

ZEN notes



SOKEI-AN SAYS

NIRODHA Tonight I shall speak
 about Nirodha--Annihi-
lation. Both Nirodha and Nirvana
are very important terms used by
the Buddha. They have entirely
different meanings. I shall speak
about Nirvana some time in the
future; tonight I shall speak
about Nirodha: about how a Bud-
dhist conceives this idea of An-
nihilation and how the Buddha
defined the meaning of it. The
meaning of Nirodha is often mis-
interpreted; tonight I shall speak
about it in the true sense of
Buddhism. This is very important
to the student of Buddhism.

Nirodha, or Annihilation, is re-
lated to the Five Skandhas, the
five aggregations of the elements
of a sentient being. In one of
the many interesting little sutras
of the Agama, the Buddha was asked,

“What are the five *Dāna*
Almsgiving) that produce
no merit, and what are the
five *Dāna* that produce mer-
it?” The Buddha said, “When
one gives another a sword,
no merit is produced.”

For example, if someone gives a
sword to a monk, the monk will say,
“Thank you just the same, but it
is no good to me.”

“When one gives another
poison, it produces no merit.
When one gives another a wild
ox, it produces no merit.”

In India there are many wild oxen.

If they come into the town they
kill the sacred cows.

“When one gives another
a prostitute, a bad woman, it
produces no merit. When one
offers a shrine to the Evil
God, it produces no merit.”

In the Buddha's time there was an
evil god symbolized by an ox. This
was worshipped by the lower castes.
At a festival they would paint the
floor with cow dung and burn in-
cense and recite incantations and
bewitch men's souls. In today's
terms this was the god of sex, so
they were sex worshippers.

“What are the alms that
produce merit? To make a
park, to grow trees, to make
a bridge, to make a great
ship, and to build a temple
for monks -- these produce
merit.

“It is said that a woman
has five powers that enable
her to regard her husband
with contempt. The first is
her power of beauty. The
second is the power of her
relatives. The third is the
power of her father's prop-
erty.”

She is a rich man's daughter.

“The fourth is the power
of her children.”

She has many children and the
father must work like a slave.

“And the fifth is her

own strength of body."
She must be a strong woman.

" But there is one power that overcomes woman's five powers. This is the power of wealth. The rich can subvert the woman's five powers.

" Marapapima has five powers (in English Mara is Devil). With these five powers he bewitches all souls--Rupa, Vedana, Samjna, Samskara, Vijnana. These are the Devil's five powers by which he deludes all sentient beings."

I think I should explain. I am repeating the same thing--these Five Skandhas -- over and over again. Rupa is this: the sky is blue, the earth yellow; mountain, river, sun, moon, storm, and flower--and this body--are called Rupa. In English Rupa is Appearance, phenomena that we see, that can be observed. Colors--red, green, yellow--all these too are Rupa. To us, Rupa exists on the outside; we believe it exists objectively. But if you are enlightened, you know that this Rupa is your subjective existence; Rupa is your sensation, it does not exist outside. Sound is in your eardrum; outside there is no sound. This is the essence of all spiritual religion; without knowing this you cannot attain anything in the spiritual realm. Objectively there is no white, no red, no black, no fan, no people--realization of this is the entrance to all spiritual existence.

Vedana is what happens when I

pinch my skin--I feel pain. When I taste sugar, it is sweet. Rupa is the eye and ear; Vedana smell, taste, and touch--sensation. Samjna is notion--thoughts that you can control--but Samskara is emotion--the movement of your mind that you cannot control. It is deeper than Samjna, as in a dream when a tiger is pursuing you: you are flying but your wings are so heavy--and then you wake up... " OH! "--that is Samskara. And Vijnana is consciousness, like the eye of the mind. A tree has consciousness; a table does not but a tree does. A tree's consciousness is not so clear and bright as human consciousness but nevertheless a tree does have consciousness. It has no eye or ear but it has consciousness. The human consciousness is in the heart.

These Five Skandhas (or shadows or stems) are the tools of the devil, and with them he makes dolts out of human beings. All this mess of life comes from these Five Skandhas, these five stems.

The Buddha said: " But there is one power that subdues these five powers of the Devil. It is the power of Nirodha--of Annihilation." Then Ananda asked: " What is Annihilation?" The Buddha said: " These Five Skandhas are the Dharmas of Annihilation."

