

ZEN BOW

PUBLISHED BY

THE ZEN MEDITATION CENTER OF

PHILIP KAPLEAU

ROCHESTER

TELEPHONE

RESIDENT TEACHER

716-473-9180

December 31, 1967

10 Buckingham St. Rochester, N.Y.

Vol. 1, No. 1

Introducing...

The publication of 'Zen Bow' will bring the Center's growing out-of-town membership closer to its activities. Zen Buddhism, as a viable and transforming religion, has now outgrown its Western intellectual phase, and for scattered but significant groups of serious Americans has become the do-it-yourself religion standing outside of the traditional, formal connotations of the word. Hence it is important that Center members receive from time to time news items which affect the state and practice of Zen in the United States. It is the good fortune of Center members to have here, so far as we know, the first ordained teacher strictly attuned to the American mind. Thus Zen Bow will reflect Zen Buddhism in an American context to a greater extent than has been possible heretofore. It is important that Zen makes for itself an American home, retaining all that is great in its Oriental transmission but disabusing itself of the stigma of 'Orientalism.' And, certainly, the major specific aim of Zen Bow must be to enforce the Zen study and practice of those who read it. It must be said here that literary accomplishments, no matter how grand or inspired, have no place in the publication and so are not to be solicited from members. The inspired life which is the natural outgrowth of Zen practice should be lived and not wasted in these pages. In fact, in a great many of the issues to come we hope to devote the largest space to translations of instructive teachings of the Zen masters themselves.

Your Rochester Center is grateful to have this means at hand for bringing you nearer. It is out of a feeling of respect for members' continuing efforts in the practice of Zen Buddhism that Zen Bow gasshos in grateful welcome!

From the Center

A good-sized article was run recently in the Rochester evening newspaper under the headline "Quiet Zen Center Slowly Growing." The article, which spread generously over the full top width of a page and ran complete with a photograph of Philip Sensei, told in

considerable and nearly accurate detail the most accessible facts of the Center. (Nearly accurate detail--for in that inimitable haste of a newspaper to set down the 'truth,' the Center's address was incorrectly given as '10 Brunswick Street!') The piece was outstanding

for its sympathetic and intelligent tone --written, by the way, by a woman reporter--and its very appearance goes a long way toward showing the extent to which this 'quiet' Zen Meditation Center in Rochester has settled into the community.

Located in one of this conservative city's more conservative residential areas, the Center rises stolidly above neatly manicured hedges and sits the same distance from the curb as its neighbors. In fact, except maybe for an occasional bell sound or the sharp sound of the wooden clapper which attends every sitting of a rigorous zazen schedule, it is likely that most of the passers-by don't give a second thought to the intense, devoted work going on here. It is the work of silent and direct realization, and newspapers do well to name it 'quiet.'

And--most amazing fact of all to those imbued with the western religious tradition--it is work which does not proselytize. Once recently the Center did place the Friday night 'introductory lecture' announcements at strategic points in the city, but so overwhelming was the response, with the crowd even overflowing onto the front porch, that even this publicizing was discontinued. Now, by relying on the old tried and true methods of word-of-mouth, the introductory lectures are filled to capacity on Friday nights.

So it is the Zen way of work which goes of its own volition, like ripples of water whose influence can be felt at who knows what distant point? The ripples move slow or fast according to the eye of the beholder, but all agree they are inexorable as to their final course. Membership at the Center now stands at 83 and has grown by 30 people just since September. The roster includes persons living in Massachusetts, Canada, Ohio, Florida and Colorado. The sesshins draw travelers from far away. The recently completed first annual tandem sesshin, held December 8 - 11 and combining the normal monthly sesshin with the rohatsu (which celebrates the Buddha's own enlightenment) filled the zendo for the entire four days and drew members from as far away as Boul-

der, Colorado.

