

ZEN notes



SOKEI-AN SAYS

WHAT IS A HUMAN BEING? As a rule of Buddhist practice, the priest of Buddhism bases his sermons upon the sutras. When we speak traditionally about Buddhism, we must prove that our text is written on such a page in such a sutra and that such a master wrote the commentary in such a way. No Buddhist priest gives his own view of Buddhism. We already have almost six thousand scriptures. For us these are enough. Everything the human mind can think about Buddhism has already been written down. We don't need to add any more. But occasionally, for some reason, a Buddhist priest does give his own view. There is no particular reason at this time, but I shall take this occasion to speak informally.

In his youth the Buddha thought this human world a most obnoxious place; he hated this human life and left his home to become a monk. He thought the human being, as a being, was very negligible, but he had no particular idea what to do about it. According to the Hindu conception, he tried to escape from this human consciousness. Finally he annihilated the concept of the human being and found that there is no such particular being as that we call human. According to the Buddhist way of thinking, the human being consists of six different beings, so-called: hell-dweller, hungry spirit, beast, angry spirit, man, and heavenly being. Every moment this human being appears in different terms: one moment the demon takes its place in the human body, then the god, next death or hell; then the body is possessed by the beast. Once in a while, from among these, the being which is called man appears and possesses this so-called human being. Only then is he truly a human being.

Finally the Buddha annihilated everything and found himself worthless. In the sutra it is written that King Mara, the tempter, appeared before him then and said, "O Tathagata, this is the time for you to enter Nirvana." The Buddha thought, "At any time I can enter Nirvana, but now I must inform my fellow beings why their life is so miserable, why the life of the human being is agony."

This is an aspect of Buddhist teaching on which Hinayana Buddhism places emphasis. Agony, the cause of agony, the annihilation of agony, the way of the annihilation of agony--these are called the Four Noble Truths. This work of annihilation is done by the Buddha's disciples. The method is meditation.

Practicing meditation, finally I annihilated everything I could think of. I annihilated all the outside as an illusion; it is illusory, not real, existence. Then I annihilated all the inside as an illusion: the inside is nothing but shadows of the outside. As the outside is illusory, the inside is also illusory; within and without there is nothing that can be called real. Not only by thinking but through consciousness, I annihilated myself. Then what happened? I found my legs! This is a joke. I had annihilated all the universe, and at the end I, the annihilator, was still sitting there with crossed legs! "At least," I told myself, "I have found my legs."

Of course I acknowledge that the world in which we are living is not exactly as we feel, as we think. But, after all, we must accept this human life. We must accept--we don't need to call it by name--this whole thing, inside and outside. The usual human world is not the real human world; it is a world created by human hope and notion. Human beings think of the Ideal--Truth, Goodness, and Beauty--the most beautiful, the best virtue, the utmost truth--these three combined make the Ideal--and we think we must reach there. All tree leaves are twisted and unsymmetrical, but each tree leaf wishes it might be symmetrical, even on both sides, with no warp or irregularity, with no worm eating it. The chair thinks that the human chair existing now is so imperfect that it is almost shameful for it to exist in comparison with the chair existing in the realm of the Ideal. The human face, too--it is almost shameful to carry it around in comparison with the face of Venus. I went to see the Venus de Milo. Her face is twisted, almost like mine. I cannot see why it should be thought beautiful. The human being created this idea of the Ideal and tortures himself with it. We are all imperfect, but that we are inferior is your idea. When I came to this country I realized what your idea of perfection was when I saw your gardens: a round fountain in the center with dolphins vomiting water at the four corners; flowers, white, yellow, red in circles; smooth pavements--gardens like mosaics, symmetrical, mathematical. And I thought, "Certainly this is different from our idea of beauty."

Everything is irregular in my country. Our idea of beauty is one stone in water, one pine tree, a bridge, and a lantern. We just cut off a corner of nature from somewhere and say, "This is beauty!" Landscape exists for beau-



THE WAY OF THE GODS - By Mary Farkas

Proceeding with my investigation through Japanese sources of the peculiarly Japanese way of looking at things that is an important part of Zen Buddhism, I resort once more to Inazo Nitobe's *JAPAN*.

