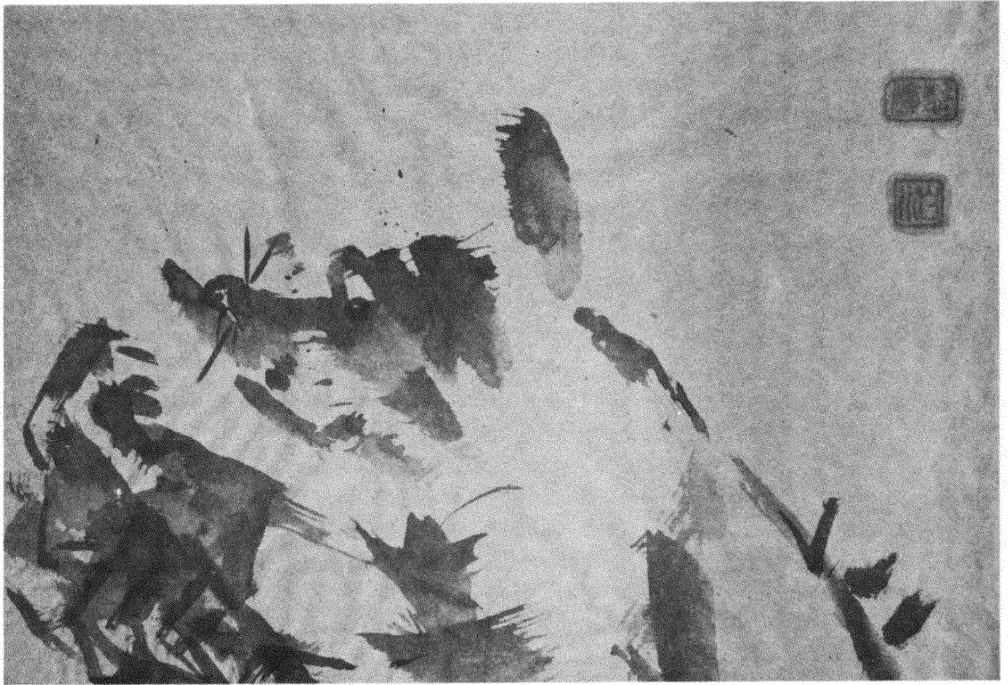


ZEN notes



Rinzai Reed

If you are a real Buddhist, you are not like them (those who look for Buddha outside themselves). You expiate past karma with your daily life. You wear what you please. You go or seat yourself at will. You don't try to be a Buddha even for one moment. Why? Someone said: "If you attempt to see Buddha by having recourse to any device, Buddha becomes the cause of the agonies of birth-and-death." Good brothers, you must value each moment of light. You use all your energy studying Zen, memorizing terms and phrases, looking for a teacher, running from door to door trying to find Buddha and Dharma (the Patriarch, Bodhidharma).

SOKEI-AN SAYS Last time Rinzai said that you do not have freedom of mind because you have not annihilated your mind. A Chinese master, after this criticism of Rinzai, said, "You cannot grow mushrooms upon bamboo leaves; they need soil." A mushroom that grows upon bamboo leaves dries up in one hot day; growing upon the earth, it will survive a long time.

If one's mind does not grow from the real ground of life, it disappears very soon. Once in your life you must clear away the piling leaves of the thicket of bamboo in your mind and see the real ground of mind. If you can answer the crystal bell koan, you will really see the ground of soul. Where is Mahakashyapa now? If you attain real annihilation, you will know; otherwise you are like a mushroom upon a dry leaf. If you do not reach the real ground of mind, you cannot see the law of the universe written in your mind.

Rinzai tells us that we must turn our blind instinct into enlightenment. When the turn takes place at the bottom of the true ground of mind we realize that our blind instinct is Wisdom calling us.

Among the two hundred and fifty commandments of the Buddha, there is one that tells us that when we see someone lying sick in the mountains or at the roadside and do not take care of him because he is a stranger or because we hate him, then we are not bodhisattvas. It is written that taking care of the sick is the best of all giving.

