

ZEN notes



SOKEI - AN SAYS
THE SHAPE OF MIND

Once when the Buddha was sojourning in the city of Shravasti he put on his robe in the morning and took his bowl and went to the village to beg from door to door. He returned to his own abiding place. He finished his morning meal, and then he sat in his accustomed seat and he smiled.

Maudgalyayana, one of his great disciples, said, "O Lokanatha, I know the reason why you smiled. I saw the same thing this morning. It was a very absurd monster, wasn't it? His body was as big as the side of a house. His face had been smashed. He was shrieking through the sky with his blood dripping behind him."

In the conversations between the Buddha and Maudgalyayana related in the Agamas there are many stories about these kinds of monsters.

I have been thinking about these monsters and trying to understand the stories about them for many years. I also can see this type of monster sometimes, and I smile to myself. If you were to see someone who has eyes in his back and two mouths, one on each side of his cheek, and only one finger on each hand, certainly you would think he was a monster or demon. But you don't realize it when you meet someone whose mind is in such a shape. Though he may have a perfect body and a beautiful face, if his mind is disarranged, it would be as if his feet grew from his head and his two hands grew from his ears--such

a one would be a monster, a demon.

Sometimes you associate with such monsters without knowing it. Everyone can find out very easily that his body is unusual, but people fail to realize when their minds are twisted or warped or disarranged. You must therefore understand the nature of mind, how it was created and how it can be used. Before you manicure your fingernails you must manicure your mind; before you scrub your skin you must wash your mind in pure water. To know the form of your mind is the first step in understanding the Buddha's teaching. Of course, in this Western hemisphere there is the famous science of psychology. But you are not wasting your time when you listen to how Buddhists think about the shape of mind. This evening I shall make an analysis of the formation of our minds, so that you may be able to avoid walking upside down while you hang yourself from the sky in order to live in this world.

If you study Buddhism from the books you will not be able to find this teaching very easily. Usually Buddhist teachers teach you about the formation of the mind from the base. It is said that the fundamental mind is the Alaya-vijnana, or the Alaya Consciousness. What is this Alaya Consciousness? It is the very deep unconscious consciousness that forms the base of your mind. This is the way we are taught. But I discovered that these teachers had all concealed important points in order to make their disciples struggle by themselves to attain true knowledge. Accept-

ing this theory that the Alaya Consciousness is the base of mind, we must realize that consciousness alone has no power to realize awareness. Consciousness needs an object, just as a mirror needs an object to be reflected upon it. Without the images reflected upon a mirror you cannot be aware of the existence of the mirror.

What are the objects that give the Alaya Consciousness the ability to become aware? They are the outside objects, they are the so-called representations. Then I ask, does the Alaya Consciousness alone and by itself perceive the existence of representations? I answer, the Alaya Consciousness must have the sense organs to perceive the images of representation. I ask, what are the sense organs of the Alaya Consciousness? I answer, the sense organs of the Alaya Consciousness are this physical body: these ears, eyes, and other sense organs.

When you think about the Alaya Consciousness you cannot think about it abstractly; you must think about it with the outside. When you meditate, do not close your eyes and retreat into the darkness of mind in order to figure out what Alaya Consciousness is. This is an erroneous attitude of meditation. Keep your eyes open and keep your ears open and then meditate upon the Alaya Consciousness with the whole nature of it. Alaya Consciousness always consists of the five senses and the five sense objects. Do not separate your meditation into the outside, the five senses, and the

Alaya Consciousness; this is wrong. You must not separate them into two parts or three; you must meditate upon them at one time as a whole. You therefore neither retreat into your own mind nor project yourself to the outside. You do not retreat into your own mind, you sit upon it, keeping all your senses open. Then you will discover the real nature of Alaya Consciousness. Remember! You misunderstand the nature of your Alaya Consciousness when you cut off the outside and the five senses and you return to darkness and bury yourself in it and think that the darkness is the base of your mind. This sort of concept causes many troubles in life.

Consider in what turmoil you live by holding such a view of the Alaya Consciousness. You destroy your house and cut off your head. Cutting off the outside world and the five senses, you try to walk only in the darkness of the consciousness and you think that this is the base of life. As a result you think that this world is unclean; you cover your face and your filthy body, and you say that you wish to exist only within your soul, so you do not accept food for your body or your mind or your five senses, and you think you are sacred.

A man who has this concept of the Alaya Consciousness thinks that it is absolute spiritual existence, that it has nothing to do with a man's physical body or his five senses. He believes that the Alaya Consciousness shines continually but that it has no form as

the sun in the sky does--that it exists in some high, bright empyrean. And so this man's face is turned upwards and he opens his eyes wide to the sky and he joins his hands continually together as if they were bound. He lives his whole life in this fashion, forgetting everything on this earth. His feet never touch the ground; he hangs himself in the sky. When he looks down upon you he looks down from the highest heaven. You will come across such men often.

Another type of man pays no attention to existing things but places emphasis upon power alone. He thinks that Alaya Consciousness is power, energy. When such men rule the world, they will naturally bring great disasters. You have seen examples of it. There was a philosopher called Nietzsche. He said that the weaker must perish and the fool must be fooled. But why must we be fooled? The fool must be enlightened. He certainly misunderstood the nature of the world and men.

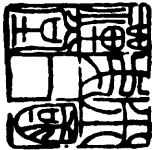
Apply these three mistakes to yourself; think about your life. When you try to find the concrete base of mind you must accept three things at the same time--the outside, your senses and your consciousness. You cannot separate them; you must understand them in synthesis. In this concrete way a Buddhist must think. When I am asked what the point of thinking this way is, I answer that I don't worship heaven or hide myself in the earth. I am here between heaven and earth, and I am the one who is really existing and who has awareness of this existence. That is our answer.

We observe the natural reaction of our mind to the outside and we judge our actions thereby. Otherwise we have to live like a thief in a department store. A thief thinks he is looking all around but his desire makes him blind. He does not listen to his mind's reaction to his actions; his desire dominates his mind. He tries to take something. Many eyes are upon him. Things have disappeared. Then because he expresses his fear on his face he will of course be caught. If you don't keep your eyes open to the outside, if you don't listen to the whispering voice within yourself and try to accept your desire you are like a thief and you must live like a thief. You cannot eliminate the outside when you think of the Alaya Consciousness.

The outside in Buddhism is called the six rajas or dusts. This means the filth, the things that are piled up. And there are six indriya or roots, the five sense organs, and manas, the mind that makes immediate reaction. (When I put my hand in the fire my natural reaction is to withdraw.) These, together with the six jnana (consciousnesses) make the eighteen spheres of the Alaya Consciousness. This is our base of mind. When you learn Buddhism you will learn about these eighteen spheres. You must meditate upon them. But do not separate them; accept them as one piece. This way of thinking makes you a Buddhist. When you cut them in two pieces and then try to think about them, you are a heretic, not a Buddhist.

Reconstructed by BRIAN HEALD

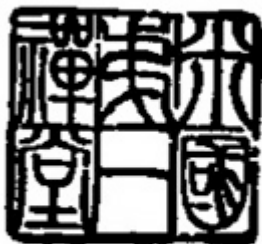
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