

# ZEN notes



A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rinzai Reed". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent "R" at the beginning.

*My sermon to which you are listening cannot be comprehended by the four great elements of which your body is composed. My sermon to which you are listening cannot be comprehended by your stomach, liver, and heart. My sermon to which you are listening cannot be comprehended by the empty sky. Then who is he who can comprehend my sermon to which you are listening? He who has no figure but who shines brightly in your presence comprehends my sermon to which you are listening. If you realize who he is, your understanding of true view does not differ from that of the Buddha. This "He" exists unceasingly throughout time and space. Everything with which you are making contact by means of the eyes is his manifestation; but when you entertain any notion, true wisdom is shattered; and when you harbor any doubt, the original body will be misconceived. Consequently you will transmigrate through the three worlds and will suffer from various afflictions. According to my view, it cannot be gainsaid that every moment of life touches the bottom of wisdom and reaches the height of emancipation.*

#### SOKEI-AN SAYS

In the last lecture, Rinzai was talking about the true ground of religion. The true ground, true existence, is undemonstrable by words; it is not a notion. Notions are the material of logic; logic is a way to transport one into the gate of the true ground of religion. But if you wish Real Understanding, you must not seek it in notions. The material, stuff that we have in our minds, is the shadow of our sense-impressions of the outside. True Understanding is different from sense-impressions. If we wish to attain it,

we cannot use any material that comes from outer existence.

The four great elements are earth, water, fire and air. The Buddha taught that the human being consists of six elements. Ether (akasha, the material that fills the void) is the fifth element and consciousness is the sixth.

The Buddha taught that all is one consciousness. It may be manifested or unmanifested. In an intricate body, consciousness is manifested; in a simple body like air, it is unmanifested. The Buddha thought that consciousness is not the highest existence. The high-

est existence is that which creates consciousness. Perhaps it could be called Nirvanic consciousness, though this is not a good term, for the Buddha's understanding is that this consciousness is annihilated in Nirvana. However, it can be said that the four great elements retain consciousness though they cannot understand, talk, or listen.

*My sermon to which you are listening cannot be comprehended by the empty sky.* Rinzai is speaking about the fifth element, akasha. When the kalpa fire of the last day of the universe destroys all, everything is reduced to akasha, the original material. The intrinsic power in akasha recreates the universe, bringing forth all the seeds of the past. Nothing, no matter how trivial, is lost. This conception is very important in Buddhism, for the hypothesis of reincarnation is based upon it.

"This akasha, however," Rinzai says, "Does not understand my sermon."

*Then who is he who can comprehend my sermon to which you are listening?* This line suggests the sixth element, the knowing that comes between two. If there is only one, consciousness is not manifested.

*He who has no figure but shines brightly in your presence comprehends my sermon to which you are listening.* He has no name but is in everyone. If I could say impersonal person, it would be that; this one is not living in worldly existence, but in purified existence. This "He" is the One of the triune body. But Rinzai is fooling us. He thinks we are children, so he must tell us a fairy story. There is no such one who has no figure. But if he said He has a figure, then all will at-

tach to this figure. Where is He? Inside? If so, where is He shining? The inside exists relative to the outside and vice versa. If you deny the outside, you must deny the inside also. Well, if it is not inside and not outside, but the central ground, where is it? It is here instantly--this moment. It is not necessary to make a line of demarcation between inside and outside. So Rinzai said, "In your presence."

*If you understand who He is, your understanding of true view does not differ from that of Buddha.* In the Orient, everyone worships the mirror, the sun. Both are symbols of "the One enshrined here within." The Buddha's realization of the true ground of religion, Bodhidharma's, and your own, are all the same realization. It is not necessary to call it Buddhism.

*This "He" exists unceasingly throughout time and space.* That One is everlasting, is not born, does not die; that One within is living always.

When Mahakashyapa entered into the meditation of annihilation, it is said that his body dried up and was scattered in the air, and his bones crumbled and washed away in the rain; but he is still meditating in that annihilation. That is the story of Mahakashyapa bearing the robe of the Buddha for the next body of true essence. That One lives everlastingly throughout time and space--wonderful conception! The mountains, rivers, stars, sun, flowers, birds, insects--all live everlastingly. That is the true ground of religion--true Buddhism.

