

ZEN notes ①



THE SIXTH PATRIARCH SAYS When you read what is said by others you may condemn them, saying that they adhere to words. You must realize that your being deluded can be condoned, but you must not disparage the sutra of Buddha. In disparaging the sutra you commit numberless offences. If you are one who in seeking truth adheres to outer forms and conceives of them as Dharma, or if you are one who builds temples everywhere and debates upon the right or the wrong of something or of nothing, you are one who will never, through recurring kalpas, be able to attain the realization of original nature. Discipline yourself in accordance with the Dharma. You must not merely listen to how to discipline yourself in accordance with the Dharma, nor must you desist from thinking of a hundred things. If you desist from thinking, it will obstruct the way of the nature of Dharma. If you merely listen to Dharma and never practice what you have heard, it will arouse false notions in others.

SOKEI-AN SAYS The Sixth Patriarch was giving his final discourse to his disciples before his death. This passage is a part of that last discourse.

The Sixth Patriarch did not accept the habitual attitude of Zen students of that period (the first part of the T'ang dynasty), who said that we must desist from thinking and must not speak a word in our mind or with our lips. They had misunderstood the words of Bodhidharma who said: "Contrive not a word to explain Dharma. Find your original nature immediately and make yourself a Buddha." They thought that silence was Dharma and that speaking no word was Zen. If speaking no word

is Zen, then every deaf-mute should be a Zen student! Bodhidharma said: "Contrive no word to explain your Dharma." His point is this:

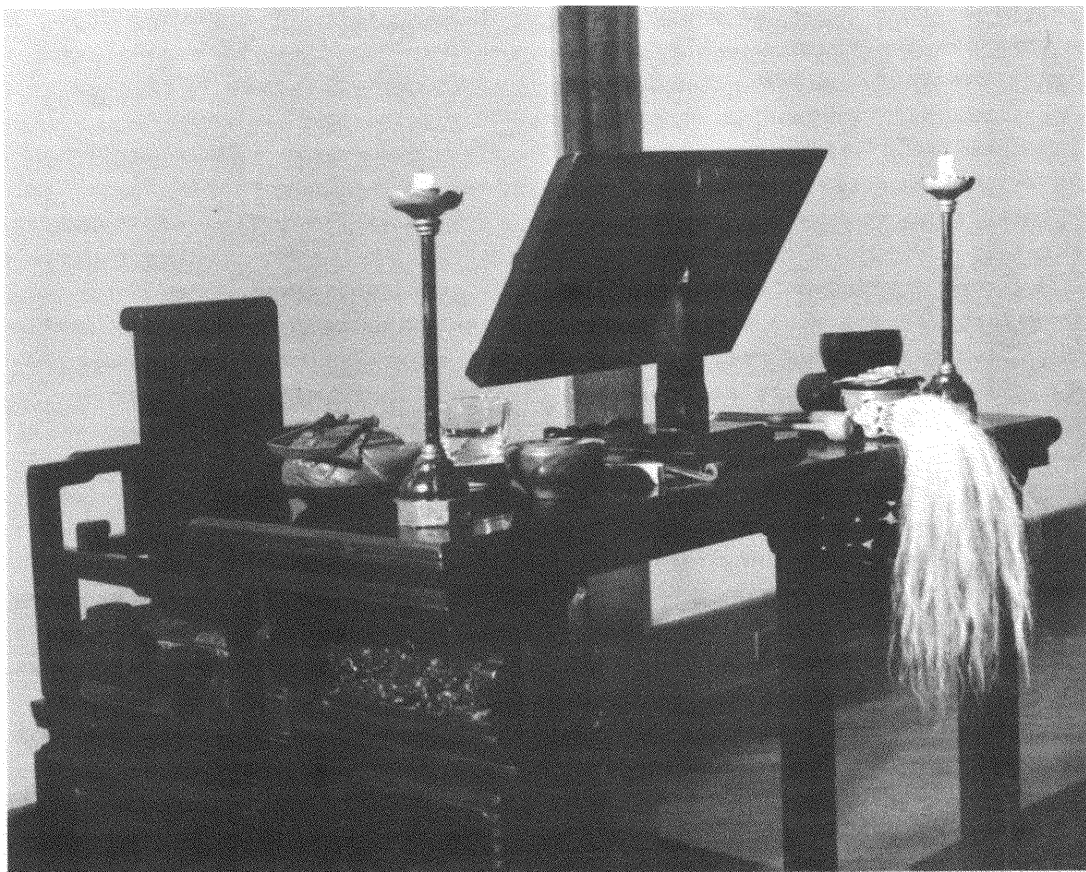
There are three contrivances--three steps--in every religion by which to explain it, three different means by which one comprehends religion.

