

ZEN notes



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SOKEI-AN SAYS

A JAPANESE IN NEW YORK I spent the whole day (December 2, 1936) seeing Professor Suzuki off after his visit to New York, so I did not have time to make my usual translation but shall speak about something important that was on my mind today.

If I were an American beginning to study Oriental religion I would have certain doubts about the usefulness of such a study. I would have heard that all Oriental religions are "spiritual." But I am living in the materialistic Western hemisphere. I do not have time to spend entertaining myself by exploring ideas. My purpose in studying Oriental religion is to appropriate its understanding for my own life. Of what use will this spiritual Oriental religion be in leading my life in my materialistic existence. In conclusion, if I were an American, I would give up the idea of studying Oriental religion unless I could find a reason for doing this.

If you were to ask the usual Oriental teacher about this, he would tell you that the spiritual Eastern civilization is better than the materialistic Western civilization, that all materialism should be wiped out. But, you would ask, what could be done about this Western civilization--it did not happen yesterday, it also has several thousand years of history behind it?

My answer to the question is

that to take either the spiritual view or the materialistic view as better is to take a relative view. There are no two civilizations that can be separated by drawing a line between materialistic and spiritual. From the beginningless beginning these have been amalgamated. Also, the idea of "material" is wrong and the idea of "spiritual" is wrong.

I shall first speak about matter and spirit, but these are not to be taken from two different angles. I think those who have worked on koans will understand what I am talking about without any explanation. The first thing we must understand is what the true object perceived by our consciousness is. Take a drinking glass, for example. It is an object, isn't it? You call it matter. The consciousness with which you see it is spirit, you think. But if you look down on the object because it is material and look up to your consciousness as spiritual, your attitude is wrong. To observe the world in such a way is childish. If there were nothing outside, you could not have your consciousness. If you were standing alone in the sky, you could not keep your consciousness, for consciousness cannot maintain its existence alone. To think that consciousness was existing alone before matter is erroneous. If one asks whether matter was first or consciousness was first, the answer is that both exist at the same



ZEN TALKS by MARY FARKAS

The words the historical Buddha spoke were addressed most frequently to his Sangha, though occasionally, conversations are reported and remarks made to individuals or special groups. The Sangha did not consist merely of monks. According to different classifications, it was made up of four, seven, or nine classes. If counted as seven, these were monks, female observers of all the commandments, novices, or observers of the six commandments, female novices, male and female observers of the minor commandments, male observers of the five commandments, female observers of the five commandments. The characteristic that to me most clearly distinguishes his attitude toward his audience is reasonableness. Rather than emotional, dictatorial, religious, or inspirational, his talks are instructive, logical, analogical, and persuasive. The Way he advocates leads not only to peace of mind but to freedom of inquiry. His most famous address in this area, made to a group of people who were in doubt about something and seeking certainty, expresses an attitude that is as "advanced" today as it was 2500 years ago. I quote it as an example of the reasonableness of the historical Buddha's approach.

The Buddha said: "It is proper for you, Kālāmas, to doubt, to be uncertain; uncertainty has arisen in you about a thing that is doubtful. Come, Kālāmas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability or authority; nor upon the consideration: 'This is our teacher.' But Kālāmas, when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome, bad and wrong, then give them up... And when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome and good, then accept them and follow them."

During the Buddha's lifetime his disciples traveled about and preached to their disciples and the "multitude." The sutras, one might say, are the outgrowth of their repetition of the Buddha's words, which were identified with the opening "Thus I have heard." The style of the rendition can be imagined from the descriptions of Ananda's mimicking of the Buddha after his death so exactly that the audience would be moved to tears. Though I have never heard such preaching, if it is anything like that given by Hindus of today, there must have been a stylized use of the voice, with at least the parts put into "poetry" recited in a rhythmic or resonant way, which in itself has an effect on the listeners.

A natural sequence would be the reading, that is, reciting, of the Master's words, followed by a commentary or explanation by the leader of the meeting, with perhaps added examples of points brought out in the text. As new works were presented for the first time, some authenticating information was probably included, such as where and when the state-

ment of the Buddha was made.

