

ZEN notes



True Cat of No Rank

THE SUTRA OF PERFECT AWAKENING

SIXTIETH LECTURE

Wednesday November 22th, 1939

"If a man attained the pure state of Dharmadhatu by annihilating forever the affliction of the mind, this very idea of purity would become a hindrance. He would therefore fail to attain complete realization of the state of Perfect Awakening. This grade of attainment is called 'awaking according to the nature of mere man.'

O Obedient One! The bodhisattva's attainment of awakening is itself a hindrance in the attainment of Perfect Awakening. Although the bodhisattva has annihilated the hindrance caused by the pure state of mind, he still resides in awareness of the state of awakening. This awareness becomes in its turn a hindrance in the attainment of complete awakening. This grade of attainment is termed 'awakening according to the nature of the bodhisattva who has not yet entered the grade of the true bodhisattva.'"

SOKEI-AN SAYS:

It is very rare to come across such wonderful lines in a sutra! The significance of important passages on attainment are explained here very carefully. These passages are explained by one who has truly experienced them.

When I read this sutra, I feel that the Buddhism of that period is not one bit different from the Buddhism that we have today. When I translated these lines, I felt as though I were listening to my great-great-great-grandfather's speech; it was very familiar to me. There are two important distinctions made here:

The first is the awakening which is caged in an idea.

The second is the awakening which is caged in awareness.

The first can be illustrated thus: Someone is drinking water from a glass, and he says, "I am holding a glass of water in my hand and I am going to drink it; I am now drinking."

The second can be illustrated thus: Someone is drinking wa-

ter from a glass, "I am—gulp-gulp" Of course this is not perfect awakening.

In the end the man just drinks the water.

So in meditation someone annihilates all thoughts and realizes he has attained the state of no-thought—"I am now in Dharma-kaya! What a wonderful state!" Someone comes near him and says "WHOA" —and he jumps—"OH!" What an awakening!

There are many who come to this state and think they have attained awakening. Monks as well as laymen sometimes think this type of awakening is true enlightenment. These are the ones who conceal themselves from the world, eat one meal a day, etc.

Why do people fall into such errors? They do not listen to the Buddha's teaching. They admire and worship the Buddha—but they do not listen to his words.

It is told that, in the Buddha's time, two monks met. One said: "Have you been with the Buddha? Have you heard his sermons?"

The other monk said, "I have been with the Buddha for seven years and I have heard the Buddha's sermons for seven years."

The first monk said, "Though I have been in the Sangha for seven years, I have never heard the Buddha. My teacher has read me a few sutras—but please tell me of the Buddha?"

Today, people's attitude toward Buddhism is very queer. Someone will come from China or Japan, saying, "I will explain Buddhism." —but he explains his own notions about Buddhism. He should at least be honest and say that he is giving his own understanding—and not use the Buddha's name in vain. He is just exploiting Buddhism and the efforts of monks and laymen for 2500 years to uphold the true teaching of the Buddha.

My belief is that America will be a wonderful ground for Buddhism at some time in the future—but not yet.

Buddhism came into China from India at the beginning of the hundred years' war between Turkestan and China. The Chinese explorers went to India and, during those hundred years, the warriors carried Buddhism back to China. This was long before the Chinese Emperor invited the Indian monks into his country; in that way, Buddhism came to China. (Not as I, Sokei-an came here in a boat, the Maru, in 1926!)

This was a very great contact of nations. As Buddhism came

into China, you will see the signs written on the stones in Chinese characters. In India, in San Francisco, and in Seattle also, I have seen stones bearing these characters.

When I was living in San Francisco, someone looked at my book—"Are you studying laundry signs?" I asked. "Yes," he said, "I am about to open a laundry."

Well, it is an introduction! I believe that in 500 years everyone will read Chinese characters. It is inevitable that the East and the West will meet. And America is the center—the ground for this meeting. The new race produced by this America will be the ground for the new Buddhism! I prophesy that this will take five hundred years. At this time Americans will read the sutras in Chinese characters. The religion now existing in America will have lost its power and it will see the other side of the coin—the Oriental aspect.

I will come back again at this time! You are studying Chinese laundry signs now—but this is the beginning of the understanding of Buddhism. It does not matter if this effort is recorded or maintained.

We are the first raindrops to tell of the approaching downpour. The storm will wait.