Always at the Center it is the zendo which is the focal point of activity. The zendo runs across the front of the house and it must have once made a spectacular living room. But all that has changed now, and there are kapok mats and cushions facing the wall around its entire circumference so as to allow room for as many as 21 people to sit in zazen at one time.

Yet to those on their first pilgrimage here, entering the Rochester zendo for the first time might give rise to disquieting feelings of awe. Thus it is important to realize right away that the atmosphere is quite functionally suited to tranquility and is not pietistic. Upon the altar at the west end of the room there reposes a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha seated in the traditional zazen posture (see From Abroad). Along the left wall rise two sections of shelving which hold various Bodhisattva icons and are divided by a long Chinese nature scroll. In this atmosphere, then, are created the zazen-ripples that find their way out into Canada and Florida and Boulder. Such is the meaning here in Rochester of the 'quiet work slowly growing.'

Lecture Activities

It is clear evidence of the ever-increasing interest in Zen Buddhism's farther journey westward from Japan that in the past year Philip Sensei has been asked to lecture at five American universities and colleges. At several of these, in fact, he has presided over formal zazen gatherings following his talks. The schools include such diverse institutions as Cornell, the University of Rochester, M.I.T., Florida State University, Bard, Batavia Community College (New York).

For the first time in Zen's western experience a fully qualified monk has returned to the land of his birth, determined to place proper emphasis on zazen practice as the heart-source of Zen Buddhist discipline. Everywhere Sensei feels the response given his talks has been as warm as the response formally given to the limited, mind-tickling ren-

derings of Zen which flourished in America in the 'Fifties.

At Florida State, for example, a morning zazen session with an appropriate introductory lecture was attended by 60 people, including 22 students from the Florida Presbyterian College in St. Petersburg. More than 150 persons had heard his lecture the previous night. Some 100 students crowded the Commons Room in Annabelle-Taylor Hall on the Cornell University campus to engage in a freewheeling and penetrating question-and-answer period which lasted over three hours. Fifty-five of the students turned out afterwards for zazen.

Another question-answer period followed Sensei's University of Rochester appearance, and since the event was a local one, it was possible to record a sampling of what students are asking about Zen Buddhism nowadays--and how the first American teacher of Zen, without any of the old barriers of culture or language, is able to respond:

Q: Could you elaborate on what is meant by such expressions as "You must kill the Buddha"?

Sensei: First of all, we must remember that such statements are neither crude nor rude. Like the word 'God,' 'Buddha' is a concept. If one calls himself a Christian one must realize the reality for which the mere concept 'God' stands. But for a Christian to say "You must kill Jesus" would be outright blasphemy, whereas in Zen Buddhism the exclamation "Kill the Buddha" is not at all blasphemous. Why not? Because the aim of Zen training is to sever every attachment or hang-up, whether it is the lofty sort where one is hung up on the Buddha or something commonplace like, let us say, a macrobiotic diet. In ancient China there were Zen monks who could easily burn a statue of the Buddha and the next day as easily prostrate themselves before his statue while doing their services. Then again, one could be as attached to the notion of discarding the Buddha as to the idea of preserving in the mind an exalted vision of him.

Q: How does Zen feel as regards the usage of drugs and their relationship to satori?

Sensei: To begin with, we must be clear that there is no specific official entity called 'Zen.' All I can do is tell you how I personally feel about it. Two or three Zen teachers I have spoken to feel pretty much the same way, I might say. At the Rochester Center now we are getting a number of young people who have taken hallucinogenic drugs, including, of course, marijuana, and one of the very interesting and encouraging things I learn in talking to these young people is that drugs are actually leading them to Zen practice. In almost all cases of heightened awareness or mind-expansion in drug taking there seems no way in one's life to sustain such experiences except by taking more and more drugs, and this many do not wish to do, so they are trying zazen meditation. Anyway, I would say that about 95% of the drug-induced experiences I have read or heard about belong in the category of 'makyo'--a Zen technical word meaning only hallucination or delusion. The enlightened state of mind is not mind-expanded in the psychedelic sense of that term. I think drug-taking is an easy way out, trying to get something for no effort of your own. Like pawning things when you need money instead of going out and earning it, or like beating a tired horse instead of feeding it. With genuine satori you perceive the need for discipline on every level of your life. Through zazen practice the life-transforming experience becomes more thorough, more natural, more long lasting.