*Everything with which you are making contact by means of the eyes is His manifestation; but when you entertain any notion, true wisdom will be*

## KARMA

*shattered.* The true ground was as pure as akasha, but a flake of delusion, like a small cloud in a clear sky, came into your mind, creating mind-stuff. Then you could not see true existence any more. Samskara is that small cloud in the sky; we have it innately. We came from our mother's bosom; we opened our eyes to see this manifested world. We never see the *fact* of existence. We think this mind-stuff is mind, but mind-stuff and mind are different: one is the outer existence of mind and the other is neuter mind. When we perceive with our delusion, it is altered. If we perceive with the five senses and cling to that, we think it is true existence.

*And when you harbor any doubt, the original body will be misconceived.* In Chinese, they say, "When your form has been changed, you are carried away from the true body, the essential body, Reality."

*Consequently, you will transmigrate through the three worlds and will suffer from various afflictions.* There is man, ox, dog, cat--you see all different kinds of torture and joy. Such is not the real understanding of the ground of life--it is superficial.

*According to my view, it cannot be gainsaid that every moment of life touches the bottom of wisdom and reaches the height of emancipation.*

Not in delusion, not in illusion, not in outer existence, not in samskara, this is the true universal wisdom.

*Brothers, the way of the soul has no visible form yet penetrates in all directions. It subdivides itself into the six harmonies of sense. If you do not cling to any of the notions in your mind, in all circumstances you are emancipated.*

The doctrine of karma is a Pan-Asiatic idea that existed in India before Buddhism. It goes with samsara. Every karmic act draws another. That becomes the cause of yet another, and that of another; linked, the whole chain turns like a wheel, with no beginning and no end. The Buddha found a way to put an end to karma, to save oneself from samsara, the endlessly circling wheel. The Buddha did not teach the law of karma, but the way of emancipation from karma is Buddhism.

Before explaining karma, I must speak about the results of karma. This must be made clear.

We particularly feel the results of karma in our minds. Your thoughts, my thoughts, are the results of previous karma. By these thoughts we arrive at our views; we observe the outside through our conceptions. When we look at something, we smile, sneer, or sigh depending on the attitude with which we habitually confront incidents. This attitude is the result of our past karma; with it we react toward present circumstances. From it, judging and deciding, we make our future. Our future depends on whether, looking at human life, we smile, sneer, or shrug our shoulders indifferently.

We can observe the results of individual karma when we dream. You have made your own discrete karma and you have cultivated and harvested it. It is yours, not mine; and mine is mine, not yours. Your dream is your own creation, not mine.

It is easy to observe your karma directly. You have seen or thought something; you dream it. Something you have done or thought will never

become another's dream. The pig you saw will come in your dream. With huge eyeglasses it looks at you. It is your own karma; the karma you made guides your life.

Then there is the karma of affinity. You were incarnated in a woman's bosom and infected by the disease that was her karma. You come out of her with a wonderful mind that is your karma also, but you cannot fully manifest your wonderful brainpower because of the karma of sickness carried with it. Buddhists call this repeated karma or piled-up karma. You may be good in this incarnation but you are reaping the results of eons-of-time-ago bad karma.

No one can escape the results of the karma that has been created.

There are three different kinds of karma: karma created with the physical body, karma that the mind created with its thoughts; karma created by your words.

Then there is the karma common to us all. I hear that sound. So do you. We know that we are hearing the same sound. I see the candle light. So do you. It is the same to both of us. This is the result of the karma that is common to us because we are sentient beings that came out of a particular place. We receive the karma that is common to us all.

When we think of the universe, it is quite mysterious. We say "the sky is blue." We think the sky is "blue." But the horse and the ox do not know the name "blue," though to their senses the sky may be seen in the same color as it is to ours.

This is my eye, but there is something that is superior to me about it. This eye is particularly mysteri-

ous to us. Whatever we think, no matter how the names differ, we all see the same color. Here is a great mystery. The eye that is so near, to me, to you, is yet one step higher than ourselves. It is with the eye that we observe wisdom and emotion and accept their results. So the eye is not separate from the human being but it is not as impure as the mind. The eye, which is in our body, is clear, pure, but it is not our property. It is a wonderful being, this eye. If we were like trees, we would not see this wonderful universe of ours. The eye gives us its wonders and no matter what we think, our eyes are the same. This is common karma.

The whole universe that we see is the dream of the eye. The dream we dream in sleep is our private dream, our private karma, but this wonderful dream is not private. It is the public dream. When our private dream comes to an end and we see the wonderful dream of the eye which is the common dream, what happens? It is very interesting to think about that! There is just one word in Buddhism that applies to this particular point--Nirvana. To attain Nirvana is enlightenment. Then what is there? There is no way to speak of this because all the words we use are names of the universe we see with our eye. We know but we cannot tell.