"If a man attained the pure state of Dharmadhatu by annihilating forever the afflictions of the mind..." This affliction is not only worry or worldly thoughts—it is also the philosophy of Buddhism.

"... this very idea of purity would become a hindrance." The mind in agitation tries to obtain something—but this very "idea of purity" becomes a hindrance. But it is a good state; much better than thinking philosophy or chanting a mantra. It is peace; it wipes all thoughts from the brain. Mysterious, isn't it? This type of awakening is called "awakening according to the nature of mere man." This one will come back once more to the world—more than once.

"... he would therefore fail to attain complete realization of the state of Perfect Awakening. This grade of attainment is called 'awakening according to the nature of mere man.'"—This is the highest attainment 'mere man' can make. He will stop drinking wine, stop going to the brothel, stop going to bed with his wife; then go to a monastery, stick some incense before him, bow—and meditate. But this is not yet Buddhism. But we call it the second grade—the first grade hasn't come yet.

"O Obedient One! The bodhisattva's attainment of awakening

is itself a hindrance in the attainment of perfect awakening." —Kick the bodhisattva! Why? Because the bodhisattva always attaches to purity of mind. This purity has nothing to do with purity of conduct. So the bodhisattva is like still, stagnant water. Water which does not flow cannot be called water. It is dead.

"Although the bodhisattva has annihilated the hindrance caused by the pure state of mind, he still resides in awareness of the state of awakening." This is the second state. And he thinks, "This is the *samadhi* which is the greatest in the universe! This is the real *samadhi* in which I keep my eyes open and I do my work."

So the Zen student comes, crossing his hands—"Oh, I was wrong before—but this is the true attainment." This one calls himself a Buddhist who is going to work for the salvation of his brothers and sisters. Humph! If he comes here, he will get a black eye! The word "resides" is very important here.

"This awareness becomes in its turn a hindrance in the attainment of complete awakening." —"Don't misunderstand—I do not call myself a bodhisattva." —and he goes into the street. This is another error—very easy to fall into. Imitation is always erroneous.

"This grade of attainment is termed 'awakening according to the nature of the bodhisattva who has not yet entered the grade of the true bodhisattva.'" —He thinks he has attained salvation—enlightenment. The smell of enlightenment is hanging about him as if he had just eaten the fish of enlightenment. Go away—this is not a true bodhisattva!

I will tell you a story—a small and very secondary story—and maybe you will understand.

One day I met an old man, about eighty years old, who was meditating. "Osho," I asked, "in your old age and after your attainment, you are still meditating. Is it still necessary?"

"What's wrong with it?" he shouted. "I was young then and I am old now. What's wrong with my meditation now?" Very good answer!

The bodhisattva who has annihilated all thoughts and has no hindrance of mind can also practice meditation.

In the following part of this sutra, the details are explained of the bodhisattva who has completely attained perfect awakening. I shall try to make it clear—but until you attain this state, it is difficult to understand.

Three-Hundred-Mile-Tiger

Sokei-an's commentary on

The Record of Lin Chi

Discourse XIII, Lecture 3

“Brothers, today those who are mighty know there is nothing further to do. However, as you have no faith in yourself, you continually run about. Having thrown away your head, you go about trying to find it, unable to stop yourself. You are like the bodhisattva whose enlightenment is instantaneous and perfect. By his awakened power he manifests himself in the world of phenomena and enters into the cosmos of pureness. However, he favors the sacred and shows repugnance for the secular. Such a bodhisattva is unable to abandon his predisposition that conceives notions such as pure and impure. But the view of the Zen sect differs. Enlightenment is instantaneous; there is no time to await anything. No matter what I say, it all comes to this. Remedies are prescribed according to the degree of illness. There is no fixed rule. If you understand, you are a true renouncer of the world and may spend ten thousand coins a day.”

SOKEI-AN SAYS:

In this passage, Lin-chi is talking about the worship of the bodhisattva, a universal enlightened being that has an inter-individual nature and no ego. The bodhisattva's power is not his own but the power of the universe. One who understands this is called a bodhisattva. At the Buddha's time, this was the title of all lay followers, of kings and wealthy followers of the Buddha. The monks were called *arhats*. Later on, the title bodhisattva was appended to the names of the major deities of Buddhism. These bodhisattvas would indicate highly spiritualized human beings whose understanding was very close to that of the Buddha himself. In Mahayana Buddhism he is a highly enlightened one. Today, however, you will find Kuan-yin Bodhisattva, the goddess of mercy, in the art shops as an incense burner. I think Kuan-yin, the bodhisattva who hears the cries of the world, never expected to be burning incense in her hand!