" Though the race is endowed with a deep sense of reverence," Nitobe says, " the Japanese have no genius for dogmatization--that is, for putting into a system the vague yearnings and experiences of communion with the Unseen Power immanent in the universe. Shinto is the embodiment of their jejune aspirations. They enjoy the pulsations of Nature and Nature's mysterious vitality, but they have never formulated their observations into a credo. They crave for the Absolute, and satisfy their cravings by a crude animistic or animistic worship. Their idea of sin is physical uncleanness. Their first and last desire is to get rid of pollution, and if by thus seeking purity other things shall be added unto them, well and good. Life eternal is not the goal of their ambition: earthly existence is quite sufficient for gods. Their life is almost vegetal. Truth and righteousness are qualities of the cleanness of spirit to be secured by lustration. The vocabulary of Shinto is extremely limited, showing paucity of ideas. Be ye pure--pure, not as your Father which is in heaven, of whom they know nothing, but as ye are in the essence of your own being. This pure being is that which remains when one is purged of all foreign dross, of all ill-will against one's neighbour, of all inordinate desire, of all that casts the least shadow over serenity of soul.

" As all natural instincts are an integral part and parcel of one's being, they are no impediments to a god-like life, hence no asceticism. Shinto is unmoral. Its very gods were perhaps like the *numina* of the Romans. To be god-like constrains no abstemious life. The gods do not deny themselves. Only they never indulge in excesses. *Kan-nagara*, the condition of godhead, is the normal wholesome state of natural existence--an Edenic existence after the heart of Jean Jacques Rousseau. But, like other paradises, this one, too, is hedged about by many inhibitions and prohibitions, leaving little freedom to uphold its incorruptibility. Exorcism, ablution, prayers, incantations--taboos of all sorts--have been invented to mar the simple, original ways of the gods and godlings. In order to be natural, an artificial requirement is called

upon for aid, and in order to be very natural, Shinto has become extremely ritualistic."

The preceding is repeated here as a confirmation of several of the points brought out more subjectively by Sokei-an's descriptions of his own early years of Shintoism. The next point to be brought out is less familiar to Sokei-an's students.

"There seems to be one feature which is common to all faiths of magical derivation, and that is the comparatively nonchalant attitude toward ethics. They do not interfere with --they evidently do not care for --the inner life or the private conduct of their followers. From the simple fact that their influence is exerted through rituals--that is, through established rites--which hierologists would call communal magic, it is only to be inferred that the neglect of set forms would be considered the greatest offense. Rituals demand from the public a certain line of behaviour--be it only silent acquiescence. The outward conformation is all that is required of it. Its inner motive is left entirely untouched. No inquisition. No confession of faith. The religious duties are concerned not so much with man's relation with gods or men as with ritualistic forms.

"There is a teaching which, if not confined to Shinto, is at least most emphasized by it, and

that is the innate goodness of human nature. Chinese philosophers were long arrayed in two opposing camps on this question, and a third party later developed to enliven the dispute. One school maintained that man is good by nature; another, that he is bad; while the third contended that he is a mixture of good and bad. Shintoists did not come under Chinese influence in this matter. Though they had an idea of good (*nigimi-tama*) and bad (*arami-tama*) spirits, they consistently upheld the theanthropic doctrine of *Kan-nagara*, of man being essentially divine. No doctrine of the fall of man has ever perplexed them. They have ever insisted upon the purity of the human heart (*ma-gokoro*), by which they mean freedom from inordinate passions. Shinto is not abstemious, puritanic. It puts no restraint on food or drink, raiment or dwelling, except that these be simple and clean. It provides a wide space for the play of the *libidos*. All appetites are natural, and hence divine gifts, and the temperate enjoyment of them is a divine power. If in the satisfaction of his desires man oversteps the limits of moderation, he pollutes his body and mind. To be god-like is to be natural; to be natural is to follow Nature as Nature will have itself followed, which is within the limits set by reason and instinct..."

