bring it to the tree top! The father monkey said, "You did not catch the moon. You lost the moon." The monkey said, "I caught the moon for as long as the water was in my hands."



The early character for moon was a rather accurate picture 月. In the seal form it became 月. Now it is 月.

While the water moves, the moon will move.

Our teacher always told us, "This world, my child, is the place where the moon casts its shadow. We are in the moon waves. We must try to keep our shape in this mutable circumstance, try to make harmony within circumstances." If you understand this, you will not feel agony in this changeable life.

This harmony is based on Shunyata. When the Buddha spoke of Nirodha, he gave three terms to describe it. They are very important terms: "Nirvana is Nirodha. Shunyata is Nirodha. Akasha is Nirodha."

To enter there are three ways or three practices. The three ways of practice involve: 1) Peace or amenability--good-heartedness. It is that when you see another you smile and say "How do you do."****2) The practice of good or beauty--cleaning a house into which you have just moved, and keeping your mind clean. 3) The transcendental attitude to human life wherein one does not become attached to anything.

There are many ways to illustrate true detachment. For instance, you go to the woods in autumn, see a pool with red maple leaves in it, and think: "I won't drink it. Its water is stained." But when you take the water up, scooped in your hands, and see the water is not stained--that is detachment. Or, you are in business--the business used in this metaphor of detachment is most often that of the wine-taster. All day he tastes wine and is not intoxicated. Or, a lady tastes and smells incense or perfume all day and doesn't faint. So in color not stained by color; in sound not carried away by sound; in water not drowned by water. Do not think this is an aloof attitude. No. Do not misunderstand the meaning of this.

MARGA-NIRODHA-DUHKHA Way of Cessation of Agony

Marga means pathway, the way to enter Buddhism. It is wrong to translate this Marga as "The Way of Cessation of Agony." It means not only to annihilate agony, but to promulgate the religion, to work for salvation, to cure everyone's agony. If this "Way of Cessation of Agony" signifies the curing of other's as well as one's own agony, it is an acceptable translation.

Duhkha, as I have said, means agony, and Samudaya means accumulation or organization, to organize this mental and this physical body to perform the functions of our daily life. These physical and mental organizations are the cause of agony. Why do they become the cause of agony? Because it is human life, and life and the functions of life are two different things. Man will suffer when things do not go smoothly. He thinks his mind is his own and that it does not belong to anything else. Mind is like flowing water. Making a new cake of your mind is not your own affair, but the substance is always the same.

Through cessation of agony one will be enlightened and will see that our agony is just our mental stuff, our dream, our own trance. In death for instance, one would think, "Well, my day is over!" and would join his hands, close his eyes, accepting death with faith and awe. Some persons do not undergo the agony of death. Physically one must accept pain--just a natural reason. Mental agony is more than physical agony in the dying moment. The struggle after all is delirious foolishness. This is just one example of the way to conquer agony.

In this Marga there are three important elements and eight different paths. Subjectively, there are three

periods. Objectively, there are eight ways, the Noble Eightfold Path. The eight ways--right view, right consideration, right speech, right occupation, right attitude to life, right contrivance to attain enlightenment, right wisdom, right meditation--are very popular in Western books on Buddhism.

Subjectively there are three elements through these eight different paths: 1) Uprightness; 2) Entrance to enlightenment or to enter, to trace the Buddha's path; 3) Realization of enlightened mind in every moment of daily life.

In the beginning, there is upright-ness. It is correct; it is true; it is conviction which you are not ashamed to hold in your mind. It is not moral; it is not immoral; it is right. This is the result of enlightenment; so that to enter into Reality, you will come back to daily life, and here you can attain the upright-ness of your daily mind. It is difficult to know what this upright-ness is or how to attain it.

And then you will find the entrance to obtain the Reality of the universe and of yourself. You will come back once again to this daily life to perform our functions.

