

# ZEN NOTES



Shih-Te with broom

# **TWENTY-FIVE KOANS:**

## **(TENTH KOAN)**

Delivered by Sokei-an, March 13 1938

*Isan (CH:Kuei-shan) questioned Kyozan (Yang-shan): "How many years have passed since you annihilated those motes of leakage in your mind?"*

*Kyozan did not answer. On the contrary, he questioned Isan: "How many years have you passed, Osho, since the leakage ceased?"*

*'Isan said: "Seven years."*

*Then Isan rejoined with a question to Kyozan: "What about yourself?"*

*Kyozan answered: "I am too busy."*

### **Sokei-an:**

That is all. Isan was the teacher and Kyozan was the disciple. Both were great Zen masters in the T'ang dynasty. Kyozan died when he was eighty-three in 853 A.D. It was the time of the height of Chinese Zen. This Isan was a great figure in Chinese Zen. To understand the meaning of this koan and the philosophical meaning of it, we must understand the characteristics of the Zen masters, the keynote of their natures.

*A monk whose name was Szu-ma said: "I found a beautiful mountain called Great Vision. If anyone made a temple there he could gather one thousand five hundred monks."*

*Hyakujo (Pai-chang) said: "Can I go there?"*

*Szu-ma said: "No, no, it is not a mountain for you to live on."*

*Hyakujo said: "Why?"*

*Szu-ma said: "You are a man of bone. Isan is a mountain of flesh. If you should go there, you would not have more than one thousand disciples."*

Hyakujo was a Zen master who was thin and strong --bone and skin! -- while the mountain was round and fat. A Chinese mountain is not always round and fat--it is usually skin and bone. Isan was a fat mountain with an abundance of trees and woods.

*Hyakujo said: "There must be someone among my disciples who can be the master of that Great Vision."*

*Szu-ma said: "I wish to see your disciples."*

This Szu-ma was not a Zen monk, but he was a monk who saw the skies and the earth and the nature of man. He was an astronomer and he had a knowledge of geography and was a master of physiognomy. He was observing the universe, nature, and man from his Buddhistic standpoint. And he found the relation between nature and man. It was his profession.

There are such monks in Japan too. If any gentleman wishes to build a house, he asks an opinion of it, and he is told, "Your house must be built at the foot of the mountain, on the west side, and the entrance must not be on that side but on the southern side." And if anyone is sick, they will say to change the direction of the house for a while, and often they save his life.

*There was a disciple called Hua-lin who appeared before Szu-ma:*

*Szu-ma said, looking at him: "I wish you to show me your walking attitude with a feigned cough."*

*Hui-lin stood, coughed, and walked a few steps.*

*Szu-ma said, "No."*

*Hyakujo said: "I have a cook who is fat and good-natured..."*

The cook is a high position in the temple. The highest job is cleaning the bathroom! The next is cleaning the food. The lowest is keeping the library! He appeared. Szu-ma looked at him, just one glance, but he is the man who must go to Isan.

*And Hyakujo the teacher called him in the night to his own cell and told him: "My Buddhism will spread from that mountain. You go to that beautiful mountain and stay there and transmit to future generations and keep my torch through the future."*

Isan went there--about as far as from here to Buffalo. A beautiful mountain--no one was living there; no villagers around there. Isan stayed about seven years. His friends were monkeys and his food was acorns and mountain potatoes. No one visited. The ancient Buddhist monks! What would they say today if they are asked to go to such a place? "Please pay my way. Please pay my salary. Please pay my provisions." But no! That monk went with straw sandals and one staff, one straw hat, and he stayed there, eating acorns with the monkeys.

As the seasons passed, he realized that no one had come up the mountain for seven years. "Perhaps I have no merit which I have created. Perhaps I had better go somewhere."

He started down the mountain, and on the way he saw that tigers and snakes barred his way. He said: "You threaten me? If I have some relation to this mountain, you had better seek shelter! If you think I have no relation to this mountain, wait there and I will come down and you can devour me!" And they disappeared. So he returned to his own house of weeds and bamboo.

A little later a monk, his comrade, came with other monks and helped him. One, two, three monks visited the mountain; and then people built a temple for him; and then the Governor of Wei heard of his fame and backed him and he became a famous Zen master.

To uphold religion one must follow the law of nature --not the law of human beings. Religion is a tree, not a weed. It does not grow in a couple of days --its grows very slowly! This story illustrates Isan's character.

*Isan questioned Kyozan: "How many years have passed since you annihilated those motes of leakage in your mind?"* ... When I was young I loved this koan very much. I was reading it one hundred times to understand it because all monks would perceive the difficulty of preventing those motes of leakage in the mind. In the temple no one taught us how to meditate--just follow tradition and begin the practice of meditation. Each monk must find the meaning of meditation by himself. The first step is to annihilate thought, sufferings, afflictions; and then to find out the state of consciousness. It has no leakage of thoughts.