This is very deep. The Buddha's idea of Annihilation is not like other teachers' ideas that one should wipe the slate clean of all the Five Skandhas--Rupa, Vedana, Samjna, Samskara, Vijnana--and then think that that is Annihilation. The Buddha's idea is very



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Dear Everyone:

ON the second of January Kanaseki San and Sumie San came in the late morning. Though the wind and sleet were continuing unabated, we decided to drive the twenty-five miles farther along the shore of Lake Shinji to the Grand Shrine of Izumo. A continuous line of sight-seeing buses, taxis, and private cars passed us, all seemingly going to or coming from the shrine.

Izumo is my favorite Shinto shrine. It is the oldest major shrine in Japan, and second in importance only to that of Ise. The shrine of Ise, hidden away in its primeval forest of dark pines, though archaic in its general construction, gives a feeling of a certain conscious sophistication. All we mere mortals are permitted to see of this Japanese holy of holies is the pure white plaster walls of the small central compound and the thatched roofs of the inner buildings and their slender whitewood crossed roof beams. Simplicity, purity, and mystery are the qualities of Ise. The architecture of Izumo, on the other hand, is of a primitive ruggedness. It is the elemental powers of nature that hold sway at Izumo.

There is considerable evidence for the theory that the deity of Izumo was someone who came from the South Sea Islands in the prehistoric period and founded and ruled a great state in the district. He is traditionally credited with introducing medicine, silk culture, and fishing to Japan; popularly he is the god who dispenses the greatest measure of good fortune for the coming year and is particularly helpful in arranging advantageous marriages. Hence the crowds that journey from every part of Japan to this somewhat remote place, particularly at the New Year.

The shrine is situated at the far end of a great park and approached by a long and broad avenue bordered with a double row of magnificent old pines. Behind it rises a semi-circle of jagged pine covered peaks, their steep sides serried with deep ravines and gorges. All the major buildings are easy of approach, and most are built in what is known as Izumo style. They are constructed of massive timbers weathered almost to black, and raised well above the ground on heavy stilts. The sharply inclined roofs with deep overhanging eaves are of enormously thick thatch, and the heavy roof beams that rise to cross above them bear elaborate gilt bronze decorations.

The avenue leading to the shrine was lined, this afternoon, with tents and booths in which the usual knickknacks were being sold. In addition, because it was the New Year, kakemonos with printed pictures of tigers in numerous poses--this is the Year of the Tiger--the Seven Gods of Good Luck, and other auspicious subjects were being offered. The crowd was large, considering the weather. In spite of the continuing rain and sleet and wind, most of the suppliants were dressed as if for a sunny day outing, the women wearing light-colored kimonos and haoris,

if in Japanese clothes, or thin shoes with high spiked heels and light coats, if in Western style. There must have been many sick people the next day.

A huge new building placed just in front of the main shrine has recently been completed. Here shrine maidens in their white kimonos and long scarlet pleated skirts perform the charming primitive dances for a sum, and the priests, also in white kimonos, but with pale blue silk pleated skirts, invoke the god's blessings for the believers, also for a sum. The great roof of this new building is in the thatched style, but made of tiny overlapping copper shingles. It alone must have cost a fortune, to say nothing of the great whitewood timbers of which the entire building is constructed. Other secondary buildings as well are being newly roofed with copper shingles. All of which would seem to substantiate the current rumors that Shinto shrines are unbelievably rich and flourishing these days. The papers say that 2,000,000 people visited the Meiji Shrine in Tokyo on the first three days of the New Year. The crowd was so great that it was impossible for people to raise their hands to clap, let alone get up to the front of the main shrine building and pull the rope of the gong whose muffled rattle notifies the god of their presence.

Here and there in the shrine compound of Izumo were large bushes, to every branch and twig of which were tied countless narrow strips of white paper bearing the names of lovers who hope the god will look with favor upon their union. The offices where charms to ward off misfortune and illness are sold were doing a "land office" business. So also were those selling fortunes obtained by shaking a numbered bamboo stick through a small hole in the top of a box containing a hundred or more of such sticks, and procuring a corresponding numbered printed fortune. People cling very tenaciously to the old superstitions even in this space age.

We paid our respects to the god by bowing before the heavy closed doors of the main shrine, then walked around to the charming miniature shrine which is the dwelling of his wife and which he is said to visit from time to time. On the opposite side of the compound we came upon a long low building divided into many small separate compartments and with a narrow verandah running along its length. This is where, during the month of October, the god of Izumo entertains the more important gods from all over the land at a conference for the welfare of the country.