When an old Zen master was asked, "What happens after death?" he replied, "I do not know." "Why?" "Because I am still living." This conversation is very simple. But his "I don't know" is very deep. It is unknowable. You must understand this point.

When the Emperor met Bodhidharma and asked, "Who are you?" and Bodhi-

dharma answered, "I don't know who this 'I' is," you might call it the creation of God. His "I don't know" has the sound of something that is infinite, boundless.

Our private dream exists in our sixth consciousness. This is common to all but our conception of it differs with our karma. Above that consciousness is the alaya or everlasting consciousness. It too is common to us all. Alaya consciousness is really common to all sentient beings--animals, insects, trees--all life. Perhaps the word "soul" can be used for this alaya consciousness. This is our consciousness but it is superior to our individual consciousness. Alaya consciousness thinks and creates the universe and observes it. Perhaps you think that the mind is superior to the eye, but the eye is superior because with it we see the thoughts of alaya consciousness.

One moment to alaya consciousness is a million years to the human being. In the daytime when we dream, the dream passes like the smoke of a cigarette--thoughts incarnate and come and go. Samsara, the wheel in the mind, goes very fast. But when we are tired, at night, our dream seems to go on forever. When our consciousness is feeble, thoughts remain a long time; when we are fatigued we think something and slip into a dream--it is one moment, but in our dream it may be months or years.

This universe is just as ephemeral as the clouds in the sky. It will be wiped out and created again, but this incarnation is endless to the human being. We are living in a mysterious world; this dream is the dream of alaya consciousness. All is a dream.

Life is a dream but I enjoy this dream. Some do not like it, but I do not care what happens for after all it is a dream. I may become attached to something, but fundamentally I am not attached to anything because it is a dream. Here is the fearless attitude of the Buddhist, fundamental to him. Though we face death or any dilemma, we are not too disturbed because we know that this is a dream and that when we come out of it there will be no more dreams, that we will enter Nirvana. So Nirvana is the real foundation of our life. We are dreaming within a dream.

We receive three sorts of karma because we have three sorts of death. There is the death of the body. Buddhists think this body is like a furnace or water pistol. The furnace will not create fire forever. The thoughts we keep are not in our minds but in space. All the thoughts that "you" think return to this mind. When death comes, "you" enter a different body, find the place to be reincarnated, by orientation (the homing instinct)--that is karmic consciousness.

There is periodic death. I studied art and died as an artist and became a monk, creating a new life.

There is also momental death; you think and die in a thought. You think of monism, pluralism, Buddhism. In each moment you die in that thought.

The karma created in the past you harvest. There is no escape.

*Reconstructed by F. Reiter*

THE FOUR DHYANA-LOKAS The first three of the eighteen Brahmaloкас are the first dhyana, the second three the second, the third three the third, and the remaining nine the fourth. See also ZN XVI/5.

# The Zen

**NISHIDANA** The parables in the Agamas are quite beautiful and interesting. To know their true meaning takes study; you must read many sutras. Then, with your profound knowledge, you will understand their hidden meaning.

During the Buddha's lifetime, many miracles are reported of him. These are described in the Agamas.

Once the Buddha was staying at a vihara beside the Pond of Monkeys, Ape Creek Vihara. This vihara was unusual because it was built of bricks, dried clay and stones. It was two stories high and had a roof-garden.

One day the Buddha washed his yellow nishidana (a thin cloth the monk spreads to sit upon) and spread it on the roof to dry in the sunshine. Taking up a broom he began to sweep the roof-garden. Suddenly a drop of rain struck his forehead. He looked up at the sky and saw a mass of black clouds ready to send rain pouring down. This was unexpected because the day was clear and the sun bright, a good day to do the washing, so the Buddha had ordered the monks to wash their nishidanas and he was washing his. The disciples offered to wash his, but he was doing it himself. The Buddha also always spread his nishidana himself before seating himself upon it. Ananda, his attendant, readied his room but no one could spread the nishidana for him.

The Buddha, looking up at the black cloud in the sky, accompanied by lightning and thunder like a drum far away, held up his hand at the cloud, then took up the broom and began sweeping again. The cloud tried hard to drop the rain, but it was held back by the power of the Buddha. The Buddha calmly

swept the roof with his broom, then took his nishidana, which was by that time well dried, on his arm and disappeared from the roof-garden. Now, with thunder and lightning, the black cloud burst. Rain fell like a waterfall, filling up the depressions in the earth until they were level with the highest places on the river's banks.