Many stories are connected with this: An ascetic was meditating in the Himalayan mountains; he was trying to annihilate the motes of leakage in his mind for about twenty years. And he was about to succeed in wiping out all thoughts, to seek original nature. Then some bird sang on the tree bough and wasted all his years' work. And he tried again, and the fishes made a noise. This is the story. He failed entirely to attain original consciousness.

I believed this story in the beginning, you know. I thought , "It can be done." Finally I realized that I misunderstood all those things. My idea was an abstraction. We do not meditate to brush all those leakages from one's mind; but we realize that we have original consciousness. We are going into it; but we originally possess it, and we need to realize it. That is all.

When we realize it, then from the standpoint of original con-

sciousness we look into the mind's activity. Then those leakages do not bother the mind any more. We close our eyes and ears and keep ourselves in a mountain cave with monkeys and tigers ---it is the wrong style of meditation. The mind comes and goes and we don't care. Let it come and let it go--do not entertain it!

So this Dharmakaya standpoint is the first -- "Before father and mother" is the first koan--the first question. Then dig deeper and find the broader aspect of it. We do not care for previous consciousness. We only care for consciousness itself. Consciousness is a medium, and a medium is not reality, A medium is a glass, like a looking glass. Then you will find a state of consciousness in you which has no leakage. .It is only necessary to find it out. And this koan is very short, but there is an important point in it.

*Kyozan did not answer . On the contrary, he questioned Isan: "How many years have you passed, Osho, since the leakage ceased?"... From the first incarnation it has been annihilated. How many years! Kyozan used the teacher as a weapon and attacked him.*

*Isan said, "Seven years."...* This answer shows his view of his original consciousness. If he would philosophize and explain it through Hegel and Kant, it would take about two-three days to explain it completely! Isan explains:nothing has changed from the original consciousness. And he did not say this as "seven years," very profoundly but as; "Oh, seven years," very lightly. So to understand a koan, you must see the person.

*Then Isan replied with a question to Kyozan: "What about yourself?"...* As if a pickpocket met a detective. "What is your occupation?" "I am a detective." "Oh, is that so!" "Yes, and what is yours--you pickpocket!"

*Kyozan answered: "I am too busy."* I will not put legs on the snake here. If you were Kyozan, what would you say? What answer would you express?



# BANKEI AND HIS WORLD

by Peter Haskel

*Like Bankei, many of his contemporaries in the priesthood in seventeenth-century Japan believed that the authentic transmission of Zen in their land had been debased and finally destroyed during the preceding two or three centuries. If Zen was to continue, such reformers argued, it had to be thought through again from the beginning, not only revitalized but reinvented. The Zen of Bankei's age, the Tokugawa period, was in many ways a rejection rather than an extension of the Zen that came immediately before.* To fully understand Bankei and seventeenth-century Zen, it is therefore necessary to start with a discussion of Japanese Zen in the late Middle Ages, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the latter part of what is referred to as the Muromachi period (1333-1573), after the Muromachi district of Kyoto where the reigning Ashikaga shoguns had their palace. Much of the information cited below is drawn from the pioneering research of Tamamura Takeji, a leading scholar of medieval Japanese Zen history. The discussion here focuses on the two principal groups identified by Tamamura as dominating Muromachi Zen: the sorin, the official Gozan temples patronized by the shogunate; and the rinka, those temples like Daitokuji, Myoshinji, Sojiji, and Eiheiji that remained largely outside the official system.

## **ZEN IN THE MUROMACHI PERIOD (Part II, #2)**

(Continued from the Winter'10 Zen Notes)

### **Part II: Missan Zen: Form and Content**

Several syncretic *missancho*, or secret transmission documents, are examined by Suzuki Daisetsu. Apart from their generally bizarre character, many of these documents share a common approach in which the idea of original being is given a literal, physiological interpretation. For the koan "*Hsiang-yen's Man Up a Tree*," for example, one student offers the statement that "This is the *a-hum* koan of the Shingon school," and his discourse involves a discussion of *a* and *hum* as *mu* (nonbeing) and *u* (being), the outbreak and the inbreath, "the answer that we make at the moment of birth to the question of why the Patriarch came from the west." A response to the same koan in another missancho stresses the child's existence in the mother's womb, where the Buddha Nature becomes the breath passing in and out through the fetus' nostrils, identical with the mother's own respiratory rhythm. Similarly, Bodhidharma's "nine years wallgazing" is interpreted as the

child's nine-month sojourn within the "walls" of the mother's womb. There is also a reference to something identified as the "Placenta Daruma" (*hoi no Daruma*), symbolizing the state of being when the body was enclosed in the womb. The student adds that in some schools, the koan "Chao-chou's 'Cypress Tree'" is said to indicate the "Placenta Daruma." Two further examples may suffice to illustrate the syncretic approach to koan study displayed in the missancho.

