ZEN NOTES

SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE GREAT OCEAN

Buddhism has two goals or aims. One is to attain emancipation, freedom from all attachment; the other is to bring peace and security to the world, to avoid disaster and sickness. The peace of the world and the security of our families is thought by Buddhists to result from our having attained freedom from all attachment.

If the king of an empire *attaches* to the making of battleships, as a result of his making weapons to attack other countries, he will bring disaster to his own country and destroy the peace of the world. If a gentleman with home ties *attaches* himself to a beautiful lady on Broadway, he breaks the peace and brings disaster on himself and his family.

Many of the fires in Japan, or anywhere else for that matter, are the result of hatred between human beings. Perhaps one person, moved by hate, starts a fire in someone's house to burn it down, but the wind carries the fire next door and the result is a whole city wiped out.

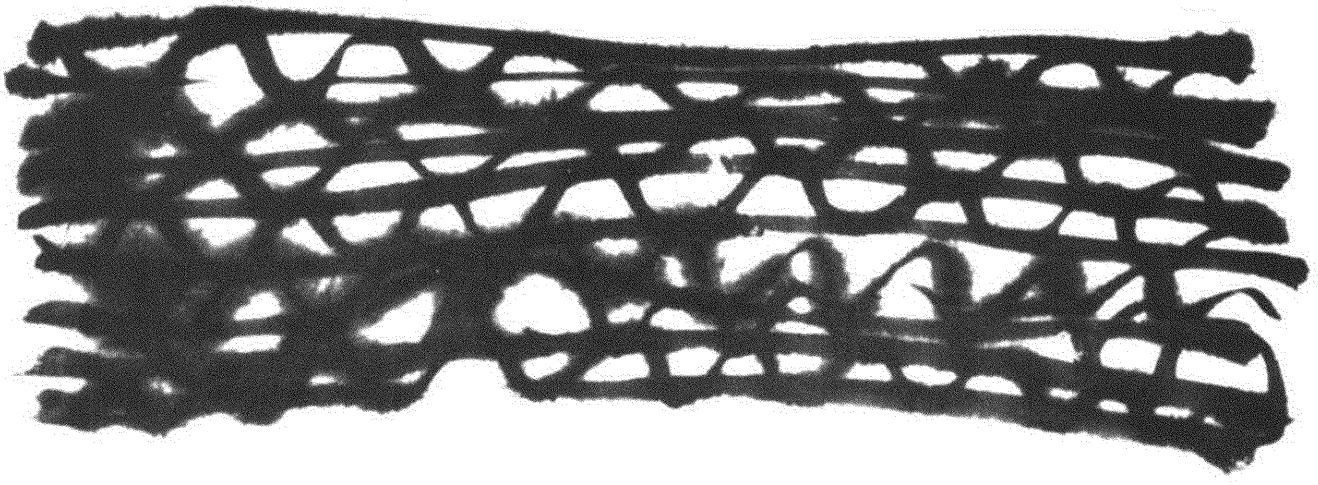
To achieve peace in the world one must attain emancipation from the unnatural that is attachment. In primitive Buddhism, to be free from attachment was the main point, the foundation of Buddhism, and the Buddha taught his disciples many ways to detach themselves from unnatural desire. A very old sutra concerning this is called *Samudra*, the Great Ocean, the Big Sea.

THE GREAT OCEAN refers not only to the ocean of water but to the ocean of atmosphere, the ocean of light. When the Buddha was sojourning in the Jetavana, one day he said to his disciples: "What is the Great Ocean?" And he began to speak about the sea to the south of India, the Indian Ocean.

When a boat is sailing smoothly over the southern sea, suddenly there will be a dot of black cloud on the horizon. As one watches, a screen of black spreads over the sky. The wind is black and the rain is like ink. It is the monsoon. Those who sail the Indian Ocean really see black water. It will not stain your hand, but when the rain comes it falls black. The navigator of that sea meets waves as black as ink, as black rain drops from the sky like a waterfall.

