

August 19, 1965

Rev. S. Suzuki

Thursday morning lecture

Water

If you go to Japan and visit Eihei-ji monastery—before you enter the monastery you will see the small bridge called Han Sak Kyo. “Han Sak Kyo” means half dipper bridge. Half dipper bridge. Whenever Dogen Zenji used (dipped) water from the river, after he used half of it he returned the water to the river again without throwing it away. That is why we call that bridge Han Sak Kyo—Half dipper bridge.

In Eihei-ji monastery when we wash our face we do not fill the basin. We just use 70% of the basin and after we wash it we do not throw the water away from the body. We empty the basin this way—toward the body. It means to respect the water. This kind of practice is not based on just economy. It may be pretty hard to understand why Dogen Zenji returned the water after he used half of it. This kind of practice is beyond our thinking. When we feel the beauty of the river, or water, we intuitively we do it in this way. That is our nature. But when our nature is covered by some economic idea you may think it doesn't make any sense to return the water back to the river.

The other day I went to Yosemite (Yosemite National Park) and I saw a huge waterfall, 1,340 feet high. The next cascade was 600 something. Even the last one was 300. When I saw the first highest waterfall, I saw the water coming down like a curtain which was thrown from the top of the mountain. It doesn't come down swiftly, as I expected. It comes down very slowly, because of the distance.

And the water comes down in some group. Water does not come down as one whole river. The water separated in many groups. It comes down like a curtain. I thought it may be very hard experience for each water to come down such a high mountain, from the top to the bottom. It takes time, you know. It takes so long until the water reach to the bottom of the waterfall. And I thought our life is maybe like that. We have many hard experiences in our life, but at the same time, I thought, the water is not originally separated. It is one whole water. When it is separated like that the water has some feeling. When it is one whole water, the water do not have any feeling—at least it looks like this. When it is separated in many pieces it start to have some feeling, or to express some feeling. When the water is running as a one whole water we do not feel the living activity of the water, but when we dip a part of the water in dipper, we feel the value of the water and we feel some feeling of the water. When we are separated in this way we have feeling. But before we were born we had no feeling. We were one piece of the universe. That is called mind only or essence of mind or big mind. Before we have feeling to us. After we are separated in this way, like a water falling down from the top of the waterfall to the bottom separated by the wind or rocks, then we have feeling. Even the water must have feeling. And this kind of, not feeling—fact—this fact is very valuable. So our birth and death is the same thing. When we realize this fact we have no fear of death anymore and we have no actual difficulty in our life.

If you think why we have difficulty in our life you will understand how to accept the difficulty. Before you are, you do not realize that we are one piece of water or one piece of universe. You have fear. You have difficulty because you have feeling. You attach to the feeling you have just now without knowing just how this kind of feeling is created.

So to dip the water from the river is to feel the water, the value of each individual, the value of the person who uses the water. At the same time when we become aware of

individual feelings we have the feeling of the value of the water. So because of this feeling we cannot use the water just materially. It is living being. Originally it was with the big river. So if the water becomes one with the big river, the water will not have any feeling to it. It will resume to its own nature. By resuming to its own nature they have composure, they will be very glad to come back to original water. If so, when you die what feeling will you have? I think it is like water. We are like water in the dipper. So if someone takes us to the original river the water in the dipper will be very glad. So if we come back to original home we will be very glad. We will have composure there. Perfect composure. It may be too perfect for us just now. Because we are so attached to the individual existence like this so we have attachment. For us, just now, in this way we have some feeling of fear or fear of death but after we resume to our true nature there is nirvana. That is why we say to attain nirvana when we die. It is same word. We say 'to take nirvana' is to pass away—to pass away is not so adequate expression. 'To pass on'.

To pass on, or go on or to join. Will you find out some good expression for it—more adequate expression? And at the same time you will have quite new interpretation to our life. Like I saw the water in the big waterfall. Imagine it is 1300 feet. If you say it is fear you cannot stand for it. But if you think that is water originally one piece of water, there is no fear and it has beauty and it has feeling. That feeling is quite new feeling, quite different feeling which the water will have. Before they do not feel, they do not know it was one whole water. So we say, 'from emptiness everything comes out'. One whole piece of water, or one whole mind, is emptiness. When we reach to this understanding we find true meaning to our life. When we reach this understanding we can see the beauty of the flower, the beauty of human life. Before we do not realize this fact. All what we see is just delusion. Sometimes we overestimate the beauty. Sometimes we underestimate or ignore the beauty because of our small mind which does not accord with the reality.

To talk about it in this way is quite easy but to have actual feeling is not so easy. But by our practice of our zazen, when we can sit with our body and with our mind and oneness of our mind and body, under the control of the big mind, we can easily attain this kind of right understanding. Your everyday life will be renewed without being attached to the old erroneous interpretation of life. When you realize this fact you will find out how meaningless our interpretation of life was, how useless difficulty we had, how useless effort we had been making, and you will find out true meaning of life and you will enjoy your life even though you have difficulty of falling upright to the bottom of the waterfall from the top of the mountain.

I could not hear even the sound of the waterfall there. At least I didn't feel the hearing of the sound. That should be our life. Like the water falling down from the top of the mountain.