

"In Zen we often hear of doing what one must do rather than what one wants to do. Is it possible to know what one must do before one has the desire to do it?"

"Your teacher will put you in those circumstances. Follow our way. At first you think you are following the way, but soon you will drive the way."

"Why is it necessary to have some unusual experience in order to practice Buddhism?"

"To open up your mind wider and wider."

SHUSO CEREMONY

Traditionally in a Soto Zen monastery the Discussion Ceremony (Hossen Shiki) between the Shuso and students would take place at the end of the practice period sesshin, but because there were so many students, there was not time for both it and the Question and Answer Ceremony with Suzuki Roshi. There was also some delay after the end of practice period until Bishop Sumi could attend. On September 19 the Shuso Ceremony was held in the zendo at Tassajara with the students who had participated in the practice period.

Suzuki Roshi described the Shuso Ceremony in this way: "Each practice period we appoint a Shuso to be head of training and leader of the disciples. For the student the experience of being Shuso, head of the monks, and being tested by the other students in the Discussion Ceremony marks the second stage in priesthood. For this first practice period at Tassajara, Zentatsu Myoyu (Richard Baker) was appointed Shuso. He was the first priest appointed Shuso in America."

The Discussion Ceremony is very old. It originated in China and still exists in Japan. However, in Japan it is often more of a formality than anything else—the Shuso is often a young student without the experience necessary to answer questions about Zen that presuppose some maturity. The young Shuso is given the answers to questions which have been given out to the students.

In America the ceremony has returned closer to its original content and feeling. Zentatsu, Richard Baker, is well into his practice and somewhat older than his Japanese counterpart. No questions were given out. Chino Sensei told the students to choose questions which demonstrated their own understanding of Zen and which probed the understanding of the Shuso. The question could be discussed until they felt the matter was resolved. Sensei described the ceremony as Zen 'combat.' Something was obviously expected from the Shuso and the zendo was charged with skeptical excitement—how can a student answer questions usually asked a Roshi—about to be resolved one way or another.

The priests sat together on the altar-platform in scarlet robes and ceremonial kesas. A strange bamboo root stick, called a Vajra (Diamond-Lightning) Staff, which had been made by Chino Sensei, rested on a low table in front of Suzuki Roshi. After chanting and offering incense, Dick walked slowly to face Docho (Abbot Suzuki) Roshi, bowed and received the Vajra Staff from his teacher. He returned to his seat on Docho Roshi's right, pounded twice on the tatami with his staff and announced, "I am ready for your questions."

The first student began a long stare at the Shuso, leaped to his feet, stamped and shouted *KWATZ!* Then he turned slowly and formally and walked toward the door. There was a tense pause and the Shuso asked, "Do you have anything else to say?"

The student turned, stamped, and walked back, bowed to the Shuso, and sat down.

Student after student brought forth his question to the Shuso. "What do you make of my transparency?" "What transparency," answered the Shuso, "You seem to be there to me. I can't see the wall through you." Or from another student, "Why did Suzuki Roshi come to San Francisco?" The Shuso answered, "Buddhism neither comes nor goes. Suzuki Roshi can study Zen as well here as in Japan. The question is, what is this 'you' that you think comes and goes?" Sometimes there was a debate: a student said, "I don't accept your 'if' in that answer." "You are right," said the Shuso, "No if." And the student, "Me asking, you answering—is that a comparison?" The Shuso answered, "No 'me', no 'you'—just questioning is all that exists here." The atmosphere lost none of its solemnity and power, but changed slowly to admiration for the Shuso and to gratitude for the pulsing life that has carried the ancient Zen traditions to Tassajara.



*After shouting "Kwatz!"
Bill Kwong walks slowly
up the aisle away from
the Shuso on the altar
with his Vajra Staff.*

When all the students had presented their questions, Chino Sensei said, "In a vale of these deep mountains a disciple of Buddha comes to teach. Let us hear congratulations." Congratulations came spontaneously from the students throughout the zendo. Bishop Sumi Roshi gave a short moving talk. Docho Roshi concluded the ceremony with his congratulations, saying how he felt the ceremony was a beautiful expression of his faith in the Shuso and in Tassajara.