There are many who think they can be true Buddhists, think they can learn real Buddhism. There was a Buddhist congregation on the Pacific coast (not the San Francisco one). The youngsters there talked things over and made the decision that the way to enter into Buddhism deeply was to read all the books of foreign scholars in English. They were of the Shinshu sect. The founder of the Shinshu sect said that to become a true Buddhist it is not necessary to do anything but call one name from your heart--that makes you a true Buddhist. This is popularized Buddhism. It can penetrate into everyone's mind. Every moment of the day, whatever you do or think, you call the name. But the Shinshu teacher on the Pacific coast did not teach this. He said, "Read books." Rinzai would not

agree. In my opinion, the members of this group were not true Buddhists.

You expiate past karma with your daily life. Take a drink, fan yourself--at noon, lunch; in the evening, supper. Expiating past karma? Yes. Not hiding the past nor making new karma. You must turn the karma-jnana, the judgment in you, which is the result of your past life, into true Wisdom.

The fox never sleeps in his hole--always outside. If the wind blows from the north, he will sleep on the north side; if from the south, he will sleep on that side. So if someone approaches the hole, the fox gets the scent and enters the hole. He never sleeps there, for a fire could be set, burning the grass in the hole. No one told the fox; he has this knowledge. But the poor fox does not know the artificial mind, so he can be caught by a hunter who knows his instinctive ways.

We are living almost entirely by our instinctual mind. If we turn it into true Wisdom, whatever we do we are expiating past karma.

In karma-jnana, there are three instinctive reactions we make: passion, anger, and ignorance. With true Wisdom, we turn these into virtues. Wilfulness turns into willpower; anger turns into meditation; ignorance turns into Wisdom.

After gathering all information and knowledge, you must come back to the real ground of mind. What was once called ignorance now is intrinsic Wisdom. Total ignorance is Nirvana.

We turn our eight consciousnesses into the four great wisdoms. Alaya-consciousness, the eighth of the eight-consciousness system, turns into mirrorlike Wisdom. The seventh consciousness, *mano-vijnana*, becomes discerning

Wisdom. The sixth consciousness, this present consciousness, becomes observing Wisdom. The fifth consciousness, including the five senses, becomes performing Wisdom.

The mirrorlike consciousness reflects. Nothing but the mirror is there. There is no reflection on it, but it exists. "The black ox sleeping in the pitch-dark." If you hear the caw of the crow that is not cawing, you can see your father before your birth. (The father before your birth means one you cannot meet). The mirror is there but it reflects nothing. It is *akasha*, the mirror made of sky, unmanifested consciousness, nirvanic consciousness.

Undiscerning Wisdom is equalizing Wisdom or coinciding Wisdom--two clear mirrors reflect each other with nothing between; your mirror and my mirror reflect each other as sky and ocean reflect each other. An Indian sage who visited a Buddhist master dropped a needle into a silver bowl filled with water. The master understood and admitted him to his presence.

Observing Wisdom, the Wisdom of insight, sees everything inside and outside. With it you perceive all color, sound, with present consciousness, with Buddha's Wisdom.

We all have the innate Wisdom with which to decide, with which to create our daily life. With it we know time and position. We must use it.

We all have these four fundamental wisdoms, but we use them blindly, instinctively; therefore we make many mistakes--that is our life. We must make our Wisdom sure and shining; we can be expert in any line we wish, use it in any direction; we are rewarded and punished by its use. So by know-

ing it and using it, our alaya consciousness can be turned from mere blind instinct into mirror-like Wisdom. This first of the four wisdoms is immobile, like the earth, and the other three depend upon it; it perceives all as Oneness--when you attain this your consciousness becomes Wisdom. We are then free in daily life and wear whatever we wish (put on whatever thoughts we wish). We can be Zenists or Christians, for if we have taken off everything, we can put on any garb that pleases us, go or stay at will. Mirrorlike Wisdom is not blind instinct, but enlightened intuition. If we understand this, no more Buddhism. The two hundred and fifty commandments become "daily life." We need no books, no meditation.

You don't try to be a Buddha even for one moment. Why? Someone said: "If you attempt to see Buddha by having recourse to any device, Buddha becomes the cause of the agonies of birth-and-death." To see Buddha in yourself and to realize him, you do not need any device. First, you "take recourse" in meditation and chanting, but you do not stick to these devices.

Good brothers, you must value each moment of light: in order to make the best of it. You must have real judgment.