In some parts of the Pacific Ocean, after November there is not one clear day. Every day ships sail in mist and fog, in a dark sea. The waves are so rough the ship seems to stand upright. For three or four hours, perhaps, while the passengers watch, helpless, the ship is held perpendicular, its prow dipped into the trough of the waves.

To the south of Japan, in the middle of a channel, is a great whirlpool which even big ships do not dare approach. Avoiding it, smaller craft pass by close to the shore. One can see them from there. In the evening, so it is said, as the sailors are enjoying the bright moonlight, singing songs and playing instruments, suddenly they will see the faint figure of a man in the dark air. It screams: "Water, give me water." A sailor cries out: "A ghost, a ghost." And someone flings a bucket of water into the air. For a moment the ghost disappears,



but it is soon back again, pursuing the boat, crying, "Water, water."

The sea near the shore is covered with reeds, among which many spirits of the dead wander, a monk tells them. It is they that pursue the ships, begging "Water, water." What are the sailors to do? "Do not throw real water to dead spirits. Knock out the bottom of the pail and throw the ghost the water that isn't there." When this is done the ghost pursuing the ship disappears, to return no more.

The Buddha did not tell this story, but he did tell many stories of the sea. He was a wonderful storyteller and through these stories he would slowly come to the point he wished to make.

The ordinary sea, he told his followers, is the sea that all common-minded ones can comprehend, but the sea about which I am now going to speak is not a sea of water. There are small bodies of water and large bodies of water called seas, but the sea of which I speak belongs to the eye. All phenomena, appearances such as the blue sky, the green water, the brown earth, are the waves of that ocean to the eye of Buddha.

If you can tolerate these waves, endure the waves of the ocean of phenomena, you will be able to sail safely across it. When the billows whirl and toss and churn, and many demons, rakshas, and evil insects try to harm you, if you cannot tolerate the waves you will be lost.

These lines appear in the sutra, but we imagine the stories the Buddha may have told. The Hindus of his time believed that there were many islands in the southern ocean on which demons, particularly female demons, lived. Many stories were told about these demons. When the merchants

ZEN AND ART - III By Mary Farkas

Samadhi, Sokei-an said, is the factor that differentiates East from West, in art and in life. One would not, I think, use this word to describe the mind in its instant of performing a single stroke of the brush, yet what is meant is the same thing focused in the act. When I say focus there floats across my mind-screen the image of an apparatus in which the sun, focusing to a pinpoint, is igniting a fire. So it is that the Absolute must be brought to focus through one's brush stroke to set each line or dot afire with life. Michelangelo pictured the creative act as the finger of God, perhaps an even better imagery than he obviously intended. Everyone knows what is meant, though it is not often mentioned. There are many theoretical or metaphorical ways of speaking about it, but in art one must learn to do it. Not how to do it, but actually to do it.

The instruction in performing arts in the Orient deserves note. For instance, in some countries the child is taught to perform dance movements by placing its limbs and body in the proper position, then executing the movement with the child as medium. The child is thus conditioned (a la Pavlov) to make the movement desired without thinking about it at all. The same training is given to the Japanese baby in teaching it how to bow. Its upper body is simply bent at the appropriate moment until the action is built in. Of course this way of teaching is not uniquely Japanese. Every mother employs it to some extent with her child; animals, too, may be observed using it. In the West, however, instruction tends to be verbalized, described, and analytic. Often theory comes before practice. The Western student confronted with Eastern teaching tends to resist. Resistance prevents his observing when nonverbal instruction is given. When the Eastern teacher demonstrates without verbal instruction he may augment this with nonverbal suggestion. A wise student watches for such directions, given not in words but in slight movements, glances, or touches. Western students who have not experienced this type of training may easily fail to observe that it is going on. Their frequent complaint is that they are given no instruction. As the teacher very often states that no instruction is given and would defeat the purpose of his methodology if he revealed his hand, the unperceptive Western student, feeling cheated, is likely to give up because he thinks he has not been " taught" anything.

