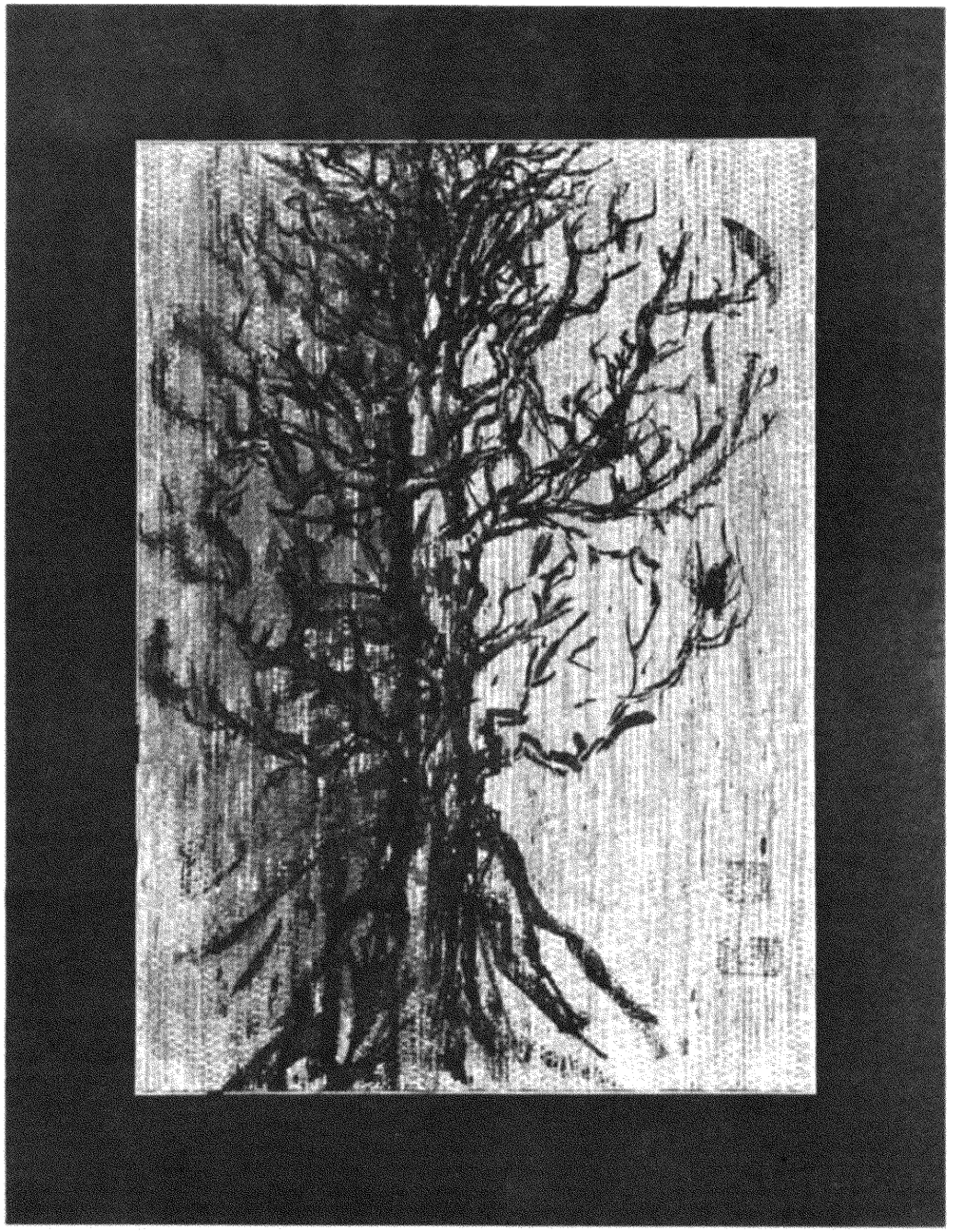
Zen Notes



SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE SIX WAYS TO NIRVANA If I meet a Buddhist, observe his manner, look into his eyes, and see no peace or tranquility in him, I know he is not a true Buddhist. For Nirvana, Peace, is the ultimate of Buddhism.