When Mahayana works were introduced to the "multitude" some statement was made as to when and where the teachings, often attributed to the Buddha, were given and why they had not been included in the original official collections. One way in which they can be identified as Mahayana sutras is the mythical nature of the place and audience described in their introductions. As one reads these, it becomes clear that the Buddha who speaks here is not the man, who became the Enlightened One, but the Eternal Buddha in heavenly conclave. An example of this is the description of the place where the Buddha raised the flower, which though it is described as Vulture Peak, is obviously not a location to be found on a map.

As competition among the upholders of individual Mahayanist sutras was keen, debates were staged in which the champions of a specific teaching publicly stated and expounded it, after which opponents might confound them and consign their sutras to perdition. Stories of Hsüan-Tsang's pilgrimage from China to India to learn more details of the teaching include an account of the Great Debate in India in the 7th century which ended in a victory of the Mahayana. In a spectacular five-day presentation of the Mahayana Doctrine by Hsüan-tsang, it is reported, not a single opponent of the thousands brought together to uphold the Hinayana answered his challenge: "If anyone can find a single word in the text contrary to reason or a single argument that can be refuted, I will forfeit my head."

THE MIDDLE WAY for May contains an article by Lobsang Jivaka that recounts how in a similar situation in Tibet

the cause of Zen did not fare so well in the eighth century.

"In addition to these schools (later the Red Hats and Yellow Hats) there was soon to be a third, emanating from China in the reign of King Tri-Song in the latter half of the eighth century. This school, so far as one can tell from the account given, was that of Ch'an Buddhism, later known as Zen, preaching the Enlightenment that comes in a flash; but it did not last. The Indian pandit Kamalashila worsted the exponent of this Chinese form of Buddhism in a public debate, and thereafter his followers left him."

As the recitation of the sutras was sometimes endowed with magical as well as logical power, sometimes the victory of an individual sutra or its exponent was based on its saving power rather than its appeal to reason. If it could cure, or enlighten, or save from battle, murder, or sudden death, not to mention famine or other national disasters, there was no need for it to be reasonable or even meaningful as well. Carrying this idea out to its logical conclusion, even the recitation of the name of the efficacious sutra or proximity to its written form would be enough for its powers to be elicited and whirling it or hearing its recitation would also work wonders.

I have been speaking so far of public "talks" or recitations in which either the whole doctrine or some particular school was fighting for its life. There was also the competition among individual masters within the sects. Unattached students might go from master to master until they found the one who best suited their tastes. And they must prove themselves to the master, sometimes in open interviews.

In such a case the result tended to be: if you can't best the master in an encounter, become his follower. The dialogues between master and student can sometimes be best understood in this light. Or, a monk may be presented in the records as representing a certain view or doctrine. Of course, only dialogues that proved the points the reporters wished to make would be included. One never hears of situations in which the master was worsted in accounts of his own school.

Most interesting, from the point of view of a Zen student, are the cases in which the members of the audience were enlightened as a result of hearing the recitation of a sutra or the words of a master. Perhaps the most famous of such instances was the awakening of Hui-neng upon hearing the line from the Diamond Cutter. Reading Master Han-shan's comment on this sutra, as pointed out by Mr. Luk, who translated it, we see that something more than mere reading or listening is going on. For a man's doubts to be cut off, the person doing the reading of the sutra must have reached the Diamond Mind itself and the audience must have come to the same level for the effect to take place. It is here that I wish to make my main point. What distinguishes a Zen talk from others is that it is uttered from the most profound level and must be heard from the same level.

Sokei-an said, in characterizing one of his own talks; "I beg your pardon for my slow speech but first I must think these things I am going to speak in my mind, then I must translate it into English, and then I must carry out the Dharmakaya itself before your eyes, so naturally I cannot speak as I would read a book."