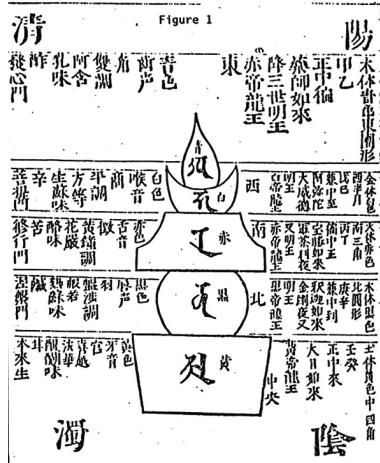
Questioned about Linchi's "Lump of red flesh," one student replies: "It is the liver, the first among the five internal organs, also known as the 'lotus within the breast.'" Another missancho in response for the popular case "Nan-chuan Kills the Cat" offers the following explanation: "The cat is the source of breath. The principle of understanding the One Buddha Nature as the cat is that at your last moment, you make a sound in your throat and become a cat"--the cat always producing sound from within its throat.

Syncretic elements also figure in missancho not primarily related to koans. One such document is the *Ganzatsu roku* by the Genju-line teacher Kohan Shojin, mentioned earlier, a kind of miscellany that supplies many odd and seemingly farfetched explanations for various items. The two Chinese characters for the important Shinto shrine Ise, for example, are said to symbolize, respectively, male and female, Yang and Yin, and Kongokai and Taizokai--the diamond and womb mandalas of such importance in Esoteric Buddhism. In a like manner, Hsiang-yen's enlightenment at the sound of a stone striking bamboo is interpreted by Kohan as the coalescence of the mother and father, of Yin and Yang, leading to the "birth" of satori.

Similar "nonkoan" syncretic missancho are found in the Soto school, where they seem to have been relatively common. One such Soto transmission is a secret transmission (*hiketsu*) for the Five Ranks, bearing the title *Chuteki himitsusho* and dated 1660. Among its features is a chart in which the Five Ranks are made to correspond in turn to a series of Yin-Yang hexagrams and Esoteric Buddhist deities, and finally to various stages of the historical Buddha's career. Each of the Buddhist deities is similarly associated with a particular color--black, white, yellow, and so on. Other diagrams included in the manuscript are constructed upon a fanciful numerology which links various groups of numbered items, such as "fours"--for example, the four directions, four seasons and "four streams." In Soto Zen, the commentary notes, this last is interpreted as the waters of Yin and Yang, in which the Yin represents the mother's vagina, indicated by the color red, and the Yang, the father's semen, indicated by white. Elsewhere in the work, a correspondence based on sets of "twos" equates Yin and Yang with various paired terms from Buddhism--for example, birth and death,

cause and effect--and observes that human beings are likewise equipped according to "twos," having two hands, ears, eyes, etc.

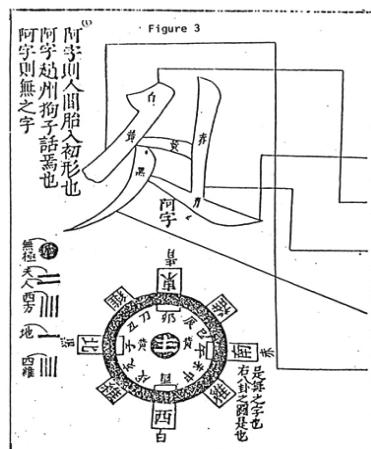
The influence of Esoteric Buddhism is particularly conspicuous in three adjoining diagrams included in the *Chuteki himitsusho* (Figs.1-3). The first and second of these illustrate correspondences based on the sections of the Shingon *gorin toba*, or fivefold stupa. In the first diagram (Fig. 1), each section of the



stupa is identified by its appropriate bija (J: *shuji*), or Sanskrit sacred syllable, while in the second (Fig. 2), each section of the stupa contains a part of a standing human figure. Both stupas are marked off horizontally at each of the five "circles" to indicate correspondences of various items listed vertically in sets of "fives."

In Figure 2, these include not only the five "elements," or *gōdai*, symbolized in the Shingon stupa, and here given as the Yin-Yang "five constituents," or *gogyo*, but five colors and five sets of YinYang hexagrams; also included are the five Chinese characters of the *nenbutsu* (*Namu Amida Butsu!* "Hail to the Buddha Amitabha!" -- here reduced to "*Namu Amida*"), and the five characters of the title of the *Lotus Sutra* and of the Zen phrase *Soshi sairai i*, 'the purpose of the Patriarch's coming from the west.'