This "to be natural" then, in the Japanese sense has quite

a different "feel" from the "to be natural" of the West. The Japanese, instead of thinking that at the bottom of his "unconscious" lies a chaotic, horrible, dangerous mess, rests on his samskara as on a flowing, bouyant support. Not his to reason why, just float at the mercy of the stream. There is not in his nature the idea that the forces of his "id" are something to be downed, sublimated, or repressed, but rather admired and relied upon as divine. The subconscious is not something to be feared but to be revered.

The "to be natural" of the Japanese seems to me different from the "to be natural" of the Taoism that is another one of the elements that makes up Zen Buddhism. Both early and later Taoism have their influences to be taken into account, for if one probes around enough, I think these two strands can be quite clearly differentiated. The Chinese "magic" that has crept into Japanese Buddhism differs from the shamanistic magic of Shinto, I believe, and both differ considerably from the more familiar "magic" of the West, where the "devil" takes much of his power from the Western concept of religious sin and guilt. The devil does not exist in the East in the Western sense. Nor is "flesh" related to him in the Western sense. There are hells and devils and heavenly beings in Buddhism, some of which were mixed up with Shinto during its

marriage and remained, but their function is different from that of the beings that bear similar names in the West.

Ceremony in Japan, as distinguished from magical ritual, comes, probably, from China. It too is an integral part of Buddhism and therefore Zen Buddhism has it too. Partly an imitation of the cultured Chinese Way, partly religious (in the sense of reverential, as noted in last month's FROM WHERE I SIT) and partly magical, it imparts all three of these elements in one to Buddhism. The magnificent robes and accouterments of the priesthood, an elaborate hierarchy, protocol, red tape, formalities of speech and writing were brought in on the several waves of Chinese culture that inundated Japanese society.

When Buddhism came into Japan at court level, it also took over some of the functions of a national religion and its ceremonies were part of the Priest-Emperor's relation to Heaven. This whole area is so fascinating I could easily devote much more space to it, but I merely wish to touch upon it here.

The fact that Buddhism was a "patronized" faith is the reason, in my opinion, for the corruption of the priesthood that developed. When Buddhism joined Shinto as Ryobu under the ingenious Tendai Dengyo and Shin-gon Kobo the advantages of the

priesthood proved a temptation to all but the most noble.

Coming to the period just prior to that in which our American lineage came into being, Nitobe says: "Prior to the restoration (1870), Buddhist priests occupied a privileged position. Nobody questioned their authority in matters of the spirit; nobody pried into their lives in matters of the flesh. They led an easy existence, and often more than easy, preying upon the industry and credulity of their parishioners. Corruption among them was connived at, ignorance ignored. Their chief means of subsistence consisted in the burial of the dead. They held aloof from mundane occupations. There was a life of utmost ease and security. It was a terrible blow to their complacency when, with the abrogation of the Ryobu, the priests, who were domiciled in Shinto shrines, were suddenly thrown out into the world, together with their images and their paraphernalia. The Buddhist temples were turned into schools, barracks, offices, and put to other secular uses. These iconoclastic measures, instigated by the Government, were aimed directly at Buddhism... But the inherent light of Buddhist faith could not be easily quenched... A new generation of priests and theologians has been educated, whose study has led them to confidence in the superiority of many articles of their own faith and to reflection on some points

of its weakness."

Another Chinese import that has been extremely important in the formation of the Japanese character is Confucianism. I am not speaking so much of the ideas of Confucianism as of its part in the formation of the "web" of Japanese interpersonal relationships, a phenomenon unique in history. Sokei-an's remarks on "The Human Being" are one of his few comments on this important aspect of the Japanese education of his time.

All these patterns and forces have so fused and interfused in our Zen Buddhism that one can only with the most observant eye see the seams where the superstructure has been joined. Yet all these elements can be identified, sorted, even detached, without in any way interfering with the real essence that is what I like to call its working principle.

