

## The Sandōkai and The Most Excellent Mirror—Samādhi

[What follows is a continuation (begun in [The Sandōkai](#)) of an edited version of lectures given by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett to all monks in September, 1981. The lectures were first published in **Zen Training** (Shasta Abbey, 1982, 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**<sup>1</sup> as well as [The Ancestors \(Annotated Chart\)](#) on this website has information about the origin of these two scriptures.]

### *The Most Excellent Mirror—Samādhi*

The Buddhas and the Ancestors have all  
Directly handed down this basic Truth:-  
Preserve well for you now have; this is all.

The first sentence exactly complements and answers the first sentence of the *Sandōkai*. The *Sandōkai* states the certainty that It (the Cosmic Buddha) exists; here, we have the certainty that It exists within you. In Sōtō Zen, every scripture which shows you how to walk in the Way opens with a statement of certainty. It then goes on to expand *in light there is darkness and in darkness there is light*, and how to see the various differences and the Oneness in all things.

The white snow falls upon the silver plate,  
The snowy heron in the bright moon hides;  
Resembles each the other yet these two  
Are not the same; combining them we ca  
Distinguish one from other.

Snow is white, a silver plate is white, but they are not the same whiteness. Herons and bright moons are the same colour, but they are not the same thing. Do not discriminate between the value of the silver and the apparent lack of value of the snow.

Supreme Mind,  
\*In words, can never be expressed and yet  
To all the trainees' needs it does respond;  
Enslaved by words you fall into a hole.

Those who have the same experience can describe it in their own words. They will be able to agree on the words of others, without forcing their opinions. When two people have reached this state of sensitivity, and gone on beyond it, and know this place, there will be no problem.... A fountain is a fountain, what is liquid is liquid (fire can be liquid also, it can be hot or cool), the liquidity of the movement, the blazing up of the fire of love, the blazing up of the Water of the Spirit, one can recognise these things. Only those who have not experienced them argue about them. Thus, one of the Ancestors could say to a monk who came to challenge him: "You! Argument is not the Real Truth; the Real Truth cannot be proved by argument. If we want to argue about something it will not be an argument about the Real Truth."<sup>2</sup> There is nothing

wrong in having personal opinions—just know that these opinions cannot contradict each other if they are about the Truth. Supreme Mind can never be fully expressed to one who does not know Supreme Mind; for one who knows Supreme Mind, no words are necessary....

If you should go against the basic Truth  
You come to a dead-end. This is as if  
A giant fire-ball; never come too close  
Nor put yourself too far away. If you  
Express by fancy words it is all stained.

[If you cling to your love of argument] you will finally go off and decide that all religion is but an “opium of the people.” Such behaviour will ruin and kill the spark of the Buddha Nature for this existence. Of course, the Buddha Nature can never really be killed. But once you have started training and then decide it is all nonsense, because of your opinions, you will bury the seed of the Buddha Nature for the rest of this incarnation. So do not cling to old habits and opinions.... You must just sit still and allow It to work through you. For “fancy words” I prefer the term “outlandish.” Do not become outlandish in your description. It all depends upon how it is done whether or not That Which Is becomes stained. There are certain words or stages on which we can all agree—the flowing, the movement, the welling-up, a joy, a gratitude; the rest is personal description.

The night encloses brightness and, at dawn,  
No light shines; this Truth holds for beings all;  
Through this we free ourselves from suffering.

At the time of kenshō,<sup>3</sup> the world seems so dark that frequently people beg to stop their training. This is when the Zen Master tells them *the night encloses brightness and, at dawn, no light shines*. The brightness within that dark night of the soul is faith, the certainty which is stated at the beginning of these two scriptures. Now you have, guard it well—do not lose it because of the darkness. It came from the far past and is even now, hold on, hold on.... By going through the dark night and facing the suffering, by going on beyond it, we free ourselves from suffering by our own efforts. It is important to understand this very clearly.

Although not made by artifice, this Truth  
Can find expression in the words of those  
Who teach true Zen. It is as if one looks  
Into a jewelled mirror seeing both  
Shadow and substance. You are not him; he  
Is all of you.