You use all your energy studying Zen, memorizing terms and phrases, looking for a teacher, running from door to door trying to find Buddha and Dharma (the Patriarch, Bodhidharma.) By studying names, you get nowhere, never meet the true Buddha, never understand the hand that Rinzai shows you. Do not seek a teacher who will suit you--there is no such teacher.

See ZN XVI/3 for The Four Wisdoms.

THE THIRTY-THREE HOLY MARKS OF BUDDHA

What are the thirty-two holy marks that appeared on Buddha's body? If I give you this koan, how do you answer? You must observe every Buddhist term from all angles. You must not just accept the statement that there are holy signs of the Buddha's physiognomy as physiognomical marks. In the morning the sun appears in the East, and after sundown the moon appears. Day and night come one after the other. The mountains soar high; the ocean is almost endless to the eye. In a week four days are clear and three days rainy. In spring the flowers bloom; in autumn the leaves fall. Farmers plow the ground in the spring and birds sing. These are the holy marks of Buddha. Of course it was traditional to describe the Buddha's body as the place to reveal the thirty-two holy signs. But you must penetrate to the inner meanings the Buddha very carefully set in his teachings.

THE VULTURE PEAK (Skr. Grdhrakuta), a mountain outside the city of Rajagriha, was probably so named because it was shaped like a vulture's head or because flocks of vultures lived on it. Its caves and caverns were a favorite haunt of ascetics. The early scriptures record that Shakyamuni Buddha preached many of his sermons there. A mythical Vulture Peak is the setting of the preaching of various Mahayana scriptures. (ZEN DUST)

EDITOR'S NOTE

Sokei-an's translation of Gridhrakuta was usually something connected with Eagles, but it refers to the same mountain as Vulture Peak.

THE BLACK STONE GROTTO

If you go to Arizona or Nevada, you may see men living in isolated huts in the mountains or desert, but they are not hermits, only outlaws or hoboes. In India, in the Buddha's time, however, there were many who lived in the woods or stone grottoes under cliffsides who were not outlaws or tramps, but thinkers. One such man was Vakkali. He was a well bred man, a Brahmin. The grotto where he stayed was not in a mountainside, but on a very steep hillside. One day Vakkali saw the Buddha passing by as he was traveling from Shravasti to another town. Vakkali was struck by the Buddha's dignity, his tranquil expression, and well formed body. The Buddha seemed to him like the moon among the stars.

When we speak about the Buddha, we often mention the thirty-two physiological signs that his ideal appearance revealed, the marks of his Buddhahood. There is also a thirty-third sign, but this is indescribable, so it is not listed among those that show on his face and body.

As the Buddha passed by Vakkali's grotto, the hermit contemplated the Buddha's wonderful appearance as in a dream. All of a sudden he realized that he must become a disciple of the Buddha. But it was too late, for the procession of the traveling groups of the Buddha's sangha had already descended to the foot of the hill. Vakkali started after them, but he feared he could not overtake them. It was evening. Rushing down, feeling that he was losing the way in the dark, he flung himself down the side of the hill and fell to the Buddha's feet. The description is that before his body touched the ground, the Buddha

held him up. There are many such descriptions in the Buddhist sutras. You must read this part as the writer's poetical touch. It is as if his decision to become the Buddha's disciple was so overpowering that he jumped from a cliff to fall at the Buddha's feet. At the precise moment his feet touched the ground, the Buddha held his hand so he must stand up. There is an additional touch of symbolism here, too, but it is a minor point and somewhat irrelevant, so I do not put any emphasis upon it.

Vakkali was fascinated with the statue-like modeling of the Buddha's face and his sublime expression. His eyes fixed upon the Buddha's face and he could not take them off the Buddha. He had become attached to the Buddha's phenomenal appearance, in Sanskrit, *rupalakshana*. Day and night he followed the Buddha, watching him as a cat watches a rat hole, meditating and concentrating upon his appearance. The description the monk has used here, *rupalakshana*, has a very deep meaning. It isn't the Buddha's *real* appearance (one cannot see the Reality of Buddha), but it is a fascination with physiological appearance. It is just as you might become fascinated with the appearance of the actor, Paul Robeson, and go back to see him in a movie many, many times.