“Brothers, today those who are mighty know there is nothing further to do.” In other words, if we know about the truth, through the Father in us, then this is the end of all doubt and we are emancipated from seeking. Daily life is the splendor of the universal consciousness. The law is written in it. If we know that we are

emancipated, we can observe everything *exactly as it is*-that is the ultimate form of enlightenment.

"However, as you have no faith in yourself, you continually run about. Having thrown away your head, you go about trying to find it, unable to stop yourself." This consciousness, though mutable and not eternal, is the Son of the Father; it came directly from him and embodied in the Mother (flesh, earth) and manifests all the capacities of his nature, in this life, from morning to evening. But we do not have faith in this so we search outside. To return to ourselves, to find God in ourselves, is easy, but to search outside, philosophizing, is very hard. You will find the same teaching from St. Paul. The way of all true religion is the same. If you seek for your own head, there is no end to the search.

Lin-chi has humor and a sharp tongue.

"You are like the bodhisattva whose enlightenment is instantaneous and perfect." This bodhisattva has no need to meditate for years. This bodhisattva's meditation is "instantaneous and perfect." At any time, perhaps while peeling potatoes, the time comes and he opens his Eye to the reality of the cosmos. We cannot speak a word, but he understands everything at once.

"By his awakened power he manifests himself in the world of phenomena and enters into the cosmos of pureness." His enlightenment is in the first stage; he is born into the pure cosmos. This is the stage of existence not related to the five senses. In philosophical terms of the West, it is the noumenal stage; the five senses cannot conceive it, but our wisdom can identify it as the cosmos of the Pure Land, the entrance to all enlightenment. The *bodhisattva's* consciousness has expanded into the infinite cosmos. All those of a religious nature, philosophers, and scientists understand this first stage of awakening.

From this first stage of awakening, he no longer manifests himself by his own consciousness but naturally manifests once more into the phenomenal world, for example, as a flower or a man. This is the second stage of enlightenment, bringing heaven to earth. The *bodhisattva* comes from the Pure Land to this phenomenal stage. There he finds the blind and the sleeping, and he shakes them into awakening from their dark viewpoint and shoves them into the Pure Land. Lin-chi is saying that the function of the *bodhisattva* is to bring all sleeping souls into this "cosmos of pureness," the noumenal stage, that they may see the real awakening stage of life.

Lin-chi is talking about his own understanding as a Zen master.

"However, he"- the *bodhisattva*-*"favors the sacred and shows repugnance for the secular."* Why favor one and abominate the other? That is not real enlightenment. When a heavenly king manifests on earth, then earth is heaven. Everything exists in your understanding, not outside. Once you enter pure noumenal enlightenment, all is noumena, even though you are manifesting yourself in phenomena. However, as phenomena are the essence of noumena, all is reality, the same substance in phenomena and noumena.

"Such a bodhisattva is unable to abandon his predisposition that conceives notions such as pure and impure." Everyone has this predisposition, the tendency toward favoring the sacred over the secular. But Lin-chi takes the standpoint that such a notion is not true. This notion gives religious teachers a hard job to open up that understanding and give pure light. If one has a relative notion of pure and impure, one's life cannot be happy because the mind is not entirely free from attachment to the notions of human beings. This is Lin-chi's understanding.

"But the view of the Zen sect differs, enlightenment is instantaneous; there is no time to await anything. No matter what I say, it all comes to this." Our sect is called Zen today; in Chinese, it is called *ch'an*, which originally came from the Sanskrit word *dhyana*. *Dhyana* means to practice meditation, quietude, and total annihilation. It also means to become one with others. If a husband thinks of his wife who is in a faraway land and concentrates, he forgets himself. His soul and his wife becomes one. Then all that his wife thinks at that moment, he feels, he knows. This is real meditation. When we train ourselves in meditation for five, ten years, we will have that power. But a letter is quicker. Why meditate ten years?