This is to look into the great, round mirror to see what one has been and done, in this lifetime and others, to know that these things are not reality but karmic shadows which need cleaning up. The true “You” has nothing to do with those shadows. However, what you see there is the cause of what you presently are. In cleaning them up, you will “die” and the real “You” will be born. Thus, in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, I speak of how for a moment I died.<sup>4</sup> It is

important to know that this moment will come. The egocentric self will die and the True Self will be reborn at the same moment. To look into the jewelled mirror and see all of one's egocentric self and then do nothing about it, to decide this is what one ought to be, is to turn the Wheel in the wrong direction. These karmic shadows are shown to us so that we may know what not to do, and not make the same mistakes again. In meditating deeply we decide we do not wish to go on as we are. When we truly say, "I will clean all this up even if it costs me my life, but I cannot go on this way," then the egocentric "you" dies, and real "You" can take over, to return again and live at one with the Cosmic Buddha.

A baby of this world  
Is such as this, possessing all his five  
Sense organs, yet goes not and neither comes,  
Neither arises nor yet stays, has words  
And yet no words. Then, finally, we grasp  
Nothing for words inaccurate will be.

You are still within your own centre. Then comes that beautiful state where there is no necessity to insist upon anything. This is to return to the Source, to know the face of one's father before one was born. But if you cling to old ways and old ideas, then the shadows will reappear and you will never truly "die" in order to know reality.... Understand that this is not to become a baby; it is to find that place within one's own True Nature from which a baby comes forth and in which it lives. Such tiny children always come from their centre and communicate from that centre. It is years later that they learn how to produce the masks and to believe that what matters is the external; our purpose is to get back to this internal state.

When stacked, six sticks of ri for ever move  
In mutual relations in extremes  
And centre; stacked three times, return again  
To the first pattern after changes five.  
This as the five tastes of the chi-grass seems  
And as the diamond sceptre's branches five.  
The absolute "upright" holds, as it is,  
Many phenomena within its own  
Delicate balance.

The five changes, or positions, are pictured in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.<sup>5</sup> There is the position of the person looking up through the darkness, the position of faith; the second is seeing the koan and cleansing it, of getting beyond it; the third, of blessing it; the fourth is allowing the water to flow over it; and fifth position is being still within it. These are as the five tastes of the chi-grass (bitter, sweet, hot, cold, and salty) and as *the diamond sceptre's branches five*... [The absolute "upright" is the correctly shaped spine, the stem of the lotus], the fifth column which *holds many phenomena within its own delicate balance*.... Sometimes we are looking up from the darkness, sometimes looking down from heaven, sometimes allowing the water to flow over the situation, always changing, always moving. To return to the first pattern

after changes five shows you what your potential was, and still is, unless you go on beyond it. It is not enough to get back to the first pattern; one must be willing to change the pattern.

When a trainee asks  
A question matching answer always come  
From the Zen master. So that he may bring  
The trainee to the ultimate of Truth  
The master uses skilful means. Trainees  
Embrace the ultimate, masters contain  
The means; correctly blended, this is good.

When one is beyond the opposites of truth and lie, there is only that which needs to be done, in the sense of *Cease from evil*, *Do only good*, and *Do good for others*—the Three Pure Precepts hold in this place. It is a far greater mistake to drive a trainee away by disturbing his illusions at the beginning than to tell him something he wants to hear. I was told not to expect too much. Later I was told not to expect anything. I then discovered that *nothing matters*, and, later still, I found that “nothingness” to be the fullest nothingness in existence. If I had been told that *nothing matters* when I first started training I would probably have walked out of the monastery.... It is important to explain to the trainee that all things change. Problems about the morality of truth and lie come from not understanding the law of anicca, from believing there is a hard and fast place within the opposites of truth and lie. This comes out of not knowing real Truth. If one wishes to get beyond the opposites, there is a place beyond truth and lie when all that matters is *Ceasing from evil*. Delusion, while it is simply being in a muddle and a fog, leads invariably to evil, or at least to a perpetuation of evil.