The Buddha realized what Vakkali was doing and did not appreciate it. "Dreadful, always looking at my body and face, day and night, from head to toe and toe to head." The Buddha made Vakkali go away. "I forbid you to follow me. Go away." Vakkali was terribly disappointed. He couldn't live without looking at the Buddha's wonderful appearance. What a disciple!

He decided to commit suicide by jumping off a cliff(it was from the Eagle-shaped Mountain near Rajagriha--not a very high mountain, something like those lower California hills, not a well-shaped mountain but a mass of gigantic rocks).

Perceiving this with his supernatural power, the Buddha suddenly revealed his entire physical body to Vakkali. Vakkali saw IT. As he stood at the edge of the cliff, one foot in the air, he saw the Buddha's whole body. This is a marvelous, deep description. As he stood with one foot on either side--entity and non-entity--suddenly he saw REALITY.

He saw, not the physical body, but the Reality of Buddha. He opened the eye of the mind and saw the complete body of Buddha, saw the thirty-three signs of Buddha. Before that he had seen only thirty-two of the signs, but in that moment he saw the concealed sign as well. I think that it is in such a moment that anyone sees Reality, Buddha by name. This description is metaphorical, of course. Vakkali's mind was on dualism, matter and spirit. One side phenomenal, the other noumenal. In that moment he saw something that is neither phenomenal nor noumenal but Reality. I don't really like the word "Reality," because Transcendentalists use it, but in that moment Vakkali saw IT and realized IT--Ah-h-h-h! He realized that Buddha had saved him and he entered Buddhism. It is something like that when one enters the initial part of Zen. As you, after passing two or three koans, realize Oneness. It is really the gate of Buddhism, neither matter nor spirit, just Oneness. The entrance is not the sanctuary--there is a distance between

the entrance and the sanctuary. Vakkali entered just this--the description is quite symbolical, quite beautiful, poetic. With one foot in the air, the other on the cliff, suddenly he saw the Buddha's complete appearance.

But this Vakkali was quite an unfortunate one. Very soon after, he fell ill. He felt a dreadful pain in his breast. He couldn't eat anything. If he ate anything, the pain almost killed him. His disease sounds something like cancer of the stomach. It had come upon him one day when he was begging alms in the town of Rajagriha, as he was standing in front of the house of a townsman. Suddenly he felt a terrific stroke of pain in his stomach and he fell down and was in agony day and night after that. A nun, whose name was Punya, happened to see this and felt she had to help him. She nursed him for three months. For all that time he tossed in agony. Finally he said to her, "I have not seen my Buddha for three months. I cannot bear this pain much longer. I am going to commit suicide, but before I do I wish to see my Lord once more. Go, Punya, I beg you, to the Buddha and ask his sympathy." Punya went to the Buddha, and, after she had bowed to him, holding his feet in her hands, gave Buddha the message from Vakkali.

The Buddha sympathized with Vakkali and went down the Eagle-shaped Mountain to Rajagriha and went into the house of the potter where he saw Vakkali tossing in great agony and moaning. When Vakkali saw the Buddha approaching him, he tried to raise up his body. The Buddha said, "Don't try to get up." The Buddha took a seat opposite him and asked him a question.

(I am not sure the Buddha would ask such a question at such a moment, but this is how it is written). "Vakkali," the Buddha asked, "Do you think this body is eternal?"

Vakkali answered, "No, my Lokanatha, this body is ephemeral. It is like a cloud in the blue sky that exists for a little while then dissolves into the blue and disappears. This is transitoriness."

The Buddha said, "Yes, Vakkali, this is transitoriness, and transitoriness is agony."

Vakkali agreed with the Buddha. "Yes, my Lokanatha, this transitoriness of the body is agony. This body is mutable, is changeable. From one moment to the next it changes appearance. I cannot trust this physical body. I cannot do anything about this transitoriness. This is agony."

The Buddha said, "If you attain non-ego you will see eternal Emptiness. If you transmute yourself into eternal Emptiness and from that standpoint observe this transitoriness you will find this is non-ego. Attaining non-ego you will find that your pain is not pain and that pain is not yours." I think when my students hear this they will understand from their experience in the koan about the agony of death.