Q: Why is it that Zen masters don't bother to explain things to people who ask questions showing they are genuinely troubled? Instead the masters answer in what appears to our sensitivities as a flippant and outright snotty tone.

Sensei: A real master is never flippant or nasty when he senses the question comes from the hara, i.e., the guts, though he can be rough. Remember, a slap in the face, a crack with the kyo-saku paddle, even silence, at the right time, in the right place, and by the right person can be far more effective than an explanation, however brilliant.

Every explanation, including even this one, is limited by its very nature. Every description of ultimate Truth-- and that is always the direction in which the master's answer points--is looking from one side at what has infinite dimensions. If one picture is better than a hundred words, a timely jolt is often worth more than a hundred words or pictures. Consider this marvelous Zen tableau:

A monk came to the master Unmon and said: "Suppose you meet up with someone deaf, dumb, and blind. He couldn't see your gestures, hear your preaching or, for that matter, ask questions. Unable to save him, you'd prove yourself a worthless Buddhist, wouldn't you?"

"Bow, please," said Unmon.

The monk, though taken by surprise, obeyed the master's command, then straightened up in expectation of having his query answered. But instead of an answer he got a staff thrust at him, and he leaped back.

"Well," said Unmon, "you're not blind. Now approach."

The monk did what he was bidden.

"Good," said Unmon. "You're not deaf either. Well, understand?"

"Understand what, sir?"

"Ah, you're not dumb either."

On hearing these words, the monk awoke as from a deep sleep.

-oOo-

From Abroad

A Buddha came to the Zen Meditation Center of Rochester this past October. Reckoned in time, he was created in Nepal a hundred years ago, but his spirit is ageless. Although he is no more than eighteen inches high, yet his immensity fills the cosmos.

He was first seen in a Tibetan bazaar at New Delhi, India, this past summer by deLancey Kapleau, who eventually persuaded his Indian host to part with him. What attracted her to him was his commanding presence, his dynamic inner calm and equilibrium, plus that intangible aura of wisdom and compassion. His was the air of a sage who had hid himself not in the moun-

tains but in the market place.

Fashioned of bronze, this Buddha sits on a lotus throne in the teaching position, i.e., with right hand extended straight over the right knee and left hand open in his lap, legs crossed in full lotus. To provide him with a fitting backdrop, Pat Simons, our monk-artist, built a special dais on the altar and draped a large gold-colored cloth behind him.

Each morning Philip Sensei and the three monastics, after zazen, chant the Prajna-Paramita Sutra in English, followed by several dharani and the Four Vows, after which they prostrate themselves three times before this incarnation of our Buddha-nature.

To experience the full power of a Buddha, one needs to look up at him. Only then can one appreciate Count Keyserling's observation in his Travel Diary of a Philosopher: "I know nothing more grand in this world than the figure of the Buddha; it is an absolutely perfect embodiment of spirituality in the visible domain."

Newcomers to the Rochester Center often ask: "Why do you bow down to a Buddha figure? Isn't this a form of idolatry?" No, it is not idolatry so long as we are aware that the True-Buddha is the Self-Buddha. The gesture of placing the hands in gassho (i.e., palms together at chest level) and bowing or prostrating before a Buddha is basically an expression of respect, of gratitude, of humility. It is a devotion which when entered into fervently and with a single mind endows a Buddha image with life. What was formally a mere statue now becomes a living reality with the singular power to obliterate in us awareness of self and Buddha at the moment of prostration. Remove the figure, though, and the gesture becomes a spiritually empty calisthenic which has the undesirable effect of making us more aware of ourselves instead of less.