There are many meanings in the term Nirvana: extinction, annihilation, sometimes death, but peace is always included. There are six ways to reach Nirvana, the six paramita to carry you from this shore of disturbance to the other shore of peace.

Giving, Dana Paramita, is one of the ways to reach Nirvana. The Buddhist gives without purpose and receives likewise, with no ulterior motive, without knowing whether he is giving or receiving, for he realizes that nothing belongs to him. Monks practice this by almsbegging. I am not myself--I am Buddha; you from whom I beg are not yourself--you are Buddha. Therefore there is no one who gives and no one who receives.

Observing the precepts, Shila Paramita, is usually given as the second of the Six Paramitas. If we are quite natural in our attitude, we need no commandments. (If you do not smoke or drink, you do not need commandments regarding smoking or drinking.) Observing the commandments, you will understand that there is no self. You are a part of great nature. The laws of heaven and earth are written in your mind and body. When you realize this, to observe the commandments is an easy task; to violate them is difficult. There is no one to observe the commandments and there is no commandment in the whole world! When you reach this conclusion, you are in Nirvana--you have reached it by your Wisdom, Prajna Paramita, the sixth way.

The Buddhist seeks peace, not happiness. Happiness is a cause of agony, to attain happiness you have to suffer. There is also suffering in the attaining of peace, but it is different. We do not fear it.

We can die in peace. In Japan and China, we offer a drop of water to the dying man, putting it to his lips on the feather of a bird. He cannot see, cannot hear, suffers the moment of the death agony, but his mind is not dead--he has peace in it. This peace is not easy to attain.

I was in a monastery before I entered the Russo-Japanese war and spent eight months on the battlefield. I had thought I was a good Buddhist student, but on that battlefield I realized that something was wrong. I had *no* peace of mind. My teacher had told me, " If you are a true Buddhist, your mind is always peaceful--even on the cliff of life and death! "

If you understand yourself truly, there will be peace in your mind. You cannot buy it--you may find it in poverty as well as riches. Peace is very easy to attain if you really find the way. If you clearly understand where you are in this universe and what you are doing as a person--you can find peace of mind.

Of course, freedom from disturbance is necessary; you must know your own cause of disturbance. You can be disturbed by erroneous instruction, interest in a strange religion, reading about some ism in which you believe--seeing your whole life and being from that angle. You must observe carefully how your life is altered by such disturbances.

To straighten yourself out, you must meditate, think deeply into your

heart and mind. This is Dhyana Paramita. When you correct your errors, you will see true existence, the true laws of man, heaven and earth. These three equal religion. Then you will know the law of the country, of the people, of the family and of the individual. Knowing this, you will have the real view.

The law of man is called morality. The law of heaven is without discrimination: no punishment and reward, no saint and no criminal--all can be received who know how to live in the pure light where all are equal. The law of earth is different: everything is constantly changing. Water becomes steam--fire cannot destroy it, a sword cannot cut it. But when it turns to ice, a saw can cut it and fire can melt it. Each individual has his own laws; each family and each country has its laws. I notice a big difference between the laws of Japan and the United States.

Another cause of disturbance comes from the past. The system of reincarnation is difficult to explain. Today we speak of atavism or inheritance. The human family is really one tree. You were living in the past and you will be living in the future. You are an aggregation, not a single element. Mind and body is an organization of elements. Each individual has various elements in his nature. Sometimes one of these elements exhibits itself, sometimes another. The Buddhist counts five or six elements that compose one mental nature. When you talk with someone, striking all the keynotes, you can find the strongest element in his particular nature. We are not simple, single-minded beings; there are inherent elements in us, but there are also parasitic elements imposed upon the true bodhi tree. It is these that disturb our mind and lead our life. We must find the true nature in which we belong, find our own level.

If you observe your life very carefully, you will find the factors that suggest what you should do. Do not follow blindly. To extend your life, you must find the arrangement of life that is written within you. Then unconscious factors will no longer disturb you. Acquired and erroneous elements can be eliminated fairly easily by close observation: inherent ones are difficult to straighten out. This is the lifelong study of the Buddhist.