Avoid one-sided clinging; this is all  
The natural and superior Truth that does  
Attach itself to no delusion or  
Enlightenment. It calmly, dearly shows  
When all conditions ripen;

If you understand change, and that you yourself will change, this truth and lie problem will cease to exist. *One-sided clinging* is probably the most dangerous of the pitfalls in training. One must be willing, not only to allow the opposite opinion to exist, one must also not fight it. That one does or does not agree with it is of no importance. What matters is that one does not fight it. When you have proved it true for yourself, you will believe in it; until you prove it true for yourself, you will not believe in it.... It clearly shows when one has reached the state where such things do not have to be clung to as dogma. Dogma is one of the gravest problems in religion; fortunately, Buddhism does not have any.

when minute  
Infinitesimally small becomes;  
When large it transcends all dimension, space;  
Even the slightest twitch will surely break  
The rhythm. Now we have abrupt and slow

And separated do the sects become  
By setting up of doctrines, practices,  
And these become the standards that we know  
Of all religious conduct. Even should  
We penetrate these doctrines, practices,  
And then delusive consciousness flows through  
The 'ternal Truth, no progress shall we make.

If you move from the centre, the fifth column, wherein you are beyond the opposites, you will break the rhythm of the stillness. It is possible to remain in that centre and still be active without breaking the rhythm. We speak of people being right-handed or left-handed, and one frequently thinks that the most active hand is the most important. Try tying a bow with one hand and you will soon realise that the left hand (if you are right-handed), while seeming to do nothing, is just as important as the right. Its duties are different: they are still, passive, like the centre of the column. The other hand is active: the expression of the centre column. You have to have both, they have to work together.... One should know that activity needs stillness, just as stillness needs activity, and not look down upon either. Activity in stillness and stillness in activity. One does not have to sit doing absolutely nothing during one's lifetime in order to prevent the "twitch." As Dōgen rightly points out, practice (activity) and meditation (stillness) go hand in hand.

The *doctrines and practices* refer to how to do it, as opposed to getting there. The various schools are often so busy arguing about these things that frequently they don't get on with it. Even if we get through all the doctrinal and practical arguments to find the true way to train, and then hang on to a tiny spot of our delusion we still won't get anywhere. We will simply be someone who saw the right road, perhaps walked along it a little distance, but who refused to give up his opinions and was determined to set up his own standards; and thus made it impossible to make true progress.

If outwardly all calm we do appear  
And yet within disturbed should be, we are  
As if a tethered horse or as a mouse  
Within a cage.

There are many people who are in this state as a result of clinging to a tiny spot of their own delusion. They cannot know the true freedom, the glory of the Lord. They may have a tiny glimpse, or a bigger glimpse, but they cannot know it fully.

So, pitying this plight,  
The former sages teaching all dispensed.  
Because delusions in the trainees' minds  
Were topsy-turvy, all the sages true  
Did match thereto their teachings; thus they used  
All means, so varied, even so to sa  
That black was white. Delusive thought, if lost,

Abandoned, will all satisfaction bring;  
If you in ancient footsteps wish to wal  
Observe examples old.

...Because delusions in the minds of many people are upside down, there are times when it is necessary to say that *black is white*, and to go along with them to a certain extent in order to try and fully understand the situation. This is to clear away, to soften these delusions, these theories. One can argue that this is to lie. But is it a lie to give milk to a baby, instead of steak? A baby could not digest steak, and many people are not yet ready to digest the whole Truth.

That He could take  
The final step to true enlightenment,  
A former Buddha trained Himself for ten  
Long kalpas gazing at the Bodhi tree.  
\*If thus restrained, freedom original  
Is like a tiger that has tattered ears  
Or like a hobbled horse.

If you do nothing but sit still and look at the Bodhi tree, you will not be a perfect tiger or horse, you will not be able to run or move. You will not understand the importance of practice. There is more than just sitting in meditation—there is also getting out and doing one's work. Remember the passive and the active. This is a warning against those who would just sit and look down on everything else, a warning against "Love and Light." Enlightenment is possible in this lifetime, if you use both the active and the passive. It does not have to take ten kalpas; it is entirely up to you.