When I observe water at the beach, I plunge in not with my body but with my soul and mind. I drop out of my own being, move with the rhythm of the waves. That is meditating-you are one with the whole universe. Forget the boundary of the body. Become boundless. Realize that the soul of the universe and your soul are one. That is meditation.

Lin-chi, comparing Buddhist schools, tells us that Zen enlightenment is instantaneous-it happens in no time at all. The ascent is not by gradual steps, nor any devices used. When the time comes, the student opens his eye wide and sees reality and buddha-nature in that reality and the law written in that buddha-nature, and he understands the life of the human being. No matter what Lin-chi says, it all comes to the same point of instantaneous enlightenment as the ultimate of Zen study.

Zen is a school of meditation, not philosophy. Zen was really the brand of Buddhism started by the Buddha that was nonspecialized. It was called the Eye of Buddhism. It does not depend upon *sutras* but upon our own experience. In this brand of Buddhism, we can plunge into anything and at that moment understand the whole universe from the inside--playing tennis, baseball, boxing. When we do, we burst into noumenal existence, realize that Being is not one's own but belongs to the universe. Through our training we can meditate anyplace, any time. This means enlightenment. There is no Pure Land to enter into or to come out from. Everything belongs to the nature of the human being if you prove the absolute. It is not necessary to wait. Realize yourself at this moment!

"Remedies are prescribed according to the degree of illness. There is no fixed rule." Even though he speaks in many ways according to the stages of men's minds, as a doctor writes prescriptions for each patient according to the stage of his illness. And *koans* are like prescriptions. One who has been deluded for a long, long time needs a stiff dose to clear the mind of all delusions, so the Zen master gives a koan that destroys everything and brings him into nothingness. It destroys the outside and the inside, and lets him see the absolute state of the universe. Then, according to the state of his mind, the master will give him another type of koan. When the student passes that one, he will find something that is like consciousness in that monotonous nothingness. He will find a new ego that is entirely different from the one before. Then, by another type of koan, that ego is destroyed, and through that next ego he will reach buddha-nature. Until finally another koan, like poison, will kill that buddha-nature. Then he will find his own human nature and become a natural, everyday human being. He returns once more to the human stage--"Ahhh! Here I am."

In such a way, one may pass through many kinds of sickness, progressing step by step, until one comes to the true realization. This is like preparing a remedy for each stage of a malady. There is no set rule. If there is no sickness, the doctor will not prescribe, for the medicine relates to the sickness. Whatever religion you believe, that religion is your remedy. When cured, you do not need religion. There is no absolute medium, no fixed idea, no settled conviction, no particular faith in religion. If there is anything that you could call "set," it is an obstacle against the truth of buddha-nature.

Buddha-nature is like a gong, like an echo. When someone says "AH!" the answer is "AH!" If you strike it strongly; its response is strong. If a telephone girl has something on her mind, she cannot answer you correctly. The law of nature or the universe is reaction. Your mind center does not create thoughts; all thoughts

are echoes of your reaction and experience from that reaction. If you study physics or law in the lower animals, you will find that all movement is reaction. The animal reacts unconsciously; there is no particular creation in that reaction. Of course, in a lower stage, the animal reacts so precisely that we can make a clear record. In the higher, human stage, this reaction has developed into a complicated system so that it takes on the appearance that the human being is thinking something to deal with the circumstances. But if you think about this carefully, you will see that it is nothing but a complicated reaction. If you free your mind, you will react according to its own law. However, every mind is deflected from its true way of reaction by past karma, so it cannot react exactly according to the law of reaction but to its past karma, having developed certain tendencies.

So in Zen studies, we must meditate unceasingly, observing the normal function of reaction of the mind force. Let your mind be free, as free as the strings of a harp. Let it vibrate clearly. Stop straining. Let your mind move freely. Then you will see the fine skeins of mind spreading their magical spell through the sky. The whisper we think is nature does not always tell us the truth because of the tendencies the mind has developed. If there are no such tendencies, the true whisper of nature will flow from our mind. When you come to this stage, you attain a mystic power to see through and think through all visible phenomena.

The true man of no ego has the power of wood to echo even the tiniest flake of mind is a record of reaction. These take many different forms, as though we are inventing a new law, or doing something beyond experience, but that is just our imagination. We are just receiving something that has already been thought by the power of nature. Before man thinks, some other power has already settled the question. No man can manage the universal center; the whole buddha-nature is one and is that clear system of reaction, as the pineal gland is the center of reaction our biological functions. Therefore there is no absolute fixed idea. No such thing exists.