The third diagram (Fig. 3) centers on a large *aji*, the Sanskrit letter a, which, in Shingon, Sym-

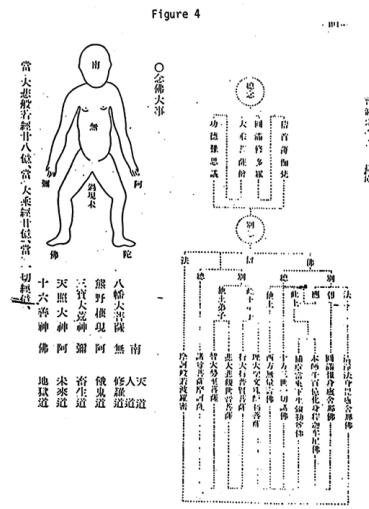


bolizes the cosmic Buddha Mahavairocana, personification of the absolute. The aji is flanked by three statements written in Sino-Japanese (*kanbun*) and reading (from right to left): "The aji is none other than the original form of the human being within the womb"; "the aji is the koan "Chao-chou's "Dog"; "the aji is none other than the koan Mu."

The large *a* is divided into five color areas linked by lines drawn to the equivalent color sections of the previous diagram, the "man in the stupa" (Fig. 2), emphasizing further the various correspondences. Below the aji are a series of Yin-Yang hexagrams and a Yin-Yang astrological chart, accompanied by an inscription which identifies these elements with the "Mu" koan and the hexagrams in Figure 2.

The existence of other similar Soto missancho indicates that the sort of syncretic approach presented in the *Chuteki himitsusho* was not a unique or isolated phenomenon. An undated Soto transmission document entitled *Nenbutsu daiji* (Fig.4), for example, contains a frontal diagram of a man's body with the individual Chinese characters for the nembutsu inscribed beside particular parts of the anatomy: the feet, stomach, head, etc. In a separate chart beneath the figure, each of the nembutsu's syllables (excluding "na") is related in turn to divisions of the ten realms of being and to various Shinto deities. The latter include the Kumano gongen, suggesting the continuing influence of Shugendo, which had important links with the Soto school during the Middle Ages.

Documents like the *Chuteki himitsusho* are presented as simple transmissions of esoteric mysteries, but other syncretic Soto transmissions are couched in a *mondo*, or dialogue-style format similar to that of certain nonsyncretic missancho. One such missancho, an undated Soto school document recorded in *karmbun* and entitled *Shichi butsu daii no sanwa*, offers what appear to be script and stage directions for the private interview between a missan-teacher and his disciple. Much of the exchange between the two participants centers on the explanation of various esoteric symbols. An example is the elucidation of the meaning of the black *man* (the reverse swastika that was a common symbol in Esoteric Buddhism) contained within a red circle:



*"Within a red circle is a black man. This is called the right-sided man diagram. It is the state existing even before the empty kalpa." The teacher asks: "What is the significance of the diagram?"*

*"The student comes forward, covers his head with his robe, and seating himself, says: 'This expresses the state before birth. Within this placenta everything is present. This is the great character man, representing the perfection of all virtues.'"*

*"The teacher says: 'The black color of the man symbolizes the state of nondiscrimination, the state before east and west were distinguished, when you were in the realm of undifferentiated existence (konton). Thus, this very, instant is none other than the black man.'"*

The syncretic missancho are an intriguing, if somewhat puzzling, aspect of missan Zen. At the least, they demonstrate dramatically the extent to which certain rinka lines absorbed features of Esoteric Buddhist practice and belief, features that determined both the form and content of their transmissions. But at present, any broader judgment about these missancho must remain largely speculative.

Indeed, the missancho as a whole raise many basic questions for which answers are lacking. It is unclear, for example, precisely how missancho-type documents were recorded. Some seem to have been compiled by teachers, others by students. In the latter instance, did the student simply return to his quarters and copy down the results of his interview with the teacher? Did he, at times, copy previously existing missan documents under the teacher's direction, as suggested by Jiyo Kennett's description of her transmission in the Soto Sojiji line? Equally uncertain is the actual role of the missancho. Did they, for example, serve primarily as proofs of transmission within a particular line; as cribs for memorizing the "correct" responses to a teacher's queries, and later as a basis for instructing one's own students; or as private memoranda of missan study that could be synthesized into a distinct personal transmission, as in the case of Kohan's missancho for the Lin-chi lu, referred to previously? Possibly missancho embodied some or all of these functions and alternated among various roles. As a rule, however, the missancho tell us little about themselves. Clearly, many problems raised by the missan records have yet to be resolved. However, assembling available historical information together with examples of the contents of the missancho themselves, it is possible to glimpse at least some part of this curious chapter in the history of Japanese Zen.