The sage will tell  
A trainee, who is feeling he is low  
And all inferior, that on his head  
There gleams a jewelled diadem, and on  
His body rich robes hang and at his feet  
There is a footrest. If the trainee hears  
\*This teaching with surprise and doubt, the sag  
Assures him that of cats there are some kinds,  
As also some white cows, that perfect are  
Just as they are.

Your appearance, sex, colour, or former creeds are not important, the Buddha Nature exists within all. If someone says to me, "I was such-and-such in the past so how can I make progress now?" I know that he suffers from the common delusion in the West that people cannot change, and I have to work on his knowledge of anicca. I will do everything I can to strengthen his faith, even if that means occasionally boosting his ego, because the ego can be useful in the service of faith.... With people who lack faith, one holds out one's faith to help them. The Zen Master will always make his answers fit the situation. This scripture is a guide, not only for the

student to understand what the Master is doing, but also for the Master to know how to help and to teach.

A master archer hits  
A target at a hundred yards because  
He skill possesses but, to make to meet  
Two arrows in mid-air, head-on, goes far  
Beyond the skill of ordinary man.

The Master is not God. He must be willing to step aside and allow the disciple to become one with the Cosmic Buddha. What takes place between the disciple and the Cosmic Buddha is the same as takes place between the Master and the Cosmic Buddha. The skill that a master archer possesses is one thing, but to cause the disciple and the Cosmic Buddha to meet together requires the skill of the extraordinary man who has enough humility to get himself out of the way.

In this superior activity  
Of no-mind, See! the wooden figure sings  
And the stone-maiden dances;

Seeing the Cosmic Buddha in all things, one sees the Buddha Nature in all things. It is a great joy to see this and to see the disciple become one with the Cosmic Buddha, a joy in which there is no personal possession. It is important to become the extraordinary man or woman, to become truly humble. It is not enough to be able to hit the target; the self has to get right out of the picture. This is a grave warning to both Master and disciple.

this is far  
Beyond all common consciousness, beyond  
All thinking. The retainer serves his lord  
The emperor; his father does the child  
Obey; without obedience there is  
No filial piety and, if there is  
No service, no advice. Such action and  
Most unpretentious work all foolish seem  
And dull but those who practise thus this law  
Continually shall, in all worlds, be  
Called Lord of Lords unto eternity.

The Master serves the Cosmic Buddha, the disciple serves his Master. Unless the Master is willing to serve the Cosmic Buddha the Treasure House of advice will not open naturally to him. If the disciple does not trust the Master, there will arise *obstructing mountains and great rivers* and *delusive consciousness will flow through the eternal Truth*. Therefore, it is important for the disciple to follow the Master's teaching, while not forcing himself to believe what he cannot believe, but he must not close his mind to the Teaching. The Master must get himself out of the way, so that those who would also serve the Lord may come to Him directly. The work of

both Master and disciple may seem foolish and dull, but those who practise this law continually for eternity shall be called Lord of Lords.

Homage to all the Buddhas in all worlds;  
Homage to all the Bodhisattvas in all worlds;  
Homage to the Scripture of Great Wisdom.

### Notes

1. Roshi P. T. N. H. Jiyu-Kennett, *Zen Is Eternal Life*, 4th ed. rev., (Mt. Shasta, CA, Shasta Abbey Press, 1999)
2. Great Master Keizan, “The Eighth Ancestor, Saint Butsudanandai” in *Denkōroku (Transmission of the Light)* Ibid, p. 256.
3. The realisation of enlightenment, “A special transmission outside the scriptures, not based on words or letters; pointing directly to the heart of man, enabling him to see into his own True Nature and realise Buddha-hood.”
4. Rev. Master P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, M.O.B.C., *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, 2nd ed. rev. (Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey, 1993), p. 73.
5. Ibid., p. 105 ff.