Through meditation, the unconscious states, thoughts and experiences will become evident and you will gradually come to perfection. This perfection in personality leads to perfection of being. This is the Buddhist ideal; the perfect personality is a Buddha. This is, of course, difficult to reach, but through Wisdom, Prajna Paramita, we can conceive perfect truth, perfect virtue, perfect beauty. To conceive this is emancipation by Wisdom. One who attains this perfection and realizes this emancipation will attain real Nirvana--perfect peace of mind and body. The endless effort to reach absolute perfection is the main teaching of Buddhism.

The usual listing of the six paramitas is: *dana* (charity or almsgiving), *shila* (observing the precepts), *ksanti* (forbearance or patience), *virya* (zealous effort), *dhyana* (meditation), *prajna*, (wisdom). The third and fourth were not included in the notes of Audree Kepner here reconstructed by Vanessa Coward and Mary Farkas.

By MARY FARKAS

Linked with the question of whether a painting is Zen art because it is painted by a Zennist is another: Is a painting Zen art because it is of a Zen subject?

Among our own paintings is one signed by Kwan-gaku Shinso we choose to suppose is of Rinzai, the great 9th Century Chinese master who simplified Ch'an (Zen), got at its guts, taught self-reliance above all, and became famous for his shouted HO! which was powerful enough to raise the dead. In it he looks like an anti-Semitic stereotype of Shylock, but the expression of the face is so knowing, sarcastic, and penetrating that it is very convincing as a portrait of Rinzai's masterful character. Certainly it is the inner nature that dominates, an inner nature that is not at all what one would think of as religious in the West. The " sages" of Zen, of course, do not at all resemble what Westerners think of holy men. As Sokei-an said of another of the Zen " characters": " You think a sage should look august, but 'sage' is not in the outer look, it is in the heart. Take Hotei, with his fat belly and hairs all around his belly button, who laughs. To you he doesn't look like a sage, but he is a sage in heart." In a fairsized exhibition, I think our portrait of Rinzai might well merit a place as a depiction of the qualities of the Zen master that make him able to " bother" everyone, as Shakyamuni seen by the Zen Eye was said to have been a rascal who bothered everyone. For such a portrait to be successful, it must show the combination of True Understanding and power that makes a master. On the other hand, our portrait of Dai-O Kokushi, though successful as a portrait and painted by a Daitoku-ji priest, Zengyu Kunmoku, seems to me to show little, if any, of this type of most characteristic Zen spirit.

Of all the Zen subjects possible, Bodhidharma has always been one of the most favored. It is not surprising, considering that it is to Bodhidharma that the bringing of Zen to China is credited. Modern critical study reveals that Bodhidharma is more myth than history, so it is accurate that paintings of him have strayed far from the literal. Some early portraits of him show a mild, slender figure, while later ones, from the 13th Century on, have the dramatic extreme of " realism" that characterizes the Japanese ideal of man typified in the movies of Akira Kurosawa by the actor, Toshiro Mifune. The idea of living each moment to the full, almost incomprehensible to the West, is wonderfully shown in all of Kurosawa's films, is, indeed, perhaps their main message, with Mifune the perfect protagonist. In " Yojimbo," for instance, he could easily pose for a portrait of the existential Bodhidharma, the " experienced" man who has passed Mumon's gate, someone who has seen everything, is capable of anything, is perfectly equipped with the survival factor, a man without bitterness or the sense of tragedy, a man who is right in there, sword in hand, swinging, in perfect *yugezammai*, his eye stern yet " kind" in the sense Sokei-an meant when he said: " Buddha was a kind and loving man, but his love was not lukewarm. His compassion was like fire!"