If you understand this (the law of the universe) you are a sage. When you are reacting, not from your own ego, body and mind, you are free; like a compass needle, your buddha-nature is always pointing to the North Pole. It never misses pointing truly; there is no particular point at which it settles. The center of mind of the sage never conceives any particular idea. It is empty, ready to react to whatever comes along. The mind is always taking a balance, signaling how to move. This balance is the symbol of nonego, of clear reaction.

“If you understand, you are a true renouncer of the world and may spend ten thousand coins a day.” You may lay out a million

a day! If you really enlighten yourself to act freely, you can do something for others. Nature invests the sage with authority to give charity. But you cannot do this for your own purposes. If I cannot find the state of mind that will make me content, there is no use in my giving my knowledge to others. When I am struggling for food, shelter, clothing, I am far away from the ideal law of Buddhism. This applies to knowledge also. When you find the real center of reaction, your mind center will reach the center of the universe and the law written in *you* will become clear. When you reach such a point, of course you will teach it to others.

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TALES OF HAKUIN'S FOLLOWERS

Hakuin Ekaku (1686-1769) is generally acknowledged as the key figure in formulating the Japanese Rinzai school of Zen as we know it today. The following anecdotes are taken from *Hakuin monka itsuwasen* (*Tales of Hakuin's Followers*), a translation into modern Japanese of *Keikyokusôdan* (*Tales From the Forest of Thorns*), composed in 1829 by Hakuin's fourth-generation disciple Myôki Seiteki (1774-1848) and published in 1843. *Tales of Hakuin's Followers*, which along with the modern Japanese-language version includes notes, the original Sino-Japanese (*kanbun*) text and its reading into classical Japanese (*yomikudashi*), was prepared by Nônin Kôdô and issued in 2008 in Kyoto by Hanazono University's Zen bunka kenkyûjo (Institute for the Study of Zen Culture).

Part 1

There was a certain Masa (n.d.), who was the wife of a Mr. Sugiyama of Hina. After her husband's death, she lived alone with her son and strove to master Zen under the instruction of the Zen teacher Gedatsu (n.d.) at his temple, Muryôji. Fervently taking up her koan, she generated a great ball of doubt. There were even times when, lost all day in meditation, she forgot to prepare the meals. When her son returned from outside he had nothing to eat and was fed by the neighbors, who felt sorry for him.

One day when her son returned home, Masa looked at him and inquired "Whose child are you?"

"Mama, what are you saying?" her son asked.

"To which Masa replied, "All right!" and returned to meditating.

This sort of thing continued for several days on end, when

suddenly Masa experienced enlightenment. She then went to see Hakuin. The Master proceeded to examine her on several koans, and Masa answered each one without the slightest hesitation. Hakuin then acknowledged her understanding...

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The Layman Furugori Kentsu (1695-1746), headman of Hina, was a samurai retainer of the Inaba clan and a originally a follower of the Nichiren school. One day Master Gedatsu brought him to meet Hakuin.

"This person wishes to study Zen," he told the Master. "Won't Your Reverence please give him a koan?"

Hakuin replied, "Why bother giving and taking [koans]? Right here, in this very moment, the truth is completely manifesting!"

Gedatsu pleaded, "He is only a layman. Please offer some expedient means to guide him toward enlightenment."

Seizing a brush, Hakuin then wrote: "What is the true nature of thinking and hearing, perceiving and knowing?"

Receiving this gratefully, the layman returned home.

A year afterward, the layman experienced awakening and presented Hakuin with a poem:

*When one loses one's hold over a ten-thousand-foot precipice
One's mattock sends forth flames consuming heaven and earth.*

*When one's body is reduced completely to ashes, things
spring back to life.*

*The paths between the paddies are as they were
The rice plants are putting forth ears.*

Hakuin then submitted the layman to rigorous Zen training.