To come before a Buddha with feelings of respect and humility makes possible a true 'horizontalizing of the mast of ego' in the un-self-conscious act of bowing or prostration. This in turn helps us open up to an intuitive understanding and appreciation

of the exalted mind and manifold virtues of all Buddhas. A karmic bond is thus formed which acts as a powerful impetus to practice.

Obeisance before a Buddha figure, then, is another mode of zazen hastening the opening of our Mind's eye. Or if we already have had a glimpse of Truth, it is a means of removing the particles of dust from our enlightenment so that the light may shine more brightly in our daily lives. The famous master Huang-po (Obaku in Japanese) would make his daily prostrations before the Buddha with such fervor, burying his head deep into the carpet or mat, that he acquired a permanent red mark on his forehead. Yet we must never forget that Huang-po could do this only because he knew that that which prostrates and that which is prostrated before are not two--that, in other words (as he himself states): "Mind is Buddha and Buddha is Mind. Mind and Buddha are not separate or different."

-oOo-

"Enlightenment is not an escape from the problems of our family, society and country but a liberation that gives us the wisdom and strength to pursue the highest form of moral actions."

-oOo-

Beyond Thought

One searches all around for his thought. But what thought? It is either passionate, hateful, or confused. What about the past, future or present? What is past, that is extinct; what is future, that has not yet arrived; and the present has no stability. Thought cannot be apprehended, inside or outside, or in between both. For thought is immaterial, invisible, non-resisting, inconceivable, unsupported and homeless. Thought has never been seen by any of the Buddhas, nor do they see it, nor will they see it. And what the Buddhas never see, how can that be an observable process, except in the sense that dharms proceed by way of mistaken perception?...

Thought is like a bad friend, for it generates all kinds of ill. Thought is like a fish-hook, which looks pleasant, although it is not. Thought, though one searches for it all around, cannot be found. What cannot be found, that cannot be apprehended. What cannot be apprehended, that cannot be past, future or present. What is not past, future or present, that is beyond the three dimensions of time. What is beyond the three dimensions of time, that neither is nor is not...

(from Buddhist Texts Through the Ages,
by Edward Conze)

-oOo-

The Prajna-Paramita Hridaya (A new English adaptation for chanting)

The Prajna Paramita Hridaya is considered to be the most important formulation for piercing the delusive mind; it is recited daily in every Buddhist monastery. A hridaya is the kernel of a sutra, the heart of it, and often this hridaya is referred to as the Heart Sutra since it is the condensed message of the Buddha's Wisdom Sutras which were spoken over a period of 22 years in his lifetime and written down in 38 different books in India between 100 B.C. and 600 A.D. Later, translated into millions of Chinese characters, these sutras were found to be unwieldy for memory or daily chanting, and the hridaya itself was brought forth in 268 Chinese characters which were then used by the Japanese with their own pronunciation (i.e. the Maka Hannya Haramite Shingyo).

There have been a number of English translations: none meant for chanting, many of them rough renderings from the Japanese. The most accurate, we believe, is Edward Conze's translation from the Sanskrit. All were taken into consideration when the hridaya

was adapted for chanting in English at the Zen Meditation Center. It was felt that while the Japanese Maka Hannya Haramita Shingyo was fluent and attractive, in the long run it would be simply an exotic decoration in the minds of Americans--without the practical function the hridaya possessed for Indians when the early geniuses of Buddhism composed it, or when the Chinese, Japanese and others recite it in their native tongues.

Prajna-Paramita means "wisdom that goes beyond," or tanscendental wisdom. Conze says, "This sutra is not meant for the stupid, the emotional, the uninformed"; it is for those who set out to know, using intellectual means as well as spiritual insight.