In some of the Japanese quick sketches of Bodhidharma, a certain "cuteness" appears also; while others have become almost cartoons, as exemplified by our painting of the eight Bodhidharmas with the caption, *Man's Life: Seven times down, Eight, get up.*

Bodhidharma's relation to Zen is unique in religious history, its only similarly popularized figure perhaps St. Nicholas. Tea is said to have sprouted from his eyebrows. He is supposed to have invented karate to liven the monks who grew weary in their efforts to meditate. One of the great koans that elicits the student's expression of the cardinal principle of Zen shows his ruggedness in the face of imperialism: When the Emperor Wu asked Bodhidharma what was his merit for building temples and favoring Buddhism, Bodhidharma gave Zen's most famous answer: (translated, roughly, NONE). Bodhidharma was said to have sat in meditation so long that his legs dropped off and he became a legless doll, the roly-poly known all over the world, teaching that you can never get a good man down. So all paintings of him must show his indomitable spirit. He canbe beaten down, transformed, concealed behind any kind of exterior, but he's got what it takes.

Traditionally, the themes of Ch'an painting, as a specific school of the thirteenth century originated by two Ch'an monks known as Mu Ch'i and Liang K'ai as an expression of Ch'an or Zen were landscape primarily, birds, animals, fruit, flowers, only sometimes human figures out of Zen legends. Favored among the folk of legend are the two mad poets Hanshan and Shih-te (Kanzan and Jitoku), whose paintings require an evocation of the "irrational" element, or, as Sokei-an called it, "abandon."

We would be more likely to call it "letting go."

Although symbolism is often attributed to Zen, I think it is rarely effective in art as a means of bringing the viewer into direct contact with ultimate reality. This is due to poor artistry, perhaps on the assumption that the viewer knows the symbol or allusion, as when Japanese moviemakers suddenly show a flowering bush in the midst of battle, irrelevant to anyone who is not familiar with the Japanese philosophical connection between cherry-blossoms and transiency.

Paintings of the personified doctrines of Zen such as Fugen and even Manjusri are not in my opinion often Zen art, nor, usually, are scenes in which Buddha appears in his glorified aspect, or at all.

On the other hand objects connected with the Zen monastic life--the staff, the rod, the bowl, the teapot, the dipper--are often successfully painted by the Masters. In the really great paintings of such homely subjects, the greatest test of the painter's Zen occurs. In them the least important object takes on a universal and profound significance. If the universal is not apparent in their actuality, the artist has not, in my opinion, succeeded. The marvelous truth may well be displayed in a tea bowl, a bird on a twig, or the stick with which the student is beaten. This tremendous profundity is often misunderstood. Today it tends to be thought of as something very different from what is meant by this in the Zen sense.

This is not a dramatized meaning that is "put" upon them, as Hitchcock in his films can put a sinister atmosphere on a moving window curtain or object

that is singled out for emphasis, nor is it the representation of the heightened excitation brought about by the perceiving of objects emotionally or under the influence of artificial stimulation. It is true that certain great painters have "seen" differently under the stimulation of one thing or another, but their success as painters has been due to their ability to get what they thought they saw down rather than to their altered sensing, I suspect. So far as I can see, excitation of perception has little effect on technical ability, any more than a drunken man's imagination of the wonderful speech he is giving has to the actual maudlin talk he may be mumbling to a subway-car full of people.

The Zen painters' problem is to show the thing itself on the paper. Describing it or explaining it won't do. He's got to get that tremendous totality expressed in some way that puts it across to another. Of course, that other must be able to see it. For the spectator, as Marchel Duchamp has pointed out, is needed to complete the creative act. In the foreword to *Zen, der Lebendige Buddhismus in Japan*, by Ohasama-Faust (Ohasama was one of the four Zen masters to whom the Dharma was transmitted by Sokei-an's teacher) this point is someway touched upon. Faust says, translated by G.B. Fowler, "The truth cannot be explained, it can only be experienced by oneself. And then Professor Ohasama would suddenly hold up before me a bit of cigarette ash on the tip of his finger and say, 'This is the highest truth.' And he would look at me with large serious eyes and say finally, smiling, 'You don't understand it, do you?'"

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DR. R.H. BLYTH DIES-In Japan, at the Seiwa Hospital in Tokyo. He was sixty-five years old. Reverend Sogen Asahina, Chief Abbot of Engakuji Temple, officiated at the funeral services.