# THE SUTRA OF PERFECT AWAKENING

## FIFTY-FOURTH LECTURE

Wednesday October 11th, 1939

*"We will never follow either heretic or Shravaka or Pratyeka-Buddha. In accordance with the vows which we thus take, we will discipline ourselves to eradicate all obstacles gradually. When all obstacles are eradicated, our great desires are fulfilled. Then we will have ascended the palace of pure and emancipated Dharma and will have realized the adorned state of Perfect Awakening.*

*Then the Lokanatha, desiring to reaffirm what he had said, recited the following gatha:*

*"O Maitreya!  
You must know that because of their tenacious desire  
All sentient beings cannot attain the great emancipation.  
They therefore fall down to the world of Samsara.  
If they extricate themselves from love and hatred,  
From passion, anger and avarice,  
Without being affected by the five different natures,..."*

### SOKEI-AN SAYS:

This Sutra of Perfect Awakening is one of the typical and authentic Mahayana sutras. It was written in Sanskrit, composed, our chronologists say, between seven to nine hundred years after the Buddha's death. Mahayana Buddhism prevailed in Gandhara and Central Asia (the Russian Turkestan and Chinese Turkestan of today) and was then brought into China. The Chinese translated this sutra, and I am translating it into English from the Chinese.

According to the previous lecture, the Bodhisattvas who wish to work for the salvation of sentient beings, must take a vow: "We will never follow either heretic or Shravaka or Pratyeka-Buddha." —There were ninety-six great heretics in India contemporary with the Buddha. The most famous were the Jain sect and the "Cow-worshipping Brahmins," those who practiced mortification, sleeping on needles, sitting on the blade of a sword, hanging themselves upside-down, soaking in water for twenty-four hours, and gazing at the sun.

"Shravaka" means Hinayana monks. Of course, in the Bud-

dha's time there was no Hinayana or Mahayana. In the original sense, "Shravaka" means "listener," one who listened to the Buddha. "Shra" is "Shri." "Vaka" is "voice." So it is those who heard the voice of the Buddha.

When the monks' Buddhism lost power in India, about eight hundred years after the Buddha's death, Buddhism was handed down to enlightened laymen—then called "bodhisattvas." Among them were kings decorated with jewels and wearing elaborate wigs. They became heads of communities, and taught young men. At this time, these bodhisattvas held their understanding to be higher than that of the monks—so they debased the monks' religion. So here "Shravaka" is written as an inferior name.

"Pratyeka-Buddha" was also an inferior sect—those who held opinions analogous to the Buddha's teaching but did not follow him. They had their own communities and sometimes made contact with the Buddha. They were a type of "free-thinkers," natural thinkers, and they did not take the vow in the Buddha's sangha. Their view was not as broad as that of the bodhisattvas.

*"In accordance with the vows which we thus take, we will discipline ourselves to eradicate all obstacles gradually."* Not only the obstacles created in the mind according to present circumstances and ideas, but the obstacles which he inherited from previous incarnations--anger, passion, lawlessness, etc. The obstacle which he himself created is easily eradicated. But the natural obstacle which prevents him from being enlightened—this is very grave and it must be eradicated "gradually." Thus, step by step, we come close to the knowledge of Buddha.

*"When all obstacles are eradicated, our great desires are fulfilled. Then we will have ascended the palace of pure and emancipated Dharma and will have realized the adorned state of the Perfect and Marvelous Awakening."* — "The palace of pure and emancipated Dharma" is an elaborate term for the state of Dharmakaya. I have been calling it the state of Reality—but perhaps it misleads the audience, because, according to your knowledge of reality it is life here. So please remember that, from now on, I will use "the state of Dharmakaya."

The state of Dharmakaya is the original body of the universe; it is everlasting existence without any relation to our five senses. "Pure" means no color, taste, etc. It has nothing to do with morality or immorality.

"Emancipated" means the state of no hindrance—no hindrance of space, time, color, or sound. The man who attains enlightenment in this state of Dharmakaya finds out for the first time

in his life that this world of phenomena is not the original state. The Buddhist enlightenment is very simple but it is very difficult to attain.

The "*adorned state of the Perfect and Marvelous Awakening*" —this is the realization of Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Nirmanakaya—and then Perfect Awakening. This "Perfect Awakening" is not "decorated" by flowers or gold—but by the blue sky, deep rivers, high mountains. Have you seen that marvelous world? You must be awakened to see it!