Vakkali said, "I have heard your teaching many times, but please tell me how I can escape from this pain, this agony. If you permit, I will cut my throat with my dagger and take leave of this transitory body."

The Buddha replied no word to this, but turning on his heel, went back to the Eagle-shaped Mountain

That midnight two devas, one male, one female, appeared to the Buddha.

One said, "Vakkali decided to commit suicide." The other said, "He will emancipate himself from agony." Then both, trailing their long robes, disappeared into the sky, leaving no trace. It was like a dream. You must understand that this description is of the Buddha's thoughts.

Next morning, the Buddha ordered his disciples to go down the mountain. Near the entrance to Shravasti was the Black Stone Grotto. He had told his disciples about the two devas and felt that something had happened. The disciples went to the potter's house to see Vakkali.

In the potter's house the previous night, Vakkali had ordered Punya to leave. He told her that he was going to commit suicide. "But do not tell anyone that. Ask the members of this family to carry me to the Black Stone Grotto. I will commit suicide there as I do not wish to die in a layman's house."

The Black Stone Grotto was an ill-omened place to Buddhists. It had been occupied by the Naked Sect, the Jains, but after the Buddha's Sect came to dominance, they left it. However, it was so dark and unpleasant that no one liked to go there to meditate. It was like a place of sickness.

Later on it was the place where the heretics killed Maudgalyayana, the Buddha's great disciple, by rolling a huge stone upon him. Supported by a cane, his body bruised and his bones broken, he dragged himself to Shariputra's gate and calling his name, died there.

When Vakkali reached the Black Stone Grotto he asked the men who had carried him there to go back home.

Then he took his dagger, cut into the most painful part of his breast and died. In the morning the Buddha, attended by his disciples, came down there and found the body of Vakkali bathed in blood. He had left his corpse in the Black Stone Grotto; its black air was his shroud.

Entering the grotto, the Buddha saw the body and turned his head away. All the disciples were afraid of the body of Vakkali and none approached it; all circled it and turned their faces away, scarcely looking at it.

The Buddha said, "Look at that black air around him. The white mist touched his body and changed it into dust. Vakkali does not look like a bhikshu, a monk. He looks like a demon. Killing himself, he has turned into a demon."

The disciples asked, "Where is his consciousness now?"

The Buddha said, "He killed his consciousness with his dagger."

Of course all this talking must be attributed into this last statement: "He killed his consciousness with his dagger, so his consciousness is not living any more."

I shall give two or three comments upon these words.

Vakkali committed suicide before he really attained the true understanding of Buddhism. His understanding was that consciousness was the center of the universe. When you come into Buddhism, you strike your breast-- "This is the center." What does this mean?

Vakkali took his dagger and struck his breast and died. Do you think he thought that his consciousness was in his heart?

An arhat, in his dying moment, at-

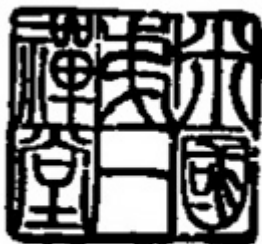
tains Nirvana if he goes into bottomless nothingness. But when in his meditation his body suddenly goes into bottomless nothingness, he feels fear.

"I cannot attain Nirvana if I go into this bottomless nothingness," he thinks. In many religions, God is consciousness. Consciousness in the sky or consciousness in the universe. They search for a consciousness center somewhere. When you are depending upon your own consciousness, as you are dying and feel your consciousness scattering, you shriek as you see that bottomless emptiness. You think you are falling. You are afraid and in agony. It is the same as with Vakkali. It is a disgraceful death that you are dying. One who believes that consciousness is the center always meets this fear when dying. Vakkali was meditating when he was in agony and thought he could not concentrate into his consciousness; his willpower relinquished consciousness. When he looked into bottomless hell, into nothingness and felt his consciousness would disappear, he thought, "While I can still hold my consciousness, I will use the dagger and be reborn into another state." It was his hope that before his consciousness disappeared he would leave his body with that consciousness. So he killed himself in order to retain his consciousness and go with it to another body. This was his mistake. He thought to escape agony. But he was dead before he attained Buddhism. The Buddha said: "His consciousness is not living anymore. He killed it with his dagger."

Reconstructed by FRANCES REITER

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