An article by a Chinese Buddhist preacher, C.M. Chen, which appeared in the Maha Bodhi International Monthly, is one of the few comments I have ever seen in any publication on the profounder aspects of preaching. Following are some excerpts from it:

It is quite well known that one does not preach anything for one's own reputation but only for the sake of others' wisdom-life. That is why the preacher is modest in speech, his practice always exceeding his words until he gets his full Enlightenment. He practices before he preaches, and he preaches after he practices, and always he fears to preach more than he has practiced. Therefore the difficulty is not how to preach well but as to what are the wisdom-experiences or inner merits to be used as a basis of preaching... According to my idea, there are six stages of preaching classified not in an exterior manner, but according to the mental states involved.

1. The first stage of preaching is based upon the knowledge of hearing or reading and that of thinking or speculation.

(This includes the reading of all the scriptures and knowledge of their languages: Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese and Tibetan, together with that of the audience. Thinking should discriminate pure Buddhism from the religion of outsiders, should select the best doctrines for individuals. Also he should distinguish the One Hundred Dharmas of the Idealist Schools and having applied these in his life, come to know the difference between commonsense or worldly knowledge and dharmic knowledge.)

2. The second stage of preaching is

that where, in addition to the first stage, concentrated sympathy for worldly sufferers is also essential.

(Because he himself has practiced the Four Noble Truths he knows not by words alone the impermanence and pains of samsara but he has realized their truth in the clarity of mind after success in concentration over a long period.)

3. The third stage of preaching is the importance of having the power to develop the audience's Bodhi-heart as the positive complement to his negative sympathy with their pains.

(" As speech is the sound of the heart and his heart has become the Bodhi-citta, so wherever he gives lectures, he is in the meditation of the unity of Dharmakaya with all his audience and, whatever he feels, that the audience feels also; whatever he likes to speak upon, all audiences like to hear too. Sympathy now is not only on the side of the preacher, but on both sides (from the audience as well). By the power of the achieved Bodhi-heart, he is able to make feeble-willed minds stand upon the foundation of Tathagatagarbha ... He who is achieved in Bodhi-heart, is sure to give appropriate teaching to others and will usually hit upon the right point at the right time for the spiritual growth of others.)

4. In this fourth stage of preaching the realization assurance of Bodhisattvas is necessary.

(" If he has the Bodhi-heart as well as realizational assurance, he is then the centre of the meeting, a Dharma-battery which all the graces of the Buddhas and the faith of all the audience contact alternately. Through him is formed a Buddha-Dharma current and he would then have the four unlimited

Bodhisattva powers of interpretation: Dharma--the letter of the Law; artha--its meaning; nirukti--ability in any language or form of expression; and pratibhana--eloquence or pleasure in speaking. With such powers of preaching the special audience of profane intelligence might be subdued.")

5. The importance of this fifth stage is the magic power of the Vajrasattva.

(" There are some special audiences who only believe when they see displayed the supernormal powers of the five Abhijna, they have no faith in preaching.") See ZN IX/2, IV/6 for Sokei-an's comment on these.

6. Full Enlightenment is the final and ultimate source of all these stages of preaching.

(" It is needless to say that the Buddhas' preaching is the most perfect and excellent. Their preachings are all true, credible, immutable, and without extravagance and chimaera. In one and the same preaching of a Buddha, all kinds of sentient beings may hear Dharma fruitful for themselves as individuals. He does not preach only for human beings but also for the benefit of devas and nagas.")

Birds sing, wind blows, stream flows, flowers bloom, and clouds move--everything is the good preaching of the broad and long tongue of the Dharmakaya for those persons whose good conditions of Dharma have come to maturity and who are ripe for understanding. Nevertheless, we Buddhist preachers should do our utmost in preaching for the Buddhadharma's sake. The conditions of the above six stages of preaching should be gathered by us, the more the better and the sooner the better.

A few copies of a booklet sent us by Mr. Chen are available for distribution.

time. Therefore, as you observe when you pass the first koan, you cannot draw a line between spirit and matter.