*Then the Lokanatha, desiring to reaffirm what he had said, recited the following gatha: "O Maitreya!"* Maitreya, as I told you before, is the name of a bodhisattva. There is an Indian idea that Maitreya will be a future Buddha. In India there were many tribes of many colors; this Maitreya was described as light-haired and fair-skinned.

*"You must know that because of their tenacious desire, all sentient beings cannot attain emancipation"* It is true! It is very hard to attain the knowledge of Buddha and at the same time make a fortune; you must sacrifice one or the other. You have to "choose" Buddha!

*"They therefore fall down to the world of samsara."* —And will never attain the world of Dharmakaya. I live here for seventy-five years or so and I die. But the state of Dharmakaya is everlasting—I will never die and never be born!

It is from the state of Dharmakaya that you must observe. You are observing Dharmakaya from here; it is the attitude of the student—not of the enlightened gentleman. To observe this world from there it is not necessary to go up to the sky. We attain this state in meditation. If you don't attain the state of Dharmakaya, you will fall into the state of samsara. If you think this world is the only world, you will remain in a deluded state and hold that upside-down view.

*"If they extricate themselves from love and hatred,"* —Our love and hate is dualistic: we call it love if we do not hate and vice versa. In Buddhism we speak of "compassion" which is beyond love and hate. It is analogous to the real meaning of the Christian "love." There are two expressions of this love: to take away agony and to give joy.

*"... passion, anger and ignorance, without being affected by the five different natures."* The five different natures are:

1. The agnostic; doesn't believe, doubts everything.

2. The shravaka; accepts religion, follows rigid rules is an ascetic.
3. The Pratyeka-Buddha; lives alone or in a small community, is a free-thinker.
4. Those who follow the Bodhisattvas.
5. Those who follow the Buddha.

*"All of them will attain the enlightenment of Buddha!"* Ignorance and agony are at an end!

## **Three-Hundred-Mile-Tiger**

Sokei-an's commentary on  
**The Record of Lin Chi**

### **Discourse XII, Lecture 2**

*"If you are master of every circumstance, wherever you stand is the true ground, and circumstances cannot divert you. Even if you are perfumed by the evil of your past karma, or possessed of the five nefarious crimes, they themselves are the ocean of deliverance."*

#### **SOKEI-AN SAYS:**

Perhaps we can agree that Consciousness is the best term to express the One in which we have faith. God is the name the West gives to the highest being. Consciousness is in everything, in the microcosm and macrocosm, in water and in fire, in a dog or cat, lion or man, in all existence, sentient and insentient. The consciousness of the insentient, we call latent. It will be manifested when the time comes, but until then it is concealed. It is not necessary to prove that we are conscious by reason; we know we are—consciousness is manifested in all stages of development. In each state it is given a name, such as vegetable, animal, human being, even “group soul,” but all are just one consciousness.

Lin-chi has been calling this consciousness, “Master.” In Zen, we worship this Master in ourselves and behind ourselves. We cannot express it using terms such as depth or height; it is not ours. From the human standpoint, how can we express it in some

way not related to the five senses? The Master's Master, the Master that operates the power in the Master, though it is not He? For there is no He, you, or I as separate individuals. We are inter-individual; we relate as you-and-I. We do not call this God, and we do not worship this as God. We worship the power that manifests in us from morning to evening in every word that we speak, in every deed we perform. So our religious life goes on twenty-four hours a day. There is no particular time for worshipping.

The five nefarious crimes Lin-chi is talking about are to profane or kill a mother or fully ordained nun, to kill an *arhat*, paricide, to shed the blood of a Buddha, to destroy the harmony of the *sangha*, the Buddhist community. He is saying even though you bear the karma of past evildoing, even the karma of the five crimes (the worst), are the ocean of deliverance. In a word you are not overcome by the environment, by the circumstances of your life. If you master your body, you can wear silk hose in winter without feeling the chill. When you have mastered all words, they will have but one meaning. But unfortunately the human being is not using words but is rather used by them.

The true standpoint is One Consciousness and form, color and sound are operated by it and take the form of men, women, and children. But that "One Soul" is different from the human soul that has been altered from its original nature. The One Soul or One Body is omnipresent, omnipotent consciousness. We are that if we master ourselves. When we are not being deluded by form and color, we are that Only One in the universe. It is so clear, there is nothing to talk about any more, but sentient beings are deluded and are transmigrating in six ways. When you understand what consciousness is, the torture of the past ceases. For this consciousness is not yours, but is inter-individual. There is just one being in the universe.