The first contrivance employs metaphor. This metaphorical contrivance has many different forms. Sometimes it takes the mythological form--like the Greek, or Japanese Shintoism and Shingon. Christianity, for example, uses the symbolic or dramatic form. God is seated in the center of the heavens, on shining golden stairs where angels ascend and descend. Angels are standing behind God and Christ is taking his seat beside God; and there is a great wall of gold, with St. Peter guarding its golden gate. This is a method invented to give you an idea of religion. The method itself is not religion, but that which is indicated by this mythology is religion. Unfortunately everyone forgets about religion and thinks that religion is this mythology, this dramatized story. This is the first type of contrivance used to point out religion.

The second type employs not the mythological but the philosophical form. This form of representation does not arrange heavens and hells, gods and angels picturesquely; it appeals to man's mind; through reason the students will attain what is called religion. Sometimes they use philosophy, sometimes theology; and they think that their theology or philosophy is religion. They forget that these are only contrivances by which they may realize religion. To make one think philosophically and by this



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The Zen talks given by Sokei-an during the years 1930-1944 were of several types. Some began, as in Zen Notes this month, with a translation of a text, and continued with Sokei-an's comment on it. Others were the explanation and illustration of Buddhist terms. Most untypical were Sokei-an's statements of his own thoughts. Examples of all types can be found under the heading *Sokei-an Says*. As it was on first hearing Sokei-an's talks that I was brought to Zen, I naturally regard these as a potent factor in carrying on his teaching.

The room in which Sokei-an lived and taught in the thirties was not large. One entered at a door near the front, where his reading desk was, and confronted the audience in order to take a seat. Edna Kenton, a writer, was the historian at the time I arrived, in 1938. She told me later, when we had become friendly, that I regarded everyone suspiciously, as though I wondered what kind of people might be gathered together to hear a Japanese priest speak. Mrs. Helen Scott Townsend, the widow of a Sanskrit scholar, who acted as secretary, announced that Samana Sokei-an Sasaki, Abbot of Jofuku-in, would speak.

The members of the audience sat in meditation in chairs to begin, during which Sokei-an, whom we were told to call Osho (a more familiar and intimate title than Roshi), sat with us. It was, of course, his SILENCE that brought us into IT with him. It was as if, by creating a vacuum, he drew all into the One after him. It was not a long meditation, at most half an hour. What followed was not a break from it, but a

continuation or continuum, while those who were sanzen students entered the Teacher's room, a small space closed off from the audience by a pair of heavy folding doors on which Sokei-an had pasted the pages of the sutra. Inside those doors the interview between Master and disciple was the means by which Sokei-an brought the students to the practice. Whereas in Japan the serious students who were engaging in the practice would have begun with long sessions of zazen, here the majority of the members either by age or lack of agility were unfitted for a monk's novitiation, so another method had to be devised if the experiment were to go forward. Some did practice meditation in the crosslegged posture, but others could not bring their bodies to it. There were, behind those doors, however, so far as I know, no psychological or philosophical discussions, no worldly advice or explanations, just the business of Zen. When I was in recent years asked if we were given "instruction" in Zen, my considered answer had to be "no." To those of us who received Sokei-an's teaching, the word "instruction" must be a misnomer, for his way of transmitting the Dharma was on a completely different level, to which the word "instruction" could only clarify the state of ignorance of the questioner. If I were to say he "demonstrated" SILENCE, even that would be true but would give no indication of how he "got it across" or awakened it, or transmitted it. It is the same problem as is involved in the translation of the Sixth Koan of Mumonkan. The best description I have found of a Westerner's difficulty in understanding this manner of teaching is in a book *Kerygma in Crisis* by

Alfonso M.Nebreda,S.J. which one of our students,Frances Reiter,came across while working for a Catholic book publisher.

