

The Sandōkai and The Most Excellent Mirror—Samādhi

[What follows is an edited version of lectures (continued in [The Most Excellent Mirror—Samādhi](#)) given by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett to all monks in September, 1981. The lectures were first published in **Zen Training** (Shasta Abbey, 1982—which is presently out-of-print), and reprinted in the Winter 1994 issue of The Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives © 1994. The Scriptures themselves are copyright © Shasta Abbey. The glossary to **Zen is Eternal Life**¹ as well as [The Ancestors \(Annotated Chart\)](#) on this website has information about the origin of these two scriptures.]

The Sandōkai

Homage to the Buddha,
Homage to the Dharma,
Homage to the Sangha.

From West to East, unseen, flowed out the Mind
Of India's greatest Sage and, to the source,
Kept true as an unsullied stream is clear.

The very first words uttered in Morning Service are those of certainty, the certainty of the flowing out from the Absolute, the flowing out from the Cosmic Buddha from the far past to the present time. It is a statement of certainty and faith. *India's greatest Sage*, Shakyamuni, was just one of the conduits, or pipes.... This statement of faith is made every morning immediately after meditation in the Zendō. After experiencing the flowing of the water during one's meditation one can *know*, in all certainty, that one is part of the pipe—by feeling the water itself, knowing it, drinking it, living it. The whole of the *Sandōkai* is a statement of certainty which helps us to grow our faith.

Although by wit and dullness the True Way
Is varied, yet it has no Patriarch
Of south or north.

Some experience the True Way clearly, visibly. They see, or hear, or they know. Others just occasionally feel the water. Although the senses may be bright or dull, although they may be clever at explaining it, or not so clever (Dōgen once pointed out that there was an old cook who mumbled like an ox but knew the Truth better than anyone he had met), yet neither the bright nor the dull is the *Patriarch of south or north*, the only true Patriarch being That Which Is, that which flows through all of them. One should not look at a monk and say, "I don't think he knows much," or, "I think he's wonderful, look how much he knows." One should not do these things; one's purpose is to *know* the Eternal.... We might as well use *do not set up your own standards* as a refrain after each line of this scripture.

Here born, we clutch at things
And then compound delusion, later on,

By following ideals; each sense gate and
*Its object all together enter thus
In mutual relations and yet stand
Apart in a uniqueness of their own,
Depending and yet non-depending both.

[At the asterisk * the gong is struck to mark the incense offering; also to accent important parts of the scripture.]

We are sensitive to the Cosmic Buddha as babies, but we are carefully educated out of that sensitivity. Children, by the age of seven, very sadly have decided to go the way of the world; they do not know what else to do. If they do not go this way, they are going to be regarded as weird; and if they do go along, they know that they have “lost” something. Throughout their lives they search for that which has been “lost.” *The Secret of the Golden Flower*² speaks of the beautiful place being torn, and heaven and earth becoming separated. The child was in its secret place within, untorn, until the world and its parents and teachers got at it. One should not think of this as a vindictive or jealous act on the part of teachers and parents; it was done to them and they know no better. The purpose of a Buddhist layman is to learn how *not* to do this to one’s children, to prevent the continuation of suffering by making sure that one’s own children are not torn from the Eternal. So we are striving to get back to the Cosmic Buddha, but all we can come up with are ideals. We have “Love and Light.”³ We try to become God. By attempting to deal with what we regard as evil we concern ourselves with what is the prerogative of the Cosmic Buddha, of the Eternal. Because we have been torn from the Eternal we try to make the Eternal into what we ourselves would like to be, and have the rest of the world be. So one must get rid of ideals, one must throw one’s hands in the air and cry, “I am not God. *I* cannot put the world to rights. Help me!” In crying for help we are once again reunited with the Eternal.... It does not mean that ideals are wrong. It means that they can mislead us as to what really is.