This was told by Ananda as one of the Buddha's miracles. As soon as the Buddha took the nishidana in his hand, the rain came pouring down. This description is very pure and very clear to the true Buddhist. When we think of the nishidana, knowing what it symbolizes, we understand this story. The nishidana is Buddha's seat. Consciousness is Buddha's seat. Without consciousness, Buddha would have no place to manifest his power. Even Mahakashyapa and Ananda could not spread Buddha's consciousness; they could not lay down the Buddha's seat. Buddha must lay this down himself. Your consciousness is your own Buddha and no one else's.

All the dhyana-lokas are seats of Buddha. The lokas are abodes in which Buddha stays for a while. Occasionally, Buddha washes his nishidana: we clean our consciousness, and when we do that we hold back the cloud, keep back the rain. A little cloud that is a dot drops a seed in our mind that produces a hurricane. It blows all states of mind away and destroys them. We are dead mentally. Buddha has the power to hold this back.

In meditation, we realize we have this power. With our physical ability, we know we can close our eyes, shutting off vision. We know when we pay no attention to any sound we can avoid the auditory function. You hear the

*zen notes*

Copyright 1970 by ( The First Zen Institute of America, Inc.  
Published monthly ) 113 East 30th Street, New York, NY 10016

Vol. XVII, No. 7, Jul. 1970  
Mary Farkas, Editor  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

tick-tock of a clock, but, without covering your ear, you can avoid that sound.

It is quite strange to us that our consciousness has that power to cover the conscious mind with its lid and avoid all thoughts. When a cloud covers your consciousness, your consciousness covers your eye, you close your eye so that the rain of thoughts will not come in to consciousness to wet the holy nishidana. It is important to remember that we have this function, this ability. When you see the portrait of Bodhidharma you see the strong power that grasps his own mind to control it. Without using this function, we are just like animals. We must protect our nishidana from the rain of thoughts or delusion. In meditation it is not necessary to close your eye and ear, but close your consciousness so that you get away from your own thoughts. If you do not practice this you can hardly call yourself a student of Zen, because then your mind is like a running brook. A Zen student must hold it as Buddha held the black cloud, hold the cloud of thought while it is trying to pour its rain down to earth, while you enjoy that quietude, that serenity when you are holding your mind. Cover your eye of consciousness and hold the thoughts. If you cannot do this you are not a good Zen student. Then, when you let your thoughts go, you let them go like music, like poetry, so that you will enjoy yourself and your speech will be loved by your comrades. If it comes with thunder and lightning, it will have the power to control the whole universe.

*Reconstructed by Peter Haskel*

A SENIOR CITIZEN WRITES This has been my 25th year as a member of the First Zen Institute of America, as well as an epoch in my own advancing years. I feel obligated to communicate a brief summary of my experience, particularly as briefness is a Zen virtue.

Zen living is even more important to an older person as he has lost much of the vital spirit of youth which aids in meeting the impact of modern living.

I can testify to the extreme difficulty of breaking out of the bonds of Western mentality or consciousness, also called life style--a more difficult task than correcting a physical defect. Consider a most important characteristic of human being--the intentionality of consciousness, its property of conscious will, especially to *transcend* or void the activity of an uncontrollable racial and social unconsciousness. Eastern philosophy calls it *prajna* (wisdom), enlightened self awareness.

Continuous existing in this life pattern leads eventually to that state so difficult to define, yet nevertheless real and oftentimes exhilarating.

*SINCERELY A SITZMAN*

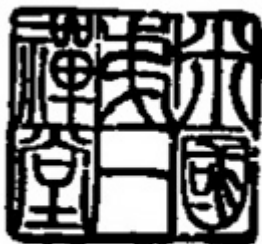
*It is always a pleasure to hear from Mr. Sitzman, perhaps our oldest (79) member, now living in Florida, where he hopefully continues to bring Zen to the attention of those whom it might benefit. Mr. Sitzman's earliest comment on Zen to me was that his doctor had told him its practice had reduced his blood pressure. I remembered this when the following news item appeared.*

AP Tokyo, March 4--Komazawa University psychologists made brain-wave tests of 50 Buddhist priests and reported that meditation in the seated Zen Buddhist position develops mental maturity and improves blood circulation.



Copyright of Zen Notes is the property of the First Zen Institute of America, Inc., and its content may not be copied or e-mailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download or e-mail articles for individual use.

Founded in 1930 by  
Sokei-an Sasaki



**First Zen Institute of America**  
113 E30 Street  
New York, New York 10016  
(212)-686-2520  
[www.firstzen.org](http://www.firstzen.org)

美國第一禪協會