Some years ago I visited a Zen Buddhist temple about eighty miles south of Tokyo. While there I had a long, interesting conversation with a Buddhist monk. He was a Zen Buddhist, a member of what is probably the most important religious group of Japan's entire history. Even today they maintain a high standard. Outstanding religious personalities are found among them. This seventy-five year old master of novices was a wonderful person. We talked almost three hours while he told me many interesting things about their religious thought and practice. After three hours I made the big "mistake". I asked him: "You have been master of novices almost forty years. I should like to know how you manage to put across to your novices these religious experiences? How can you transmit a personal experience in words?" The old monk smiled and began to compliment me (Japanese are extremely polite, and you should be aware of this when they compliment you). "For three hours now I was really pleased to see how wonderfully well you speak our language. If I had been blind, I would have said that you are not a foreigner, but Japanese. And yet ... " Then he came to the real point, "yet this question of yours, even if I had been blind, would have told me that you are not Japanese after all." To my question on how to transmit personal experience, he answered: "Only by two personalities, so to say, 'rubbing each other.' The one who is somehow receptive will get your message. If he

is not receptive, you had better give up. Wait for maturity. Until then it is hopeless."

The sanzen students would stay inside differing lengths of time, punctuated by the sanzen bell, the ringing of which meant dismissal. Although what went on inside was usually in too low a voice to be heard outside, occasionally there would be diversions. Shouts or roars would replace the murmurs or silences from within. When the last person had gone in and come out, usually me in later years, there would be a signal with the gong or fishhead drum that the end had come. Once, when I had not taken my turn to go in because of some mental disturbance, an awesome shout from within reminded me that the Zen student has not to permit worldly matters to interfere with his Zen study. As each student came out, his face would reveal something of what had transpired. Determination, wounded pride, studied indifference, -- what a variety of possible responses there were! Of course we weren't supposed to look at them.

Then Sokei-an would issue forth from his lair, and take a seat at the table on which his manuscript rested on its wooden stand. At one side was the crystal glass, often referred to in his talks, which was refilled as needed from a metal pot that kept his drinking water fairly cool. How hot it was in the little room on summer nights! How many times Sokei-an's carefully folded white linen handkerchief would be needed. Perspiration would drip from our brows, over which drowsiness would bring down a heavy curtain that pulled down our eyelids as the fan lulled us with its hypnotic appeal to

the ear. A small gong signified the beginning and end of the service. Before beginning the talk itself, the ceremonial fly whisk called a Hossu was always raised. An article by Lob-sang Jivaka in *The Middle Way* for February, 1966 describes this "The frequent use of the symbolical act of raising the dust-whisk which every master carries, is to draw attention to the mind or the active function of the spiritual body, the Dharmakaya." When we saw Sokei-an raise the Hossu, we were not concerned with its symbology. It was just the thing itself, as it was. Everything was quite clear. Then the deep voice would begin. As is usual with Japanese speakers, some sort of sound would come, midway between a purr and a growl, from the very depths of being, before the first word would be articulated. The rest followed naturally.

Sokei-an spoke extremely slowly, and would pause between phrases or sentences for what sometimes seemed an eternity. His accent was a hindrance to some; to others it was an added attraction. (In one of the first talks I heard, I was never sure whether something was being unlevelled or unraveled.) After the text, there was no more reading. All was given spontaneously. As those who have followed Zen Notes know, the same subject might be given many times. Each time the details would vary, as would the emphasized points, as Sokei-an's mind chewed the subject slowly, in order to get every bit of

nourishment possible out of it.

When Sokei-an would come to a story, his dramatic side would take over. Now all the roles would be played rather than told. Even Stanislavsky might have taken a lesson here. For Sokei-an played not only the human roles, but also the animal, mineral and vegetable as well. Sometimes he would be a huge golden mountain, sometimes a lonely coyote on the plains; at other times a willowy Chinese princess or Japanese Geisha would appear before our eyes. Best of all were the Zen stories in which he would be the arrogant samurai, the uneasy monk, the frightening ghost, and, on the other side, the stern, abrupt, or kindly Master. There was something of Kabuki's Joruri, something of Noh's otherworldliness, something of a fairy story for children, something of archaic Japan. Yet all was universal as the baby's first Wa-a-ah.

SOKEI-AN SAYS (1937)

When I came to this country the last time I was teaching American ladies to meditate for a half hour at a time. For three days no one came back to my place. So I taught them to meditate for five minutes but that was very long so I reduced it to one minute and one young lady fainted.

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thinking awake to reality, the sutras were written and the lectures were given. These sutras and lectures are not religion; they are a ferry boat to carry one to reality.

The third type is this: to handle reality and by handling reality to awake to the state of reality. It is action, the same sort of direct action you use in your daily life. When you are merely discussing hotly with your friend you say, "I will hit you!" and take it out in words. But in direct action--you just hit him without a word.