According to an article in the Young East, Dr. Blyth came to Japan in 1924 after graduating from London University. Before World War II, he taught at Keijo Imperial University in Seoul and the Fourth Higher School in Kanazawa. He did not return to England during the last war and was interned in the Kobe Concentration Camp. He had been Professor at Gakushuin University since 1945, and was tutor to the Crown Prince. He was particularly well known for his studies of Haiku, Senryu, and Zen, and his books on these subjects.

Your editor had the pleasure of dining with Dr. Blyth in Tokyo in 1955, along with Father Dumoulin and Mrs. Ruth Sasaki. I remember Dr. Blyth's first words to me: They were: "Are you afraid to die?" His own greatest interest, he told me, was to live a life of Poetry, that is, in his definition, at the highest peak. Nothing less was worthwhile.

The painting featured on the center page is a wood block print by Manus Pinkwater, previously represented in Zen Notes, Vol. IX, No. 2, also by the Bodhi Tree on the last page of the current issue. According to a southerner who saw the painting, the trees are snake trees, that is, the kind that snakes like to be near. Prints, 24x36 and 11½x20½, available for sale.

FOR SUBJECTS MENTIONED, SEE:
Rinzai--Original at the Institute.
Dai-o Kokushi--Original at the Institute; published LK Vol. IX, No. 6
Bodhidharma--ZN Vol. I, No. 12; Vol. III/12
Hanshan and Shih-te--ZN Vol. IX No. 12

Zen Notes
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BUDDHISM IS A TREE Through all the different sects of Buddhism there is one important principle. All the schools of Buddhism originated from the Buddha's own experience. The "philosophy" of Buddhism is different from other philosophies; it depends upon the experience of the teachers and students, their experience in meditation and daily life. Of the two major philosophical schools early in Buddhism, though one said that nothing exists and the other that everything exists they were really like two mirrors reflecting each other with nothing between, for if you understand the philosophy of Buddhism and do not follow the words--entity or non-entity--it is the same thing that is described--the experience that is the foundation of Buddhism.

Some Buddhist teachers place emphasis on the theories of Buddhism. Talking about them, you may think you are a Buddhist. But from the true standpoint, theorists are not Buddhists.

If you go to a Buddhist country and meet the monks and lay brothers, you will find something in them that is quite different--some rare element that sets them apart from others. When you visit the temples, the monks will receive you amd give you tea and rest--but not much in the way of conversation. You will be disappointed if you expect them to speak philosophically about Buddhism. Instead, you will sit on the verandah, drink tea, and walk in the garden. When we enter Buddhism, we vow that we will not discuss it. That is why you have no chance to speak with the monks. They are *living* Buddhism, not talking it. In my lectures I too speak of theories, but in daily life I abominate discussions about religion.

How *do* we observe Reality? We prove that color, and so forth, have no existence--yet *something* exists. We call it noumena -- the whole universe is noumena. To observe it, we must use this present consciousness. This present consciousness is the entrance to Buddhism.

You use this present consciousness when you lift your hand, but if you try to digest your food, you find that it is not done by you. What do you call the faculty that digests your food? You, nature and God are one in experience, but when consciousness goes and the body decomposes, that is the end of you. But from the universal side, the side of wholeness, that is not the end. Nothing can be wiped out from the universe -- there is no place to go!

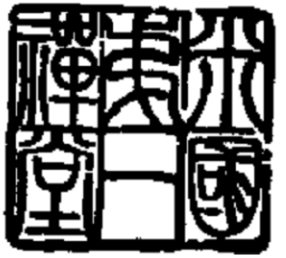
In Buddhism, this universe may be wiped out by kalpa fire and everything annihilated, but from the ground of Nirvana, the world will be re-created. In this re-creation, every mark, every form, will be realized once more.

In deep meditation, we come to the center of Wisdom. We see no entrance, but suddenly we enter the endless universe. The veil that we have put between noumena and phenomena is rent and we realize what we have read about, what the Buddha described.

In meditation, the Buddha made contact with the great universe, read the law written in himself as it is written in the universe. All his teaching is built upon that experience. Expressing it in words has brought about the growth of the many schools.

Buddhism is like a great tree. This great Bodhi tree is still growing, still issuing new branches. It springs from the Buddha's own experience.

Founded in 1930 by
Sokei-an Sasaki



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