But it was growing colder and the sleet had now turned into a heavy rain. We were glad to drink from shallow white clay cups the hot sake which the priests were offering for a sum, a final gesture in honor of the god, for sake is the drink of all the *kami*. Walking away down the avenue of gnarled pines, from time to time we turned to look back at the handsome black thatched roofs and beyond them to the mist swirling around the pine crested peaks, or rushing torrent-like down the dark gorges.

That evening the entire Kanaseki family came to the "Military Headquarters of the Eight Clouds" to have with us the wild duck dinner for which the inn is famous. We gathered first in our own palatial rooms and were served thick green tea and heavy sweet cakes, the usual prelude to a lengthy dinner. Then we adjourned

to a large new room which Kobota San has recently added to the old inn for just such parties. Places were arranged around three sides of the room with an empty space in the middle, so extensive that conversation was impossible except with one's immediate neighbors on either side. Before each of us was a small charcoal brazier of clay, and around that several standing trays on which were arranged the various kinds of food from which the piece de resistance was to be individually prepared.

Kobota San, assisted by several maids, himself poured the sake. With this we ate the tiny black-eyed fishes, raw, and several kinds of delicate sea weeds. Then on the coals of the brazier we placed a very large abalone shell. When this was thoroughly heated, a broth, made according to Kobota San's secret recipe was poured into it, then sugar and shoyu, the salty soy bean sauce. To this was then added finely cut vegetables--onions, white radishes, mushrooms, spinach, and *seri*, a green somewhat resembling our parsley. When the vegetables had not much more than wilted, paper-thin slices of raw duck breast were laid on them. A kind of duck *sukiyaki*, you see, and most delicious. This was repeated numberless times until the duck and vegetables were exhausted. Then only were the salted vegetable pickles and the rice brought in. Japanese dining etiquette does not permit of drinking after one begins to eat rice. The dinner ended with tangerines and hot house grapes. These latter are in Japan far from the exclusive luxury we consider them to be in America, and are grown in profusion in the hot houses of Okayama prefecture. The muscats particularly are superb.

The following morning we woke to find that the storm had at last abated. After breakfast we said a ceremonious goodby to our solicitous host at the Yatsuun Honjin, and bumped over the potholes to Matsue. The pale blue mirror of the lake was dotted with innumerable tiny fishing boats, the wild birds rose from the shore reeds into the pale blue of the sky, and the gnarled pines that border much of the lake rested for a time from their battle with the wind. So constant is this Siberian wind that blows over the province of Izumo that the farmhouses in the district, even the most humble, are surrounded on all but their southern side by tall hedges of tightly planted trees. These wind barriers are one of the distinctive features of the Izumo landscape.

Kanaseki San and Sumie San joined us in town. This morning our objective was Yaegaki Shrine on the farther side of Matsue, the oldest shrine in the province, even older than the Grand Shrine itself, so it is said. Few people come to this tiny shrine hidden away in the back country hills and sacred to the mother of the great god of Izumo. Here there are few buildings, and these small and dilapidated. The frail old priest, whom we found sitting alone in his little office huddled over an *hibachi* trying to keep warm while hopefully waiting for buyers of his charms and fortunes, eagerly suggested that he take us in into the inner sanctuary itself. He quickly put on his white kimono and pale blue pleated skirt and helped us into short white cotton coats which, I suppose, purified us sufficiently to permit us to enter.

The main shrine, built after the Ise style, is not more than twenty feet wide and forty feet deep. The tatami is tattered and the shrine implements covered

with the dust. The inner room, however, contains painted wooden panels that are most interesting. They date from the 9th century, or even earlier. Though much damaged, they show us charming life-sized portraits in faded colors of several men and women wearing Heian period court dress. The shrine has been rebuilt several times during the passing centuries--the present building dates from about 200 years ago--but fortunately these panels have managed to survive.

The old priest told us that numerous relics of a very primitive culture had been found in the caves in the surrounding hills. It is believed that the goddess of the shrine and her husband were members of the clan of prehistoric people who once inhabited these caves. In the utterly lovely grove of old trees behind the shrine, a grove which it is quite easy to believe the *kami* still inhabit, or at least come from time to time to sport in, is an aged double-trunked cryptomeria tree sacred to the couple. And in the dark heart of the grove is the fern-bordered pool fed by a trickling spring where the goddess performed, or perhaps still continues to perform, her daily toilet. We gladly purchased postcards and charms and fortunes from the sweet old man. Another car drove up as we were leaving, so perhaps his meager income was somewhat augmented that day.