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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. The previous sections, therefore, concerned Japanese Zen during the late middle ages, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. "Tokugawa Zen" deals with the Zen of Bankei's own period and how it emerged amid the changed conditions of the new age. The Tokugawa period, which lasted from approximately 1600 to 1867, was of key importance in the development of Rinzai and Soto Zen as we know them today, and many of the features of Japanese Zen that we now take for granted evolved during the more than two and one half centuries of rule by the Tokugawa shoguns. Bankei's age, the seventeenth century, is a particular focus of this section. Bankei was an original and highly individual teacher, but as will be seen, he shared many characteristics with other Zen teachers of his day, not least the very originality and individualism of his approach. The concluding section, "Bankei's Story," will detail Bankei's biography and the manner in which he arrived at his distinctive teaching of the unborn Buddha Mind

TOKUGAWA ZEN (Part III, #6)

(Continued from the Summer'12 Zen Notes)

Buddhism Under the Tokugawas

Factors such as those described previously --the widespread support of Buddhism by the military class, the increased numbers of temples and priests and the important renovation movements within the sects --testify to the fact that, far from fading into obscurity, Buddhism remained a significant presence in seventeenth century Japan. Nor was its influence confined to the world of the Tokugawa ruling elite, the priesthood and the great temples and sects. Among the common people themselves, Buddhism enjoyed tremendous success, and various popular forms of Buddhist worship spread throughout Japan's urban and rural communities. Although the parish system decreed for each individual a binding le-

gal relationship with a particular parish temple and its priest, there remained a second and wholly voluntary area of religious activity, a popular Buddhism that frequently existed apart from the parish temple and outside the realm of officially sanctioned Buddhist observance. In the seventeenth century, the world of popular Buddhism was, as it had always been, highly syncretic, embracing worship of a variety of kami and buddhas and marked by pilgrimage circuits mingling visits to both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples of various sects. Much of the popular Buddhism of the early Tokugawa period represented a continuation of late medieval trends that had popularized and vulgarized Buddhist worship. Such trends, which became specially pronounced during the Warring States period, reflected the close spiritual ties established between local temples and the surrounding communities, particularly in rural districts.

Rather than inner salvation or "enlightenment," this form of Buddhism stressed the importance of funeral and memorial observances and of ceremonies through which parishioners could obtain specific material benefits in their daily lives. Temple rites and festivals aimed principally at averting evil, invoking blessings and securing good fortune, including wealth. Many involved the worship of gods and buddhas credited with curative powers.

Such practices, spread in part by *yamabushi* and other wandering ascetics, established the general pattern for popular Buddhism in the seventeenth century and were adopted by rural temples of all the major sects, including Zen, Shingon, Tendai and Nichiren. In particular, the performance of Esoteric Buddhist rites for worldly benefits (*kito*) remained a central aspect of popular belief and formed the backbone of the economy of many local temples. This was especially true of the *shinchi*, or "new temples," which, as late comers on the scene, were hard put to find unaffiliated funeral patrons, and were forced to rely on patronage derived from promoting popular interest in rites, or *kito*. The shift from funeral to *kito* temples occurs from approximately the late Kanei era (1624-1629); official documents show that of the temples constructed between 1643 and 1660, nine tenths had *kito* patrons, while in the remainder, the number of *kito* patrons had far outstripped that of funeral patrons. Bakufu injunctions against *yamabushi* and various unaffiliated ascetics who performed Esoteric rites in rural areas also make their first appearance at this time. Ultimately, however, it was the *kito* temples rather than the official parish temples which became the true focus of the religious life of the rural masses in Tokugawa Japan.

These were, for the most part, small establishments, operating outside the official framework of the parish temples and often associated with Shugendo, the particular Japanese amalgam of Shinto and Buddhist Esotericism associated with the *yamabushi*, or mountain ascetics. The income of the *kito* temples was almost entirely dependent on the performance of rites, supplemented periodically by donations from special public ceremonies. Among the most important of these were festivals (known as *kaicho*) at which revered Buddhist images normally kept concealed were displayed to the faithful. These festivals, which began in the Genroku era (1688-1703), were immensely successful, though they were opposed by the Bakufu, apparently because of the enormous crowds they tended to attract, considered a threat to public order.

The practice of popular Buddhism in seventeenth century Japan was not confined to the temples. And although the government opposed most forms of Buddhist observance that occurred outside the official temple system, certain aspects of popular belief involved unauthorized mass public devotions or centered on charismatic religious figures who included unordained male and female ascetics, or *hijiri*. Large numbers of such wandering ascetics roamed the cities and towns of early Tokugawa Japan preaching the merits of the cold water austerity, chanting, ringing bells, and soliciting alms. Many were *yamabushi*-style practitioners, but were not actually monks or members of an established sect of Shugendo; others were loosely affiliated at best. The government sought to establish strict controls over these semi-independent ascetics, and numerous edicts were directed against them, with the majority concentrated between the Kambun (1661-1672) and Genroku eras.