To find Right View you go around everywhere to find a real teacher. The Buddha realized that to find the Right View from somebody else is of no use. He could not waste his time following another's Right View. He found it for himself. He went back to his seat of soft reeds on the bank of the Nairanjana river and decided that he would not get up from that seat again until he had found Right View. He tried to find it from his own original nature because it is direct and it has its own treasure. He had his own eye, his own ear, his own

feeling. He had his own microcosm, within him. Why should he seek Right View elsewhere? He made his own retreat into his own mind and he attained. It took him six years. It is wonderful that he did it in six years.

Monks today take almost a lifetime. The teacher will say, "Well, your idea is almost like the Buddha's own. You have a good idea of the outline of Buddhism. How old are you?"

"Forty-seven."

"When did you come to the temple?"

"At twenty years of age."

"Well, you have plenty of time."

The Buddha was a genius. He did not scrape the earth or tear down the clouds to find God. The first thing that he did was to annihilate his mindstuff--that heard by the ear or seen by the eye. And then he separated his mind into pure mind and mind stuff. Klesha is the word for stuff. "Mind stuff" is a very good translation for my purposes for this Klesha.

Pure mind is like water. When you were growing you did not feel mind. But today you are possessed by mind stuff; you do not possess it. When a boy goes to a dress shop with his sister, her face changes every moment. She takes out her pocketbook, doesn't know what to do. Her young brother looks at the dress, accepts its beauty, but has no agony of desire to possess it.

In meditation, you look into your mind. In the first month you find it is filled up with mind stuff or Klesha. For example, money and its problems. Usually money! But if you observe it as a cloud in the sky, this Klesha disappears and another will come. Actual mind does not fade, but mind stuff fades. Some one has talked about you and like smoke the thoughts come into your mind. Soon, how-

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ever, you begin to realize that there is mind essence which is not mind stuff or Klesha. Then you will enter Reality.

In this Reality there is nothing to see. You open your eye and your preconceived notions are wiped out--clear as a mirror. This moment is called Right View. You will not use the old measures. You have Right View. You accept everything--Right View. Then you come into daily life. Yesterday you hated this stuff of the world. Today you accept it.

Uprightness, entering to trace the Buddha's path, and realization of enlightened mind in every moment of daily life--this is the way of attaining Buddhism. It is the only way. There is no other. You divide your mind into pure mind and mind stuff or Klesha. One is stuff. The other is like water. You need no teacher for this. Do it with your own mind, your own effort--but do it. You will make the question and you must make the answer. You will prove it and find your own Right View.

* The Soothill Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms says that the Chinese "accumulation" does not correctly translate *Samudaya*, which means "Origination."

** These three "convictions" are discussed by Sokei-an in another lecture (See ZN Vol. VI, No. 10) along with Nirodha, which follows, as the four principles through which he entered Buddhism.

*** Note that Samskara is needed to make up the Five Skandhas. It is taken up on page 7. The Five Skandhas are discussed in some detail in ZN Vol. VII, No. 6, and Vol. VI, No. 7.

**** Quoted from the lecture printed in ZN Vol. VI, No. 10. The Three Bodies, not handled in this Outline, are described in ZN, Vol. VI, No. 11.

***** Reminds us of *jen*, human-heartedness. See ZN Vol. I, No. 8.

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The Four Noble Convictions was reconstructed by William A. Briggs from notes taken by Edna Kenton in October and November 1938 on a series of lectures entitled An Outline of Buddhism.

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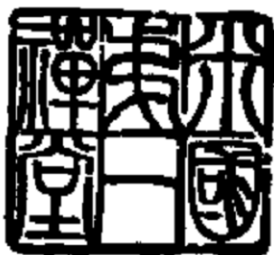


Vol. VII, No. 12, Dec., 1960
Mary Farkas, Editor
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Published monthly by
THE FIRST ZEN INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, INC.
156 Waverly Place, New York 14, New York

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