Time still remained before the train left for a short drive around Matsue itself. It is a delightful old city and still almost unspoiled. The modest castle of the lords of Matsue--the Tokugawa Shogunate kept them in near penury so that they would not have the means for staging a revolt--rises on a low hill in the center of the city. It is surrounded by a small park which seems never to have known the hand of a professional gardener, and a moat over which several charming bridges arch. The moat itself is ringed on its far side by the old houses in which lived the samurai retainers of the lord. Some are more pretentious than others, but most are small and unassuming. That in which Lafcadio Hearn lived for several years while he was teaching English in a school in Matsue--he married the daughter of a Matsue samurai and was adopted into her family--is open to the public. And down the road just beyond this house is the Hearn Museum, for which Kanaseki's father was the architect. Kanaseki San spent all his boyhood in Matsue.

Fortunately through the influence of a friend Kanaseki San and Sumie San were able to get seats back to Osaka on our train. The train was overcrowded, as I have said. The station platforms were veritable forests of skis. Many mountain climbers heavily weighted down with their packs were there also. Mountain climbing at the New Year is an old pastime in Japan, the aim being to see the first sunrise of the year from the top of some peak. Twenty-nine persons lost their lives this New Year trying to do just that.

different and very difficult. You must remember this saying: "The Five Skandhas are the Dharmas of Annihilation."

It is not necessary to wipe them out, but nevertheless they must be wiped. It is not necessary to touch it--it does not exist. To observe from the true viewpoint is Annihilation. It will all disappear in the end anyway; though it exists now, just the same it disappears. Purposelessness and non-attachment will annihilate the Five Skandhas.

--Here is a beautiful apple. But I don't like apples or apple juice. Yet how beautiful it is! I don't like it, so there is no purpose to eating it; I see it, but the apple is not existing. I see two candlesticks, one right and one left. I see them, but after all they are nothing but candlesticks. They do not exist. At the bank the cashier is counting, counting, counting from morning to night--one, two, three, four. Everybody wants money. At three o'clock he comes out of the bank, and someone says, "How much money have you counted today?" He does not know. But if on Saturday afternoon there is money in his pocket--that is different. A salary is purpose and he has attachment. Purposelessness and non-attachment will annihilate the Five Skandhas though they exist in your presence.

Today I talked on the telephone to my friend who went to Japan after the typhoon. He saw life in Japan as all emptiness, all temporality. They know that earthquakes or typhoons will destroy

their houses, so they build them like cricket cages. The typhoon destroyed the house yesterday--today there's another. Old home, new home--they are all ready to be destroyed by the next typhoon. They do not build anything substantially. My friend is a good observer. The circumstances and environment of Japan make it a waste of time and energy to build substantially.

Yet we must remember that this house, this body, is also a temporary home and not substantial; the time will come when it will be annihilated. All sentient beings are living in temporary houses. And so while it is existing it is just the same as annihilated. Thus observing, you will deliver yourselves from delusion and affliction. But if you surrender to desire you are marked like a dog.

So you may say, "I am living in a temporary body and in temporary suffering." I have heard one ask a Hindu teacher, "If all is a dream, why must a saint run from a tiger in a dream?" The answer is that I am suffering in my temporary body and in temporary suffering, while knowing that my real foundation is Nirodha. In Zen to grasp this Nirodha is very difficult; many koans point the way. If you grasp the essence of Nirodha, though you live in the dream, yet you are living in eternity. The shadows, though existing, are yet eternally wiped out. This is the idea of Nirodha. The Buddha said: "Let it stay here; leave it as it exists. But it is the same as though not existing."

When you join your hands above your chest and stand erect and straight, your soul reaches all the dimensions of the universe. You are existing and at the same time not existing. If you do not have this experience you are not a Buddhist. In the Prajnaparamita Sutra there is a famous line: "If you observe that the Five Skandhas are empty, you will deliver yourself from affliction." If you observe the Rupa--all that is Rupa is empty. It is not necessary to wipe the cloud away from the sky--leave the cloud in the sky and there is no cloud. It is not necessary to destroy all these existences, yet there is no existence. You feel, you taste, you smell, but there is no smell, no feeling, no taste. Samjna comes sometime like a hurricane in your mind--and then disappears. Just as you shake your broom outside the house--use the mindstuff to clean up the mirror. All sutras are wonderful, but are nothing but brooms or dustpans or soap--keep the brushes outside after cleaning.

