

**MODEL SUBJECT NO. 86  
FROM THE HEKIGAN ROKU**

**NOT VERBATIM**

**"UMMON'S 'STORE-ROOM AND TEMPLE GATE'"**

**Translation and Commentary by Master Shunryū Suzuki**

**Roku:**

Ummon Bun'en (?-949) was a disciple of Seppō and founder of the Ummon School, one of five schools of Chinese Zen Buddhism (Rinzai, Igyō, Ummon, Hōgen, and Sōtō).

During the political confusion at the end of the Tang Dynasty all the major schools of Chinese Buddhism (Tendai, Hosso, Ritsu, and Shingon) were in decline, except Zen, which was strengthened by the persecutions and the difficulty in traveling to escape persecution and to visit and to visit various Zen masters. The hard practice of Seppō and Ummon during that time has been and still is a good example for all Zen students.

**Introductory Word:**

Introducing, Engo said: To control the world without omitting a single feather, to stop all the streams of passion without losing a single drop, this is the great teacher's activity. If you open your mouth (in a dualistic sense) in his presence, you will fall in error. Hesitate and you will be lost. Who has eyes to penetrate barriers of this kind? Ponder the following.

**Commentary by Master Suzuki:**

"Control" needs some explanation. The man who has realized the wisdom and virtue of the single-Buddha-mind in which every existence is one, does not think, speak, or act in a dualistic way because his view of things, including himself, is based on the inmost request (the activity of buddha-nature, or the experience of buddha-nature as the inmost request) of the self-sufficient mind.

Things are usually viewed as either positive or negative, material or spiritual, objective or subjective. The positive materialistic way of life may be more common and naive than the so-called negative spiritual way of life, and may involve us in innocent but terrible competition. Eventually this competition requires from itself a restrictive power. At least a person in a summer resort cannot be regarded in the same light as a deer in the mountains. In the negative way of life there may be a resistance to materialistic power or an indefinite feeling of helplessness in the face of materialistic power.

Although amicable and sweet, the more primitive materialistic man is doomed to feel criticized by himself and by others (from inside and outside his heart). Although pure and immaculate, the spiritual man will be

condemned completely by material power insensitive to any spiritual subtlety; or he will become lost in a sort of materialistic merry-go-round.

Accommodation of these two opposite aspects will not satisfy our inmost desire. When such accommodation is successful it will result in depravity. When the accommodation is unsuccessful, the friction of the opposites will kindle a formidable destructive fire. It is impossible to ignore these contradictory aspects of our visible world, because they are based on our inmost request for life.

A deeper understanding transcending successful or unsuccessful accommodation of these aspects is needed. Even though everything is observed through sense organs in a necessarily dualistic way, it is possible to not be limited by the duality of the sense world. It may come through hard practice, but the ordinary observation of our world with our sense organs is at the same time holy.

In the realm of real experience beyond intellectual formulation there is no material or spiritual view. The free activity of the mind and the pursuit of material power is our inmost request. The idea of matter and spirit are intellectual formulations which are seen to be non-existent when we resume to the genuine empirical world in which there is no subjective mind or objective material. What really exists is our inmost request—always in incessant activity. In the realm of thinking this inmost request takes the form of mind and its objects. In true living or experience, which is Zen, the activity of thinking and the everyday empirical world is one there, before reflective thinking takes place. The inmost request plus nothing is our true existence. There is nothing to control or nothing to lose.

### **Main Subject:**

Attention! Ummon introducing the subject said, "Although everyone has the 'Light' within himself, it cannot be seen in one's 'UTTER DARKNESS.' Now what do you think I mean by the 'Light' of everyone. As no one could answer he said, "A temple store house or a gate." Then after a while he said, "It would be better not to say anything, even if it is a good remark."

### **Note:**

By "light" Ummon meant essential mind or Buddha-mind. Zen Master Dōgen said, "Buddha light does not mean blue, yellow, red, or white light. It means the great original light in which plants, trees, and land are perpetually shining. This essential mind cannot be recognized by our five senses or mental faculties. However, all our thoughts and sensations are based on this original vitality. It is because of this vital request (before any empirical thinking) that our mental and physical faculties serve their purpose just as birds know when and where to fly. Because of this innermost request we know what is good and what is bad as a fish knows

where to lay its tremendous eggs without knowing why. We want to know when this cosmic world started; but even if we knew the answer to this mystery, we do not know in the same way the answer to why we want to know.

The mystery of why we pursue truth in the spiritual world, or physical pleasure in the material world, should be understood as the vital request of our true nature. Our spiritual and physical pursuit of life is always carried on in the realm of duality and this is the ultimate cause of our suffering in this world (four noble truths). This cause of suffering appears to be dualistic only in the empirical world. But in reality—in Zen practice—beyond intellectual formulation, there is no duality. This freedom does not come from outside nor is it the result of practice. In fact practice is meaningful and joyous because of this freedom. Practice vitalized by our inmost request is self-joyous practice. This practice covers everyday dualistic life. Duality should be realized as oneness, and oneness should be manifested as duality. The joyous continuous effort to realize the oneness of duality is the way to obtain vital religious freedom. Only when we find ourselves actualizing this freedom by practice do we find the incessant shedding forth of Buddha light in our life.

The light should not be sought in the visible objective world in a dualistic way. It is necessary to actualize this light in your everyday life by your perpetual effort.

This Ummon said, "Temple storehouse and temple gate. But in order to prevent all the disciples, the idle seekers, from being attracted by tentative answers and then forgetting themselves in dualistic thinking, he added, "Even an excellent word is not better than saying nothing.

### **Appreciatory Word of Setchō:**

Each one has his own light. But I have toiled to make myself clear to all of you about the ABSOLUTE DARKNESS where there are neither flowers nor the shadows of trees.

However, when anyone wants to see; who will not see? Only when one does not see, does one see.

### **Note by Master Suzuki:**

Before I add my note, you have understood all about it.

---

This transcript is a retyping of the existing City Center transcript (thought to be based on notes by Baker-rōshi). It is not verbatim. No tape is available. The City Center transcript was entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. It was reformatted by Bill Redican (10/27/01).