When your consciousness evolves--your sense organs and so on--you see IT and you call it form, you hear IT and you call it sound. Observed from your inner consciousness in meditation IT is just pure etheric space, to borrow a scientific term. Observed with the eye IT is form and color, observed through the ear, IT is sound, through the nose smell. When we use inner consciousness there is no sound, smell, taste, touch, or appearance. Also there is no time, no space. If we observe this existence with two or three sense organs at once, we create two different existences--spirit and matter. But there are neither spiritual nor material entities.

Suppose you had no eyes, no ears, no sense organs, then nothing would exist for you. There was that famous American woman, Helen Keller, who could not prove that her consciousness existed except through the sense of touch. Except for that, as experience, the three worlds were empty to her, because throughout the universe there was nothing for her to experience. Of course, if one had no physical body one would have no soul, though we would not call this being dead. But whether one is called dead or not makes no difference. If we observe the universe with the inner organ of universal con-

sciousness it is empty and we call that consciousness spiritual. When that consciousness evolves and branches out to the five senses we call it material existence. If there were no matter, there would be no consciousness. But this inner consciousness is also material. In fact, these names--matter, spirit--are just words, just nonsense. Why should we dispute, standing on one to disdain the other?

There are those who say we should wipe out this material civilization, who would advise the Orientals who are now beginning to imitate it to stop building ships and skyscrapers, just to dig a hole in the ground and lie in it. Because this material civilization creates so much unhappiness, shall we go back to the caves and take three hours to cook our food over a smoky fire? Do you think that would be "spiritual?"

How then shall the student in the materialist country combine the spiritual with the material view to his advantage? If a Japanese complains about your materialistic civilization, do you think you should take your hat off to him and say: "We have a terrible civilization in the West and we beg your pardon. We are terrible people. Your tea ceremony is wonderful. Please tell us about it. We will listen very carefully."

The Japanese will laugh at you and think you do not know the value of your own civilization. When an Oriental comes

here and says you must wipe out the subway and the machine, he doesn't know what he is talking about. It is not being materialistic to use machinery. Truly, to have a "material" society would mean that nature had not passed through the human mind. When nature has not been thrown into the melting pot of the human mind and been molded into a solid shape or form like a city, it is just "material." The wide plains, miles of virgin country with no cattle, no fish--that is material, because it has not been touched by the human brain, has no association with human beings.

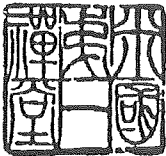
This is the "spiritual civilization" you are looking for. Why can you not accept it? You disdain it because you have never returned to the first stage of consciousness, your original aspect, and looked at it from there. You always stand on your five senses to observe. You think you must jump out of your five windows into the sky to find the spiritual. Close your five windows and go back to the sanctuary of your consciousness. Better still, keep them open but realize that you have this inner consciousness. While you are talking or philosophizing about names you are not in the spiritual body. Forget all those names and notions. Give them up and be yourself.

Spiritual people say we must give up desire--to eat, to embrace a woman is terrible, they say. Why should we give it up? You think this because your un-

derstanding is not clear about your desire. It is better to think about this from the economic side. Desire is always limited by circumstances. To live in New York you must pay a very high price and you can satisfy your desires only cooperatively with your neighbors. The civilization of cooperation really makes you develop non-ego. In order to satisfy your desires you must develop the non-ego attitude. Everyone must play a part that harmonizes in this scheme of existence. Your desire becomes a social rather than an individual matter, therefore you find the Buddhist's non-ego. From my standpoint, this New York civilization is Buddhist. We do not need to do anything more than enjoy it. I live here and I enjoy it. We do not need to wipe out New York and go back to the mountains. What is wrong is that we do not recognize this life. Don't disdain life, live in it. Do not live in it as though you are in a dream. You have the treasure, the great jewel, in your hand. Open your hand and look at it. I come from the Orient and I affirm this civilization and accept it. There is no error in this. The only error is that you do not know its value even though you have created it. You call it material, but it is a crystallization of the human brain, the human mind, which is really spiritual. This is my conclusion. I accept this as my existence in this life.

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