To benefit from such teaching one must first be like a child who is ready to devour every bite of anything offered him, who is all eyes and ears. Theodor Reik, in *"Listening with the Third Ear,"* Grove Press, New York, 1948, a book of advice to analysts, tells them to listen to the nonverbal, nonconscious communications missed even by persons trained to observe others, because such persons do not keep their inner eyes and ears open. The Zen student must learn how to " see" and " hear" as his first step. He is not told what to do and how to do it but must " catch on." It is not necessary for him to know anything about what he is go-

ing to do. He must just " see" and do it. The rhythm of doing it is passed on so that the learner performs even the most complicated acts with no hesitation. When the flow of activity has become established, specific directions or corrections can be given. Any good teacher knows, intuitively, when to correct and when not to correct. If corrections are made before the conditioning is established, hesitation is developed. When the slightest hesitation is developed in the student, the method is not functioning.

Today many intellectuals seem to be concerned with learning how to "sense," or to expand their consciousness. What they are talking about should not be confused with what is meant here. To " sense" is at the perceptual level, but really closer to imagination than to the esthetic " sensing" of rupadhatu, the world of form, that is referred to here. To see things as they are in the world of form is not to wallow in sensation as such. That could be called attachment, or intoxication. " Op art" a cousin to " Trompe l'oeil" is a play in which one is not deceived. To be carried away by sense pleasures is something orthodox Buddhism is forever warning the unwary against. It is an error as old as Buddhism itself.

The art of calligraphy is especially attractive to the Zen student because of its pure estheticism. Nothing is stuck onto it. Even when meaning is included, it is to be esthetically enjoyed rather than to arouse feelings or sense-pleasures. Yet it does not belong to the world referred to in the line " Euclid alone has looked on beauty bare," the abstract world perhaps which could better be compared to one of the stages of arupadhatu as defined by Sokei-an.

To teach such an art requires a teacher free from any kind of stickiness, and it requires patience on both sides.

When I was first coming as a Zen student to Sokei-an, one of my friends, named Wagtail by Sokei-an, begged him to teach her woodcarving. He agreed on the condition that two others of us would join the class. I felt totally unequipped with talent or time for this undertaking, but the chance was too good to miss. Although I never learned to be a woodcarver, to be taught anything by a master is rewarding if as nothing other than a course in pedagogy, then, as later, one of my most insistent interests.

Our lessons, on Sunday mornings, usually included tea, a variety of household chores, dissertations on any subject that came up, for instance Chinese military strategy, impromptu games in which we would play at being cats after a mouse, for example, or sutra-chanting. Our first study was the " sharping" stones. We learned that there were a great many different kinds of these, to be used in the sharpening of the innumerable tools Sokei-an next one by one introduced us to. The art of sharpening is much neglected these days, but when I was a child it was one of the accomplishments of the gentleman as well as of the man who was handy around the house.

The young Buddhists of today, particularly the vegetarian ones, have few opportunities to see the art of carving the roast for Sunday dinner displayed as it was in earlier times. All eyes were on the host as he custom carved each slice, employing a special skill for each cut of meat. Now one

seldom sees this expertly performed except by the master waiters in the best restaurants. Even the art of peeling the apple and orange, leaving a lengthening line of dangling skin, using a pearl-handled silver knife, has largely disappeared. But in the days when the American family gathering for Sunday dinner after church was an important ritual ofdaily life, the sharpening of the carving knife preceding the slicing or cutting was a regular part of the performance. Feeling the edge of the bone-handled knife, refining it against the matching sharpener, was an indication of the standing of the master of the house, regarded with envy by those who were always guests, rarely hosts. At Sokei-an's we learned how to sharpen the tiny semi-circular spoon-like tools, the heavy broad blades, and the thin supple ones. We were told: " Three years is usually needed to learn sharpeningthe tools."

The calligrapher's training is similar. He must make his own ink every day, a work requiring both patience and discrimination. Student calligraphers may make the master's ink too. When I was in Japan I toyed with the idea of having a large screen made such as the one we have at the Institute. Negotiations were begun with a nearby priest but had to be abandoned because his monk students could not take off from their duties the three days it would be necessary to devote to making enough ink to nourish his brush, nearly as big as a horse's tail.