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ty, so we show it. Tree leaves, for instance, are all unsymmetrical and partly bitten by worms, yet we think them beautiful, not as something carved by a sculptor is beautiful, but they have their beauty. We don't scold the tree leaves: "I don't want to look at you."

A tea master once asked his disciple to sweep the garden. The disciple watered the garden first, then swept it very clean. It was autumn, and the leaves were falling. The disciple swept everything away--all the tree leaves, all the pine needles--and even washed the pebbles. When the tea master came back and saw the garden, he said, "Have you swept the garden?" "Yes." "You don't know how to sweep a tea garden. Look at it!" cried the master. "Do you call yourself a future tea master? Think about it!" What was the disciple to do? He was a wise disciple. He went to the garden and shook the maple tree. Two or three yellow leaves fell down, and some pine needles. "You are a good pupil," said the master. "You understand." This irregularity makes beauty. We expect irregularity and excuse it, even though it is a little too much.

In such a way we think of all the world and all human beings. Our idea of completeness may be likened to the moon reflecting upon the waves. In the sky the moon is perfect, round, and full, but in the water it stretches out and comes back, breaks into ten thousand pieces like the scales of a fish--it changes its appearance in a million different ways. But from the synthetic view there is perfection in that irregularity. We understand perfection, but we are not trying to bring it out in our human life. We like to live as human beings, accepting all human qualities, but we must emphasize the beautiful parts and suppress the ugly.

Confucius said, "The superior man cultivates the foundation." "Foundation" means the foundation of the human mind. According to this foundation we perform our daily life. This foundation of the human mind exists between father and child, brother and sister. It is the foundation of human feeling and human love, and we build human life on that ground. We find it naturally between father and child, brother and sister. When you open the Confucian Analects you find: "A dear friend has come from a distance. It is delightful." This plain feeling is basic human mind.

There is also an ugly way to associate with our fellow men. These days we don't find men of the big calibre of our ancestors. Men have be-

come terribly small, and their minds contorted. What is the cause of this? It isn't written only in fable or story, we really know there were great men among the human beings of ancient days. Why is it we don't find men of that calibre today? Everyone has become so small and so cheap. We must think about this. Everyone knows there is something wrong, somewhere something twisted, but we can't find out what it is. In the economic conditions, in the political conditions, something is wrong. We must pass through these conditions. We cannot know what it is or what it comes from, but what is clear is that what is wrong comes from the mind. We work so hard, but we don't get anywhere because we are trying to go somewhere on the seat of an automobile. We don't know how to find the real human being. Find your own self, the real human being, the real heart and real mind, the real love that is not distorted, not of ulterior motive. It is pure as spring water. All of us have this, but we have forgotten that we have it and don't know how to find it.

People tell me I am an idiot to think one can be kind all the time. Someone told me: "Everyone laughs at you. You must be a hard-boiled egg." How can I be a hard-boiled egg? "You must be tough." I went to see a movie about a big newspaper office. In this picture a little boy came to the reporter and went "Chrrk!" with a gesture of cutting his throat, and read his name from a list of those who were fired. They all grew sad and went away. In my father's time, when you discharged an employee, you would speak with him decently; you would call him into your private office and at least say, "Sorry." Perhaps the movie was true, perhaps it is done this way today, with no words, no waste of time, just a "Chrrk!" and a fifteen-year job gone. I think no human being likes this. Even the hard-boiled guy in the newspaper office didn't like it. Well, there is something wrong, isn't there?

I think about the old days, how my father educated me. As his duty, after supper, he would call me to his chair and educate me. He taught me what it is to be a human being. In your country the mother used to teach the children. Every moment, the mother was the teacher. These days fathers and mothers put the baby to bed and go out dancing somewhere. The child goes to school, and the school-teacher gets a salary for dumping out knowledge. No one teaches the child how to develop the quality of the human being.