Mt. Fuji - First Zen Institute

## Book review

by Ian Chandler

### Buddhacarita, Life of Buddha.

by Ashva Ghosa, Translated by Patrick Olivelle, Clay Sanskrit Library. ©  
New York University Press & JJC Foundation, 2008.

Ashva-Ghosa lived during the first or second century C.E., at a time when large parts of northern India were under the rule of the Kushánas, Buddhist invaders from central Asia. At that time, an intense rivalry developed between Buddhists and Hindus, with most of the prominent positions in society occupied by Buddhists. Brahmanical epics, such as the *Ramayana*, helped Hindus to resist the Buddhist challenge by promoting Hindu culture and beliefs. In response to the *Ramayana*, the Buddhist Ashva-Ghosa wrote the *Buddhacarita*, an extended prose-poem about the life of the Buddha. The *Buddhacarita* is a compilation of familiar stories of the Buddha and depicts events which supposedly occurred 600-700 years earlier. Patrick Olivelle's new translation of the *Buddhacarita*, entitled *Life of the Buddha*, is a recent addition to the Clay Sanskrit Library of the New York University Press. The epic opens with the following lines:

*In Ikshvaku's line, equal to Ishvaku in might,  
Among the invincible Shakyas, was born a king,  
Loved by his people like the autumn moon,  
Pure in conduct, Shuddhodana by name.*

*That equal of Indra had a wife like Shachi herself;  
Her splendor paralleled his might;  
She was as pretty as Padma, as steadfast as the Earth,  
Maya by name, like the peerless Maya herself.*

The *Buddhacarita* is a beautiful extended prose-poem which covers most of the popular stories about the Buddha: his birth from out of the side of Queen Maya in the flower garden in Lumbini; his sheltered childhood; his seraglio; his encounters with sickness, old age and death, the birth of his son Rahula, his decision to renounce home, his meeting with King Bimbisara, his teachers Alara Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra, his period of extreme asceticism, his meditation under the Bodhi tree, his encounters with the forces of the evil Mara, his enlightenment, and his teaching and preaching throughout north India.

The *Buddhacarita* is an amalgam of history, biography, legend, and efforts to get the better of rival Hindus. The canto on the Buddha's seraglio includes graphic and tantalizing depictions of many and various beauties. The young Siddhartha abhors sexual

pleasures, and is gently chided by his friend Udáyin, who urges Siddhartha to involve himself with women, while at the same time running down the sexual peccadilloes of several prominent Hindu saints and gurus mentioned in the *Ramayana*:

*The sage Vasíshtha, overcome by lust  
Fathered a son called Kapinjaláda,  
By Aksha-mala, the despised daughter  
Of a man from the outcaste Marángas.*

*And Yayáti also, the royal seer,  
Even at the end of his life,  
Made love to the ápsaras Vishváchi,  
Within the Chaitraratha grove.*

*Though Pandu of the Kuru line knew  
That sex indeed would lead to his death,  
Seduced by the beauty of Madri,  
He gave in to the pleasure of sex.*

*And Karála-jánaka as well,  
Who abducted a Brahmin girl,  
Never stopped holding fast to his love,  
Although he came to ruin thereby.*

*Men of eminence such as these,  
to satisfy their carnal lust  
Enjoyed pleasures even abject,  
How much more, then, excellent ones?*

*Yet you, youthful, handsome, and strong,  
Treat pleasures with utter contempt,  
Pleasures you have rightly obtained,  
Pleasures to which the whole world clings.”*

His resolve unshakable, Siddhartha leaves his father's pleasure palace and assumes the garb of a wandering ascetic. He easily reaches and surpasses the understanding of his teachers Alara Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra, and starts practicing austerities. Eventually, he meditates under the Bodhi tree. The armies of Mara attack the Buddha from all directions, using an incredible variety of assaults and tortures, but he remains steadfast in his meditation practice. Eventually, Mara is forced to call off his assault, and the Buddha breaks through to enlightenment.

Unfortunately, the *Buddhacarita* is chopped off midway. It runs through the Buddha's enlightenment, but that is where the original Sanskrit text is lost. In keeping with the approach taken in the earlier, 1936 translation, *Buddhacarita or Acts of the Buddha*,

by E.H. Johnston, Olivelle provides summaries of the 14 missing cantos, based on Chinese and Tibetan translations. Unlike the E. H. Johnston translation, which provides the original Devanagari script, the *Life of the Buddha*, like the other volumes in the Clay Sanskrit library, provides Romanized Sanskrit on the page facing the English, so that English language readers can hear the original Sanskrit pronunciation.