In the Hridaya the Buddha himself is speaking to Sariputra, who among the 80 chief disciples was most noted for his wisdom and is therefore considered to be the most apt pupil to hear of the achievement of Avalokita, who became the Bodhisattva of Compassion through his discovery that the human personality is merely five skandhas, literally "heaps" or "aggregates" (i.e. form, feeling, perception, volition, consciousness), and that they are empty of real substance.

The Buddha then discloses the illusory nature of the 18 dhatu (realms of sense made up of the 6 organs, the 6 types of sense data, the 6 acts of sensing), the 12 nidanas or links in the chain of existence that proceed from ignorance to death, the 4 dogmas as set down in the Fourfold Noble Path and even the dualistic conception of nirvana and samsara.

While the sutra deals with theory, the Sanskrit mantra at the end provides a means of practice for disentangling oneself from thought through repetition of syllables, not only fortuitous phonetically, but by tradition the gift of a higher being to transmit wisdom. These syllables remind some who chant them of heart-beats, perhaps another reason for calling this hridaya the Heart Sutra.

The Prajna-Paramita Hridaya

The Bodhisattva of Compassion
when he meditated deeply
saw the emptiness of all five skandhas
and sundered the bonds
that caused him suffering.
Hear then!

Form is no other than emptiness,
emptiness no other than form.
Form is only emptiness;
emptiness, only form.

Feeling, thought and choice,
consciousness itself,
are the same as this.

All things are the primal void,
~~neither born nor destroyed.~~
Nor is it stained or pure.
Nor does it wax or wane.

which is not born or destroyed

So, in emptiness, no form:
no feeling, thought or choice;
nor is there consciousness;

no eye, ear, nose,
tongue, body, mind;
no color, sound, smell,
taste, touch or what the mind
takes hold of;
nor even act of sensing:

no ignorance or end of it,
nor all that comes of ignorance;
no withering, no death,
no end of them.

Nor is there pain or cause of pain
or cease in pain or fourfold path
to lead from pain;

not even wisdom to attain!
Attainment, too, is emptiness.

So know that the Bodhisattva
holding to nothing whatever
but dwelling in prajna wisdom
is freed of delusive hindrance,
rid of the fear bred by it;
and reaches clearest nirvana.

All Buddhas of past and present,
Buddhas of future time
using this prajna wisdom
come to full and perfect vision.

Hear, then, the great dharani,
the radiant, peerless mantra,
the Prajna-Paramita
whose words allay all pain
---hear and believe its truth!

Gate, gate
paragate
parasamgate
bodhi, svaha!

Gone, gone
to the other shore
gone beyond.
Awake: rejoice!

By Chisan Koho
Chief Abbot, Sojiji Monastery

It was Dogen Zenji who brought Soto Zen from China to Japan in the twelfth century, but it was not until Keisan Zenji became abbot of Sojiji several generations later that the teaching spread throughout Japan. The reason for this is not hard to seek. On Dogen's return from China he was thinking that only the Chinese way of doing everything was right, but it is not possible to graft the customs and culture of one country on to another. When a religion is carried from one country to another, it is only the basic thought that will survive--it is like a Japanese bride, who at her wedding wears white so that her husband may realize that she is willing to be dyed to any color, with regard to customs, ways and behavior, that he may wish. When a new religion is married, as it were, to a new country, it must be willing to be dyed in the same way. Keisan realized this and changed the customs, but not the philosophy, to be in accord with Japanese thought; thus did Soto Zen become the bride of Japan and spread throughout the country so that it now has more than fifteen thousand temples.

But this spread was impossible while it remained in its original Chinese state, since people felt that a foreign religion was being forced upon them, and the people of western countries, if Zen is ever to reach them properly, must color it in the same way for themselves just as the Japanese did. Thus will Zen be reborn in the West. Like the Buddhist at rebirth, the new Zen will neither be completely new, being the same stream of philosophic thought, nor completely old, having new forms, ways, customs and culture...

-----From the foreword to the manual Zen is Eternal Life, by
Rev. Jiyu Kennett, published by DAI HON ZAN, Sojiji.