The itinerant ascetics played an important role in the development of another facet of popular belief which occurred largely outside the realm of the established parish temples: the rise of numbers of "new" buddhas and bodhisattvas. Bearers of magical powers, these deities, frequently appeared without any clear history, originating in certain charismatic contemporaries, including many ascetics of the *yamabushi* variety. During their lifetimes, these figures were worshiped by the common people as "living buddhas" (*ikibotoke*), and after their deaths were revered as helping gods or bodhisattvas, able to cure a variety of illnesses and afflictions and even to foretell such natural disasters as famines, floods, and epidemics. Many stories appear from the early Tokugawa period of ascetics and others endowed with spiritual power who, on the verge of death, vow that those who worship them will

be cured of their ailments. At times, such practitioners deliberately brought on their own premature death through starvation, live burial or other means, including simple willpower. These measures were believed to insure that they could immediately enter nirvana, fulfilling their vow to become buddhas and help the suffering masses. The date and hour of their passing were often announced a year in advance, and the actual scene of their entry into [eternal] samadhi,' could become a public occasion attracting throngs of pious or merely curious onlookers. In 1667 in Edo, for example, a large crowd assembled to witness the death of a certain, fasting Buddhist ascetic who had announced his intention of passing away on the eighteenth day of the tenth month. After repeating the *nembutsu* (the invocation to Amitabha Buddha) ten times, he dug a hole in the earth and taking a sword in his hand, seated himself in the hole and vowed: "I shall become the god Shoki and cure the illnesses of sentient beings." The spectators gathered around him chanting the *nembutsu*, and at his request, threw earth into the hole, burying him alive. In 1692, in a similar episode, another fasting ascetic, identified as a former samurai who had become a Shingon monk, received a revelation from the wrathful Esoteric Bodhisattva Fudo directing him to die in order to save his fellow villagers from an epidemic. He consequently fasted for seven days, chanting continually and on the appointed date, passed away.

The ability to die at will in this manner was considered miraculous, and Bankei may well have such practitioners in mind in the Sermons when he disparages, popular reverence for people who predict in advance the moment of their death and then pass away at the appointed time, even if they are perfectly well. Such people, he asserts, haven't grasped the true meaning of "being free in birth and death." Similarly, Bankei's frequent use of the expression "living buddhas" to describe the enlightened potential of the members of his audience may serve as a corrective of sorts to the common notion of "living buddhas" as ascetics endowed with supernatural powers.

The actual practice of ascetics fasting to death was not a new one. It seems to have developed among certain Shingon *yamabushi* of the late Middle Ages who believed the starvation process would purify their body and preserve it in a mummified form till the coming of Maitreya, the future Buddha. In the Tokugawa period, the object of mummification became altruistic to transform oneself into a buddha, bodhisattva or kami able to respond to the prayers of the common people, performing mira-

cles to alleviate their sufferings. Such drastic expedients for saving the masses were not universal, however, and other ascetics assumed the role of healing divinities without having to depart the world. A Kyoto-based *yamabushi* of the Genroku era, for example, was regarded as a living Fudo, and is said to have cured the ailments of those who sought his help until his death in 1702.

Not all the "new" buddhas were professional ascetics. Like the heros and heroines of the seventeenth-century dramatists Saikaku and Chikamatsu, the popular Buddhist hagiography of seventeenth century Japan included many ordinary men and women of humble birth. The worship of Otake Dainichi Nyorai is an example of one such cult that originated in the early Tokugawa period and has continued till the present. A certain ascetic is said to have prayed for the opportunity to worship Dainichi (the "Sun Buddha" Mahavairocana) in a living body, and was directed in a dream to seek out a virtuous Edo serving woman named Otake (d.1680), who distributed her food to the city's beggars. The ascetic presented himself before Otake and informed her of his vision. Thereafter, she passed the remainder of her life in fervent repetition of the *nembutsu*, revered by the common people as "Otake Dainichi Nyorai," a living incarnation of the Buddha Mahavairocana. The cult of her worship was spread by the *yamabushi* and reportedly continues to this day.