Bodhidharma did not employ any reasoning or give any explanation for anything. To him, swallowing water was religion; every act from morning to evening was religion--eating food, sleeping, tending a shop, talking with one's neighbors--every act was religion. It was his means of practice. And you--you are in that state or you are not in that state.

Of course, from this point of view, we must alter our ordinary conception of religion. When we come to this state and are in this state from morning to evening, we do not need anyone to explain anything. For this reason Bodhidharma said: "Contrive no word!" So, as Zen students, you contrive no explanation.

It is all in your mind, in your first decision of the day: "Now I get up. I take my first step as I put my foot into my slipper this morning." But to attain to this state your mind must be enlightened.

For example, take a carpenter: if two men stand beside him, one to explain mythologically, the other to explain philosophically, that carpenter would just say, "I paid twenty-five

cents for this hammer yesterday," and go on with his work. He has no need for their explanation.

A similar story is told of the old Zen master Nansen who was sharpening his sickle when someone asked him about Zen.

"This is such a good sickle," he said, "It cuts so well."

Bodhidharma stood on that ground, so he said, "Contrive no word." But the monks of that day did not understand his point; so they just kept their mouths shut or stayed apart in the woods, refusing all their friends. "This is religion," they said. But you cannot use such a religion in your daily life. What are you going to do with it? Keep it in your closet? And as to reading the sutras, "Oh, this trash!" they said.

If keeping the mouth shut is Buddhism, then how did it come about that the Buddha was preaching for forty-nine years and left all those 5084 volumes of Buddhism? If keeping silence is Buddhism, then the Buddha would not have spoken a word. Your state of delusion is your own fault. You do not understand the profound method of leading people into religion. First you build temples, carve caves or images; then you construct theories--theological or philosophical; then you handle reality, in order to understand the state of reality. These are contrivances--one, two, three steps; and four steps, five steps, six steps! Just keeping your mouth shut and closing your eyes--this does not make a religion. It does not teach you anything.

Of the first two contrivances the Sixth Patriarch said: "If you are one who, in seeking truth, adheres to outer forms and conceives of them as Dharma:

or if you are one who builds temples everywhere and debates upon the right or the wrong of something or of nothing, you are one who will never, through recurring kalpas, be able to attain the realization of original nature."

It is true! When he said this, the Sixth Patriarch drove the last nail into these two planks.

And when he said: "...nor must you desist from thinking of a hundred things. If you desist from thinking, it will obstruct the way of the nature of Dharma," these words marked a milestone in that period.

How "listening to Dharma and never practicing what you have heard arouses false notions in others" is difficult to explain. A nun was invited to a layman's house. A whole fish was served--tail, fins, head, eyes. Now the regulations provide: do not eat the meat of an animal (or fish) if you have seen its entire body. The nun was in a quandary. At this moment one of the children of the family put his chopsticks into the fish's eyes and goggled them out -- the fish eye is considered a great delicacy--and the nun fainted.

A Buddhist monk came to America and someone took him to the stockyards in Chicago. When he saw what was going on there he became pale, cried like a baby and went out. This was a famous story, a very beautiful story, I thought. When I, as a student, returned to Japan to see my teacher, I told him this story. My teacher said: "He is a fool. Why did he go there? Buddhism will be cheapened having such a monk."

When people study Buddhism, they imitate the monk's way--obeying the commandments, meditating in silence, living in caves or forests, refusing all their friends, abhorring the world

and daily life.

But from our standpoint, when a fisherman studies Zen, he must be a real fisherman; when a butcher studies Zen, he must be a real butcher. A farmer must be a real farmer, a warrior a real warrior. He must live his daily life really, and every act from morning to evening is his religion.

So every religion has these three steps by which to explain it.

First, it gives you a mythological story.

Second, it explains this symbolic or metaphorical or dramatized form, through a priest, according to canon and theory, and renders it into a philosophy.

But Buddhism has one more step. Theory is derived from mythology, but theory must become reality. Then all is complete. Then it will be canonized. One who has the true eye will draw the true meaning--the reality--from mythology and philosophy.

As students you accept mythology first, and then grasp theology and philosophy, and then grasp reality. From the priest's side we know that reality, but from the students's side we cannot give it directly. So, mythologically or philosophically, we give it to you, in order that the children of all sentient beings may at last realize reality.

Reconstructed by EDNA KENTON

The three steps by which religion develops were described also in ZN II/12.

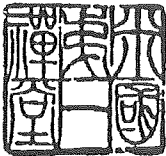
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