



ZEN For Americans: Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot (With Active Table of Contents)

Soyen Shaku

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"THIS little work is a collection of some of the lectures delivered by the Right Reverend Soyen Shaku., Lord Abbot of Engaku-ji and Kencho-ji, Kamakura, Japan, during his sojourn in this country, 1905-1906. He came here early in the summer of 1905 and stayed with friends on the Pacific coast until March in the following year. Lectures on Buddhism were frequently delivered at the request of his hostess, Mrs. Alexander Russell of San Francisco, for the benefit of her friends. He lectured on the Sutra of Forty-two Chapters, and naturally chose the texts for his sermons from this most popular among the canonical books. As His Reverence did not speak English, the burden of interpreting his speeches fell upon my shoulders.

During his stay on the coast, His Reverence was occasionally invited by his countrymen, scattered throughout the State, to such places as the Buddhist Mission and the Japanese Consulate in San Francisco, to Los Angeles, Sacramento, Fresno, San Jose, and Oakland. Wherever he went, his addresses were most enthusiastically received and greatly appreciated by the Japanese residents, and by Americans when his speeches were repeated in English.

In March, 1906, the Right Reverend Soyen Shaku crossed the continent to the Atlantic coast, visiting Washington, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. Whenever he was asked by his countrymen or by his American friends to speak on his faith, he always acceded to their wish. These addresses were added to the sermons already under my charge, and when His Reverence was leaving for his European tour towards the end of April, he left all the manuscripts with me with a view of publishing them in book form.

In going over these documents critically, I found that I could not make use of all the material as it stood; for the talks during his stay on the Pacific coast were mostly of a very informal nature, and a copy of them prepared from shorthand notes needed a great deal of revision; besides, some of the talks were suited only to special audiences and adapted to their peculiar needs. So with his permission I condensed several articles into one, while in other cases I selected a subject only incidentally or cursorily referred to in several different addresses, and made a special essay of the scattered passages. Sometimes I found his expressions too Buddhistic, that is, too technical, and intelligible only to those who have made Buddhism a special study. In such cases, I put the thoughts in a more conventional and comprehensible form for the benefit of the American public. Again, when I thought that His Reverence took too much knowledge of his subject for granted on the part of his audience, I endeavored to express his thoughts more plainly and explicitly." - Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki

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