The sense-gates know what they like; they know what they dislike—they do not know that within both the liked and the disliked there is That Which Is beyond both; that one can stand in that place and neither the liked nor the disliked will affect one.... It is possible to stand with your feet in hell and know that the encircling hands and the flames are the cool petals and the water of the lotus blossom. You can make these things into the cool water, or the flames (as you move out of the Eternal). You can have it either way, or you can have it beyond both. These things can depend upon each other to show the differences between themselves, or they can be seen to be the shadows they really are—one *can* know the reality within them. Most people seek love in its earthly form, not knowing that the essence of love far transcends the earthly state. When one truly knows this, earthly love becomes as dross. At a gourmet restaurant, one can have one’s tastes titillated with the most exquisite dishes, but once one has tasted the Water of the Spirit no food whatsoever has savour, there is nothing more delicious, more refreshing, or more cooling. It is through knowing what we like and what we dislike that we find the essence of both. It is through the varying tastes that we find the basic taste, which is the essence of the Cosmic Buddha, That Which Is. It is through love and non-love that we find true love. It is through ugly

sights and beautiful sights that we find true sight. Do not look down upon the senses. Use them as tools through which one may come to know the Ultimate.

In form and feel component things are seen
To differ deeply; thus are voices, in
Inherent isolation, soft or harsh.
Such words as high and middle darkness match;
Light separates the murky from the pure;

Sounds are loud or soft—we know what we prefer, until finally we love silence. Then we may hear the still, small Voice of the Cosmic Buddha which was silenced by our parents and teachers and our own foolishness in going along with them. Most people spend more time in trying to forgive themselves for going along in this way than I care to think about. There is no point in worrying about all this, it is past, it is done. What matters is the going on, going on, going on, allowing the Water of the Spirit to flow *from West to East unseen*. Within all these discriminating statements, the soft or harsh, high and middle, the murky and the pure, is to be found the Essence, if only we look hard enough. The lotus blossom can be seen blooming in hell with the flowers as cool water; the lotus blossom can stand in that water with the flames all around, and no harm will come to it. *Just as the lotus blossom is not wetted by the water that surrounds it*, the water that surrounds it is not consumed by the flames nor, when the flames surround its stalk, is the lotus blossom damaged. There is damage only if one moves from the centre. One can find this centre by becoming more and more sensitive, quieter, by preferring the less noisy to the noisy, the more and more exquisite to the less exquisite. But unless you have compared them it is impossible to know that you want neither; it is impossible to know that heaven is more dangerous than hell unless you *know* heaven.

The properties of the four elements
Together draw just as a child returns
Unto its mother. Lo! The heat of fire,
The moving wind, the water wet, the earth
All solid; eyes to see, sounds heard and smells;
Upon the tongue the sour, salty taste.

As we penetrate these things, as we become more sensitive to them, we draw more and more into the centre. We are as a child returning to its mother, its True Mother being the state it was in before it was ruined and torn from that beautiful, sensitive place where nothing can harm it, where neither death nor life is of importance because there one knows true life. One knows which life is as a shadow and which is the reality. Do not get stuck with heaven, with the exquisite and the beautiful tastes. You must go beyond all that. If you get stuck in sensitivity you will become a painfully boring and annoying person. The coarser form of this is “Love and Light.” You must go on beyond that exquisite sensitivity to find the Cosmic Buddha in both the coarseness and the dark. Thus we can say *in darkness there is light* and *in light there is darkness*. The lotus blossom grows up from the mud, but it does not pull its roots out of the mud, for the Cosmic Buddha is found in the mud just as much as He is found in heaven.... One has to return to the Source to find that the source of the Yellow River does not necessarily have to be pure.

And yet, in each related thing, as leaves
Grow from the roots, end and beginning here
Return unto the source and “high” and “low”
Are used respectively. Within all light
Is darkness but explained it cannot be
By darkness that one-sided is alone.
In darkness there is light but, here again,
By light one-sided it is not explained.

Nirvana is here and now, in this very lifetime, and in eternity. But do not get stuck with light: “Oh, I am so holy, I am full of light.” Do not think, because there is darkness within you, you are forever doomed to darkness. The Essence flows through both and always has.

*Light goes with darkness as the sequence does
Of steps in walking; all things herein have
Inherent, great potentiality,
Both function, rest, reside within.

Because this line is so important the gong is struck. It is actually light and darkness *within each step*, not one after the other. It is because light and darkness are within each step that there is this inherent, great potentiality in both the light and the dark. No matter how dark the karma within you may seem, no matter how light, know that the essence of both is in fact identical. Thus there is the great potentiality for the end and the beginning to come together at the Source, and for both function and rest to reside within.

Lo! With

The Ideal comes the actual, like a box
All with its lid; Lo! With the ideal comes
The actual, like two arrows in mid-air
That meet.