The study of calligraphy begins in literate Japan in early childhood. Sokei-an said: " When I was five years oldmy father began to teach me Chinese. Writing the characters was my lifework as a child." In another place he adds: " At first Japanese children use their fingertips to write; then, when they come to make the characters with a brush, the teacher says: " Don't touch the table with your hand.' And when the child says, 'How can I write this way?" the teacher tells him, 'Put your strength in your shoulder and let your hand relax; don't move hand or elbow, but draw from the shoulder. And when it is a *big* character, draw from the hip!"

From their earliest schooling Oriental children are taught the way of art as what Sokei-an often described as the " knack." " All art has this *knack*," he said. " When I was studying wood carving I was afraid I would hit my hand with the heavy hammer struck from the elbow. Then my teacher showed me a big arm angle and told me, 'Swing it from the shoulder.'" He is trained to perform each stroke as specifically as a dancer or musician might be trained to perform steps. Each movement is made with what Sokei-an called smrti. To demonstrate smrti he would use the gesture made in offering incense as an example, picking up a pinch, holding it over the incense bowl, concentrating into it. " Mindfulness" can be used to describe the perfected action, but " no-mind" also is often used to indicate what is meant. Mind is focused and there is no self-consciousness or thinking to intervene between Mind and act.

Learning to brush the characters is done in what would seem to Westerners a very uncreative way. They are imitated or copied, perhaps traced on thin paper until they can be executed perfectly. Analyzed, Chinese characters do not contain very many strokes. The character on page 4 is used to show

them. Each of the strokes is practiced until it is perfect. Then there is the balance of the strokes which appears in a character, in a lineof characters, and in a series of such lines on a page. It occurs to me that possibly the fine skill the Japanese has in arranging anything, vegetables in a bin, fruits in a dish, sticks in a pile, dead stalks in a field, may come from or at least with the skill in balancing the elements of the characters.

Just as Western handwriting can be studied as an indication of the state of being of the individual who has performed it, so can calligraphy show clearly the state of mind of the person performing it. Quite a number of ways of writing characters have been historically developed. Two main areas may be distinguished: the formal, clearly defined, tending to the square; the cursive, flowing. Although there are a variety of elements to be observed in it, the most important is its full vitality. That is to say, all of each stroke must be full of life. If there is any wavering or weakness in it, it is lacking in samadhi.

In a recent work on brush-writing, "*You and Brush-writing,*" its authors, Takahiko Mikami and Kazuaki Tanahashi have attempted to characterize it:

1. It is an art of linear, spontaneous beauty. Each stroke is laid down in one decisive movement. It is an event, not a process. There is no repeating or correcting what has been written. Beauty is becoming, not being.

2. In this linear, spontaneous beauty we find a continuity of time and motion. Once begun, a work must be immediately carried to completion. To do this one must have continuity of heart.

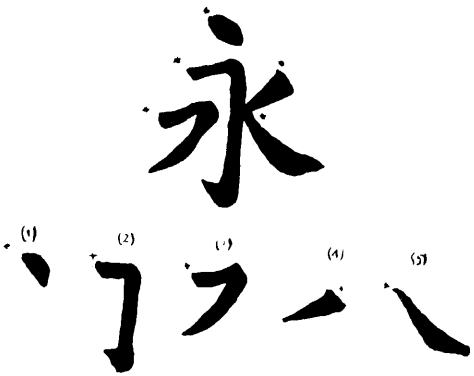
3. To be linear, spontaneous, and continuous, the work must be created with the most simple lines.

4. These lines must have assymmetrical variety. Geometrical lines have no place in *Sho-Do* (brush-writing). Lack of variety destroys a work.

5. Sho-Do is richest written with sumi, for as the belief states, sumi contains every color. With sumi the depths of beauty are reached. Sumi flowed onto special Sho-Do paper allows a work to become, and not to be. It is the first material for beginners, and is often the final material for masters.

Sho-Do is an expression of life. Of all the arts, conscience controls least in Sho-Do. Writing is a natural means of expression for human beings, and it is easy for basic human nature and the writer's own personality to appear in the work. In Sho-Do we see reflected the nobleness of humanity.

Sho-Do, therefore, is not only an abstract of natural objects, but also an abstract of human mind and spirit.



