

LECTURE BY SHUNRYU SUZUKI ROSHI

The following lecture was given by Suzuki Roshi during the sesshin that ended the first practice period. It is the final lecture of three he gave on the *Genjo Koan* by Dogen Zenji, a translation of which appeared in the last *Wind Bell*.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Originally a koan was an official order from a king. So koan means the first principle—which we have to understand from various aspects and experience through practice. What we normally call koans are examples of realizations by Zen masters of this first principle.

Genjo means everything. Koan means first principle. Genjo Koan means the various activities we do as our practice is extended from zazen. It is the oneness of everyday life and practice as attained through pure practice.

Form is emptiness and emptiness is form. Form is form and emptiness is emptiness. Thus we understand things in four ways.

Form is emptiness may not be so difficult to understand, but it is easily misunderstood. Some hasty person might think, "Yes, form is emptiness. There is no need for us to attach to some particular thing." This looks very clear and maybe this view is better than the view which attaches to particular forms and colors. The view of non-existence may be deeper than the view of

existence: when you just see things it looks like they are permanent and have self-nature, but there is no special self-nature for anything. Everything is changing; nothing is permanent. So this understanding of form as emptiness may be a more advanced view.

That emptiness which is enlightenment itself, is form is more difficult to understand. Whatever you do is enlightenment itself. Even though you think that emptiness should be quite unusual, it is really something very common. Even though your practice is not perfect, that is enlightenment. This may be hard to accept, especially when you practice zazen. No, my practice is not perfect, you feel. But if you understand that form is emptiness and emptiness is form, back and forth, in this way, and that form is form and emptiness is emptiness, when emptiness comes, everything is emptiness, when form comes, form is form. We accept things as they are. There is no problem.

This means that when the moon is in the water, the moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken. That is, moon is moon and water is water. Here there may be a misunderstanding because if form is form and emptiness is emptiness, you may think there is no need to practice Zen. But an understanding of each view should include the other three. Actually they all are the same. So instead of saying form is form and emptiness is emptiness, form is emptiness and emptiness is form, it is really enough to say just one. This is the true understanding of the *prajna paramita*.

Priest Hotetsu of Mt. Mayoku was fanning himself. A monk approached and said, "Sir, the nature of the wind is permanent and there is no place it does not reach. Why, then, must you fan yourself?"

Do you understand? If the wind is everywhere, why do you fan yourself? If everyone has Buddha nature, why must you practice Zen?

"Although you understand that the nature of the wind is permanent," the master replied, "you do not understand the meaning of its reaching everywhere."

In other words, even though the monk understood that form is emptiness, he did not understand that emptiness is form, because he thought there must be something which is permanent besides form.

"What is the meaning?" asked the monk. The master just fanned himself. The monk bowed with deep respect.

There is a great difference between a man who fans himself and one who does not. One will be very hot and one will be cool. Even though the wind was everywhere, the monk just fanned himself.

This is an experience of proving Buddhism and its correct transmission. Those who say we should not use a fan because there is a wind know neither permanency nor the nature of wind. The nature of wind is permanent—the wind of Buddhism actualized the gold of the earth, and ripened the cheese of the Long River.

"Ripen the cheese of the Long River" is a quotation from the Bandavyuha Sutra. The water of the Long River is supposed to be pure milk. But only by going through the right process can it become cheese. Milk is milk and cheese

is cheese. If you want to ripen milk into cheese you must work on it. Even though there is wind, a fan will make you cool; even though there is gold in the earth, if you do not pick it up you cannot use it. This is a very important point.

People may think Zen is a wonderful teaching, that they will acquire perfect freedom by studying it, that whatever you do, if you are in a Buddhist robe, it is all right. This looks like the teaching that form is emptiness, but this is not what is meant by it. Back and forth we practice. We train our mind, our emotion, our body. And only after these practices do we acquire perfect freedom and that freedom is acquired only under some limitation.

When you are in your position, are limited, the realization of truth will be there, will happen to you. But if you do not work anywhere, wandering from this place to that place, without knowing where you are, without knowing the place where you work, there will be no chance for you to realize your true nature. Even though you use something to make yourself cool, like a round Japanese fan or a big electric fan six feet high, if you are always changing from one to the other as you wish, then you are spending your time just changing your equipment and will have no time to appreciate the cool wind. This is what most people are doing.

Reality is experienced only when you are in some particular circumstance. That is why we say emptiness is form. Emptiness is very good but it can only be experienced in some form or color or under some limitation. But we cannot be attached to the limitation. It is wonderful to use this big electric fan at Tassajara, but if you use it in San Francisco, what will happen to you? You cannot be attached to *anything*.

But you should appreciate what you are doing right now, moment after moment, and to do that you must know what condition you are actually under. If you are a teacher you should behave like a teacher. If you are a student you should behave like a student. So first of all you should know what your position is, or else the realization of the truth will not happen to you. To realize our position and find ourselves is our Way.

When Priest Hotetsu says to the monk, "Even though you know the nature of the wind is permanent," strictly speaking this is a kind of politeness. The monk does not know the nature of the wind at all—nor what is meant by permanence or the meaning of its reaching everywhere. How does the wind reach everywhere and what is everywhere? What is there to reach? The monk has no idea.

How is the nature of the wind permanent? When the wind blows in a certain direction and under certain conditions, then the nature of the wind appears. Do you see? There is no emptiness without form. And reaching everywhere means that the cool wind blowing in a certain direction with a certain velocity covers the entire world. The form is emptiness itself. In that moment, the movement of the wind is both the whole world and the independent activity of the wind. Nothing can be compared to it under these conditions. Just as ash is ash and has its own past and future, and firewood is firewood and has its own past and future, and firewood and ashes are therefore completely independent and reach everywhere, so does the wind.

This activity is beyond the idea of time. When we attain enlightenment all the patriarchs attain enlightenment at the same time. You cannot say Buddha is before and we are after. When you have enlightenment you are independent from everything and have your own past and future, just as Buddha had his own past and future. And his position is as independent as your position is independent. If so, this realization is beyond time and space, and the wind reaches everywhere. Do you understand? You cannot say that Buddha is before and we are after, just as firewood is not before and ashes after. In this way the wind reaches everywhere, and the nature of the wind is permanent.

The monk did not understand and it was impossible for Hotetsu Zenji to explain about his direct experience of reality, so he just fanned himself in appreciation of the cool wind.