Evil and good come together in this place, but do not *try* to make two arrows meet in mid-air, for if you do you will again be usurping the position of the Cosmic Buddha. To try constantly to do good is to usurp the power of God. Equally, to try to do good by taking on the “demons” of this life is also to usurp His power. *To do good; to do evil*—one has to find the essence within them and stand in that place. When “demons” seem to attack, one must ask for help, and when angels seem to bless, not become overjoyed and spiritually proud. In other words, one needs to cry, “Help!” in both situations. It is not you who make the arrows meet in mid-air; your actions allow the arrows to meet in mid-air. This is not to turn you into something that just sits and does nothing, for that is just as bad as trying to do too much. One must act, and when one does one must be willing to take the consequences of that action. One must always know that it is not one’s self that does anything.

You must do that which is true for yourself. I personally know only one way, the perfection of Zen. Every philosopher knows that in perfection there is an ending, a going on beyond both good and evil, beyond all opposites, to that which lies beyond. But an ending does

not necessarily have to be negative. The *MU [emptiness]* of the Scripture of Great Wisdom is by far the biggest, fullest emptiness you will ever bump into.⁴ This is my way.

Completely understand herein
The basic Truth within these words; Lo! Hear!
Set up not your own standards. If, from your
Experience of the senses, basic Truth
You do not know, how can you ever find
The path that certain is, no matter how
Far distant you may walk?

Set up not your own standards. Keep going on, and on, and on, always staying still within the Water of the Spirit, always going on beyond the opposites, getting caught in neither, and knowing that they hide within each other. If you do not become deeply sensitive and go on beyond to find the Source, and go on beyond that to find the Source in both the sensitive and the insensitive, you will never be able to look at the drunk outside the temple gate and know that he possesses the Buddha Nature—and still say no to his entering the monastery until he is sober.

As you walk on
Distinctions between near and far are lost
And, should you lost become, there will arise
Obstructing mountains and great rivers. This
I offer to the seeker of Great Truth,
Do not waste time.

The distinctions between good and evil, male and female, and the like, become lost in time, if one becomes sensitive enough to the real, true spiritual Essence. This is true of all things. If you get involved in the differences between the man and the woman, or between the different dishes of food, or the sounds and smells, you will be in trouble. These *mountains and rivers* are metaphorically mountains and rivers. It will seem impossible for you to go on, because of the size of those things your standards and imagination have set up. You will have created a non-existent mountain and river by clinging to your own opinions and ideals; thus creating for yourself a barrier which prevents the pipe from giving forth the life-giving and life-sustaining Water of the Spirit. If you do not find the Lord in the darkness, there will always be you, the Cosmic Buddha, and darkness.... You must find the Eternal within the darkness just as much as you find it within the light. This is the importance of the *Sandōkai*.

If you have not understood fully the experience of the senses, and become truly sensitive to them, how can you find the path? Your ideals will then come up again: “Oh, I will go off and become a paramedic, or a this or a that, then I’ll be able to follow my ideals.” You can do these things, and still go off, provided you know where you are going, and know the road; provided you know you must get to that sensitive state where there is nothing but you and the Cosmic Buddha.... Only then can you go back and do those things with the right attitude of mind, and not get caught up in *doing good*, “I am going to deal with wickedness and evil; I am going to usurp the position of God.” When you know the Essence, then you can really do something, for it will

not be you that is doing the doing. It will be that which lives within you that does the doing. The certainty comes at the beginning of this scripture, then comes its understanding. You must understand this in every respect. *Study in detail*, says Dōgen. Study this scripture in great detail. Do not leave anything out. Find That Which Is—and find It in all things.

This

I offer to the seeker of Great Truth,
Do not waste time.

Notes

1. Roshi P. T. N. H. Jiyu-Kennett, *Zen Is Eternal Life*, 4th ed. rev., (Mt. Shasta, CA, Shasta Abbey Press, 1999)
2. Richard Wilhelm & Cary F. Baynes, trans., *Secret of the Golden Flower: a Chinese Book of Life* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1947).
3. The “Love and Light” heresy attempts to find the source of love and compassion in human relationships and feelings, instead of recognizing the true Source, the Cosmic Buddha. It mistakes transitory “experiences” and emotions for genuine spirituality, -ed.
4. It would be more accurate to say that the word “sunyata” (Mu) has in the West been translated as “voidness” or “emptiness.” These words have a negative connotation and do not convey the full meaning of the term. A more positive and helpful translation is “purity” or “the Immaculacy of Nothingness.”