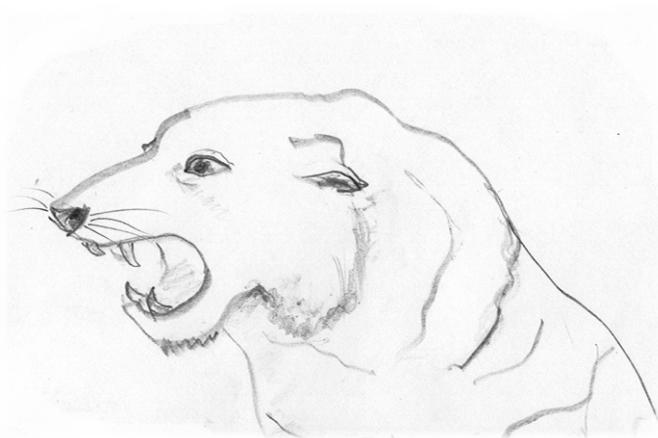
The *Buddhacarita* lacks psychological credibility - it is too much a work of hagiography. The young Siddhartha is presented as almost a perfected being right from the start; not truly human. According to the Japanese Buddhist scholar Hajime Nakamura, , most of the ancient texts discussing the Buddha's life "...involve so many legendary-mythological elements we have difficulty in assessing historical facts while Shakyamuni is super-humanized and even deified; thus they are reminiscent of fairy tales..." In any case, Olivelle has rendered the *Buddhacarita* into beautiful poetry.

Olivelle is former Chair of the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, and is a prolific translator of classical Sanskrit texts, with 25 books to his credit, including a full translation of the 12 early *Upanishads* which won the A. K. Ramanujan Book Prize for Translation from the Association for Asian Studies, 1998. He also has a soon-to-be-published history of the Buddhist king Aśoka entitled *Aśoka In History and Historical Memory*.

### Cover Picture

The cover picture hangs in the Institute library and is of the monk Shih-Te, who ran the dinning hall of Kuo-ch'ing Temple located near a place called Cold Mountain in T'ien-t'ai prefecture during the 7th century in China. Shih-Te's close companion was the monk poet Han Shan who lived on Cold Mountain writing poems on bamboo, wood, stones, sides of cliffs and people's houses. Han Shan would often come down the mountain to visit Shih-Te in the monastery kitchen where the two would carry on often with much laughter and Shih-Te would at times give him leftovers concealed in a bamboo tube to take out. Shih-Te was considered the more pragmatic of the two and thus would often be depicted, as in this case, with a broom. Eventually, after many years at the monastery, Shih-Te and Han Shan disappeared into Cold Mountain without a trace. While the temple monks considered them somewhat mad and foolish Han Shan and Shih-Te were considered enlightened bodhisattvas by those with the eye to see.

Where did my year go??...



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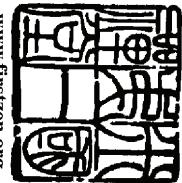
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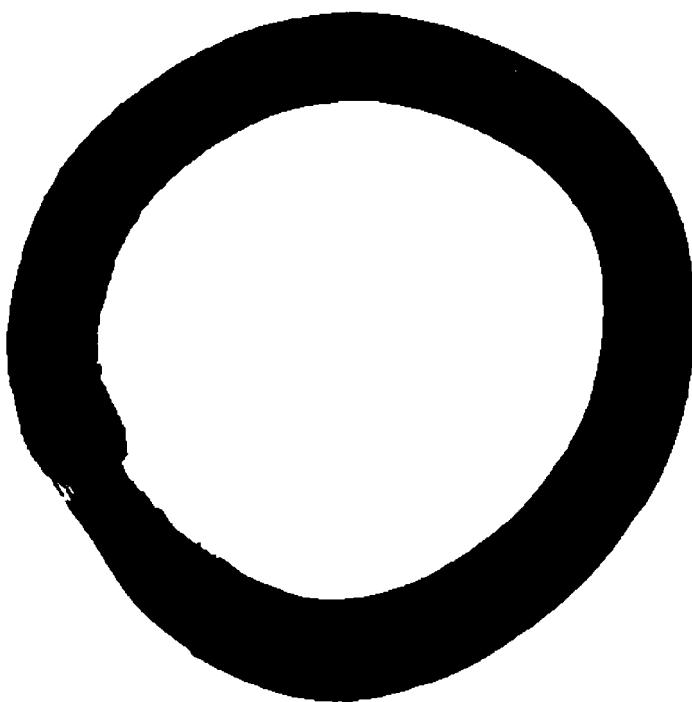
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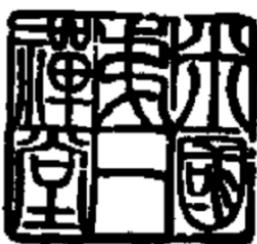
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(ZN Vol 57, No. 2)



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