When you understand the essence of Nirodha, keep the trash outside and enter into meditation. But in Zen you think without words. Someday you will become annihilated and all the cosmos will appear--otherwise you cannot see God. But if you think a word you are not annihilated and the cosmos will not appear. Think--take words but do not use words. From the first word it will be difficult. And soon Samskara--emotion--will peep out from hell like fire. Sit on it; it is not necessary to escape,

it is not necessary to hate. And this consciousness, this Vijnana: it is not necessary to destroy this mirror of consciousness. Meditation is the consciousness and you will hide yourself in the consciousness. You and consciousness of consciousness do not exist. It is not necessary to close your eyes; it is not necessary to escape outside; it is not necessary to hold the tip of the tongue. You disappear. You can hide yourself in your consciousness. How do you hide yourself in your consciousness? I cannot explain this in words. Now, with no words, think. Hide yourself in consciousness. Then you will realize Nirodha.

I cannot talk of this. By your continual practice of meditation and concentration you must know. Do not think with words, but think when you are eating food, doing business, working. Think without words. At some time you will enter into the great cosmos.

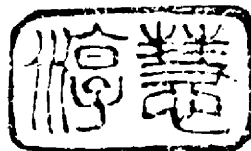
Edited by BRIAN HEALD

NOTE: Those who attend meetings at the Institute will probably recognize the "famous line from the Prajnaparamita Sutra" as identical with the first statement of the Heart Sutra we repeat so many times. Most of our more zealous members sooner or later have a try at learning this epitome in its Japanese form. Miss Edna Kenton, in her seventies when she first essayed this, suggested to her juniors a mnemonic device she had found helpful in relation to the learning of this line. "Fractured", *shō-ken go-on* phonetically becomes "show can go on." As a cue from an old trouper we never could forget, we pass it on. ED.

VANESSA COWARD'S ink-paintings will be on EXHIBITION May 17-June 8 at the New Art Center Gallery, 1193 Lexington Ave., NYC, 10 AM-6 PM. The exhibition will include 17 framed items and many available smaller matted items, plus "Zen Brush Strokes" (in book form).

Beginning November 1961, Mrs. Coward's ink-paintings have been a regular feature of Zen Notes. For this month of May we had asked her to illustrate Sokei-an's article in some way, but our various suggestions did not ring a bell until we hit on "five" itself. (We hope you noted May is also a five.) Vanessa's inked reactions to the idea "five" were many, varied, and unusual. We enjoyed them so much we decided to use three. Incidentally, we claim the distinction of having "discovered" Vanessa, her works having appeared first in Zen Notes as far back as 1958, in Letter from Kyoto in 1956.

In issues in which Vanessa's name is not mentioned, her paintings may sometimes be identified by this seal. Its two characters stand for her Koji name, Ejun, which might be translated Pure Wisdom.



THE CHINESE CHARACTER 五 FIVE According to Karlgren, one of the more responsible of the philologists, our present five 五 was one of the products of the fixing of the "small seal" form by Li Ssu about 200 B.C., when he created a new, comparatively simple and practical system of writing Chinese. "Unfortunately," Karlgren comments, "he did not reject and replace all that was unintelligible to him but took over--and simplified--a lot of old characters, the interpretation of which had long been forgotten, e.g. 𠂔 (the older form of 五). Consequently the commentators from 100 A.D. to our days have been much puzzled to interpret these characters, and they give us farfetched, scholastic, often very amusing explanations... 𠂔 is the five cardinal points (N.S.E.W. and Centrum) between 二 the two cosmogonic powers yin and yang."

Father Wieger, according to Karlgren, the author of the best European work on the subject up to 1920, informs us: The primitive 𠂔 five represents the five elements (four sides and the center). Later on, two strokes were added, to represent heaven and earth, and thus was formed 𠂔 (五), the two principles yin and yang, begetting the five elements, between heaven and earth. It forms, with the addition of 口 mouth 𠂔, an appellation to designate one's self; I, my, me; a phonetic pronounced "wu." Plus 卜 the combining form of 心 the heart, mind, motives, intention, affections, center, it forms 悟 wu, to awake, to apprehend, to become conscious, intelligence. In Japanese 悟 is the character used to represent satori.

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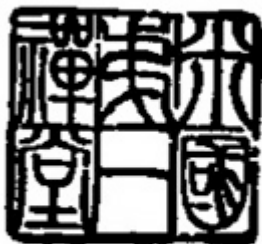
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