

# ZEN NOTES



## SOKEI - AN SAYS

**THE QUIET LIFE** Perhaps you cannot imagine such a practice as that which has been current among my people. In China or Japan, monasteries are built on a mountain top or on the edge of a cliff. From there you can see a thousand miles before your eyes. In winter, when the valley is covered with snow, you feel you are in a world of silver. No color is before your eyes. In the valley it is so quiet. In the daytime when the monks are meditating, if there is any sound in the temple it will be only that of a mouse or a rat.

These monks are not retiring from the world; they are trying to find quietude in their minds. This state is longed for by oriental students. They try frantically to find it. Occasionally they renounce their home, or separate from wife and children to pass their lives in such a quiet place. You could not dream of men like this until you meet them. They value highly their quiet way of life. They cannot see the value of the life we are in daily contact with, our present civilization, where men hold a cigar in the right hand and a glass of whiskey in the left hand, listen to music, watch dancing, and eat delicious food. We might say that these are the two extremes of human life.

Perhaps you will ask, what value is there in that quiet and aloof way of life. The monks would ask the same question of you. What value is there in passing your nights in a night club?

From a lecture Feb. 21, 1942

WHEN I WAS A CHILD my father always put me to bed. From three years old I remember he told me bedtime stories in Chinese, so the sound of Chinese was familiar to me from my earliest memory. When I was five years old he began to teach me Chinese, and writing those characters was my life work as a child.

From a tea talk