Such varieties of popular Buddhism were in many respects manifestations of folk religion in which age-old traditions combining shamanism and sympathetic magic seem to have played an important role. At the same time, serious efforts were being made within the established Buddhist sects to popularize their schools' teachings and to make them available to the common people. Public lectures and sermons such as Bankei's certainly served this purpose. But the printed word was significant, too, and many Buddhist monks of the period composed literary works that presented the teachings of their sect in a direct, simplified, easily readable form. For the most part, these works were written in ordinary Japanese rather than in the difficult and often abstruse Chinese in which much of Buddhist literature in Japan was composed. In content too, Tokugawa popular Buddhist writings frequently reflected the realities of contemporary Japanese life, preaching the importance of ethical conduct in terms similar to those employed by the government and by Confucian scholars of the day. Thus, together with their explanations of Buddhism, such works often tended to articulate the feudal "secular ethic" of the period, inculcating such virtues as loyalty, filiality, diligence, and

the fulfillment of one's role in the social order according to one's station in life. In part, this represented a response to Confucian accusations that Buddhism was indifferent to social and ethical concerns and was of no practical use to ordinary people in the conduct of their lives. Perhaps in consequence, many of the popular Buddhist works tend to exalt the position of laymen and to assert their potential to fully realize the fruits of religious practice.

But the creation of popular works on Buddhism also continued a trend begun in the Middle Ages by Gettan, Bassui and other medieval teachers. In the Zen school of the seventeenth century a number of such popular works appeared, composed by well-known masters of the period: Takuan Soho's *Night Talks at Tokaiji* (*Tokai yawa*), Shido Mu'nan's *Realizing Buddhahood in this Very Existence* (*Sokushingi*), and *On Self-Nature* (*Jishoki*), and Suzuki Shosan's *Meritorious Way of Life for All* (*Banmin tokuyo*) are all Zen examples of this genre.

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Cover

Searching for a cover for soon to be published *Three-hundred-Mile Tiger*, Sokei-an's translation and commentary on the Record of Lin Chi, we thought of Sokei-an's beloved cat Chaka. As Sokei-an's dharma heir, we decided he was a 'true cat of no rank' and sprawling out of Sokei-an's arms he is a tiger ready to play. The final version is a negative, Here it's the cropped original.



This fall lands in 2013?
Donno... lost my broom to navigate the leaves.
Well... on cold mountain we'll need hot soup without the dragon's fire
Why are snakes everywhere?...



Drawing by Susan Morningstar

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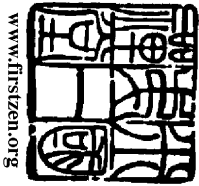
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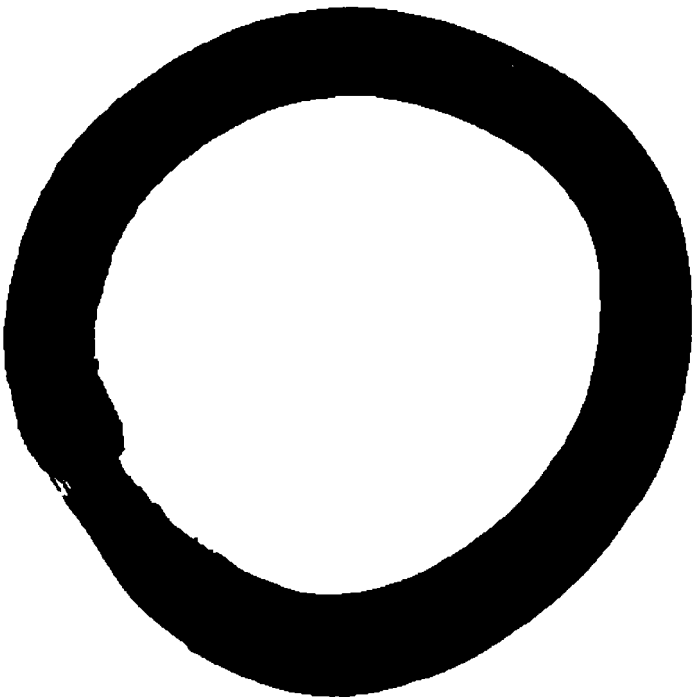
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