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who voyaged into the southern ocean to find pearls and other jewels disappeared, it was believed that they were caught by female demons. Ceylon was thought to be inhabited by rakshas and crocodiles.

This is an allegorical way to speak of the existence of this world of ours, for if a man is caught and trappedand dies, he cannot attain emancipation. For instance, a man's eye follows a beautiful woman. His consciousness is clouded by the lust of the eye. He loses the eye of his consciousness. Women follow the tactile sense and are lured to destruction. Feeling a furcoat with her fingertips she must buy it. Thus she falls into the whirlpool of desire.

Then there is also the ocean of sound. A young man who follows the ocean of sound begins to study music, is infatuated by the beauty of sound, plays day and night, is driven out from place to place, apartment to apartment until he is reduced to playing the violin on the sidewalk, or in the subway. As the Buddha theorizes he would be all right if he could swim across the ocean of sound, but if he can't he will drown, he will go down in it, end up at the East River sawing on a street corner.

There are the oceans of smell , taste, and touch also. They are not so great, and can be easily imagined, gluttony, for instance. The ocean of mind is the greatest. Really only a very few men save themselves from the tossing and churning and boiling waves of the ocean of mind. When the ocean tosses and the waves of mind blow in your brain, you do not know how to sail across and you are lost. There are many foes in the invisible ocean of subconscious mind. You may feel quite sure you are not indulging yourself, or being carried along by the waves, but even when you don't know it, unconsciously your direction is governed by them.

Then there is the ocean of alaya consciousness, fundamental consciousness, the bottom of mind. You think it is eternal, God. At the end of the day, when you die, there is still this consciousness at the bottom of mind. And you think you can sail across this ocean, that your soul exists. When you are in the consciousness of the bottom of mind, you think that you will exist forever. Many people think we depart from this life not losing the consciousness of mind, self-consciousness. They believe that this ocean can be sailed with cognition and awareness. But when the black veil covers the eye, that faith betrays them. They drop into the empty void, the abyss of darkness. Then consciousness comes again and again goes and again comes. They shriek with terror. At that moment they realize complete nothingness, unawareness, absolute unconsciousness. They realize that there is no channel that reaches from them to God. They no longer believe that there is a way to find God. All their lifetime they have believed and at the moment of death, they lose their faith. What is there for them to do? Attain enlightenment at that moment? It is too late and they die in great doubt. The Buddha has expressed this in poetical form. In the great sea, the billows toss and whirl, evil insects and rakshas you are afraid of are there. It is difficult to cross the big sea.

If we can sail across the great ocean we annihilate all remnants forever and we do not take another body. Thus we find eternal Nirvana and never come back to our self-indulgence again. Samudaya means the accumulation of desire. When we annihilate this and clear up the remains of attachment, we do not need to return. Many times we experience annihilation, many times we return to attachment, before we attain complete detachment. I do not much like the term " detachment." Buddha's detachment is different from your selfish " detachment"; it means detachment from your selfish attitude. When you realize your own place and time and ability and capacity you will easily get to the bottom of true detachment.

In the battlefield I experienced detachment every morning. Every morning I ate my last breakfast. I gave up all attachment, the dream of a wonderful future. I did not suffer.

I am standing on the roadside, watching you go astray. If you ask me which way to go I will tell you.

Reconstructed by MARY FARKAS

See ZN XI/2 for another lecture on this text, also another painting by Manus Pinkwater, who illustrates this issue. Vanessa Coward, our regular illustrator, is on vacation abroad this month, so her usual place is unfilled.

APRIL 8, 1965--We celebrate the Buddha's birthday. Georgette Siegel, the Assistant-Secretary, who answers most of our inquiries, is attempting to carve a baby Buddha for the occasion. Progress report is that the feet are too big. Old joke: Is it possible to have too much understanding?

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Mary Farkas, Editor

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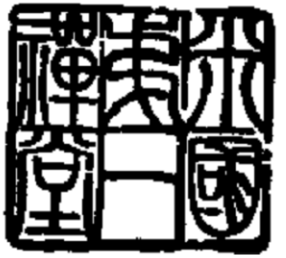

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