I am an Oriental so I can tell you

something of what we were taught in the East. There are five cardinal virtues, the necessary qualities of a man. Lacking one, the man is not complete. The first virtue is love; the second means to pay back a duty; the third is propriety; the fourth is intelligence; the fifth is confidence.

Love--what is love? We don't need to talk about it. When two human beings meet, naturally there is love: love is felt naturally between two. So the Chinese character for love is two people.

Duty. When, in a predicament, someone comes and helps you, you will remember; when he is in difficulties, you will help him. My parents, with love, educated me, therefore I educate my children.

Propriety. I always talk about the relation between parents and children because it is the foundation. You call your father "Pop." "H'lo, Pop!" How can you call your father this! If we Japanese were to call our father "Pop," he would be furious. Without propriety, there are not warm feelings between husband and wife. And between men there are ways of saying things--you may move the mouth and the lips in the same way, but what a difference!

Intelligence means the sympathetic view. With the sympathetic view you understand the other and forgive him without a word.

Confidence is the fifth of the cardinal virtues. With confidence no one backbites or speaks with a double tongue; no one gives away a friend or tells secrets. Your friend says, "It is a secret, but I will tell you." And when you know, I know, earth knows, heaven knows. But when there is confidence, you listen to your friend, perhaps say just one word, and your friend goes away, knowing that he can trust you.

These days the diplomats, who hold the whole power of their countries, come together and talk. One says something one day, but the next day no one can trust what was said yesterday. How can confidence between two countries be established that way?

What are we doing that everyone distrusts the other? These days there are no cardinal virtues in our life. Where shall we seek the true human quality? Without this human quality on what foundation do you build your life? Any other foundation is like ice that melts away while you are looking at it. Man's error is clear. Truth is not outside; it is in you. Of course I am thinking of these Confucian virtues in my Asiatic way. You must think of them in your own way. Everyone realizes that something is wrong. I think what is wrong is very clear.

THE NEW YORK TIMES OF MARCH 13, 1966 carried an article, part of which is noted below, that bears out Sokei-an's remarks of 1941. The respect for elders inculcated in the Japanese by the teaching of the "Confucian virtues" in the schools and at home seems to be largely lost since this teaching, which was considered, probably correctly, the main means of indoctrination in Japan's "nationalism" of the past, was forbidden during the American occupation.

ARMY HELPS TRAIN WORKERS IN JAPAN
SHORT STINT MOLDS EMPLOYEES IN CLASSIC VIRTUES--by Robert Trumbull, Tokyo.
An increasing number of companies here are requiring new male employees to spend a few days in an armed forces camp before reporting to work. They see a "lack of discipline" in the young university graduates.

Personnel executives say they hope that in the military camps their "new boys" will absorb some of the classic Japanese virtues, such as respect for elders, which are said to have been largely forgotten by a new "emancipated" generation.

Any Japanese male may spend up to four days in an armed forces camp at a cost equivalent to about 50 cents a day for food. Last year about 90,000 men did.

"It is good for young Japanese men today to see the strict discipline in the armed forces," Seizo Shiga, a personnel training director for the huge Toho Company, a leading motion picture and theatrical concern, declared.

"Young men of the postwar years are badly in need of good manners," said the 30-year-old Mr. Shiga, who did the standard four-day stint in an infantry camp as part of his company indoctrination.

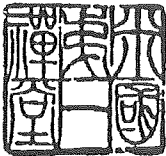
"Democracy, as Japanese youths understand it today, is the privilege of behaving as freely as they like without respect for their superiors," Mr. Shiga went on. "After their brief life in the armed forces, our young men have a better appreciation of discipline, considerate behavior and teamwork."

Several young workers who have had brief sojourns with the armed forces as part of their job training said in interviews that they had gained from the experience.

"As a student, I had led a loose and free life, but my experience with the military has given me a sense of responsibility, duty and the value of time," said Yikishiro Yoshida, 24, an employe of Nihon Kotsu, a large car-rental and taxi concern in Tokyo.

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