

SESSHIN LECTURE
by Shunryu Suzuki

Saturday, August 28, 1965

Confucius said that the most visible is something invisible. There are many oriental proverbs like this. One in Japan is: "The silent firefly, unlike the noisy cicada, glows with light." This means the same as the most visible is the invisible, and this kind of idea is quite common in the orient. In Japanese we have the word "*shibui*" which means not conspicuous, not colorful, not uncommon. It expresses a deep sense of taste. These ideas may have originated in Zen practice. This sense is important if you want to maintain a tradition or culture. To develop this sense in Zen is called accumulating unknown virtue or merit. It is to do something which nobody notices. It is to do something fundamental, to devote ourselves to fundamental work. To set up the foundation is the most valuable work. If you wish to devote yourself, choose some fundamental work rather than conspicuous visible work. Be silent like the firefly. We must work with a far-reaching plan, or far-reaching eyes. In Japanese we say *kenshiki*: to be farseeing, to have a far-reaching idea, not just temporal work.

Even if we successfully compete in the visible world, our work will be neglected before we die. It is important to work for future generations, for our descendants. We must be proud to do something even though people do not usually know its value. To devote yourself in this kind of work is to have eternal life. However, if you are occupied by a near-sighted idea, you will lose your value and you will not find your true composure.

In Japan many religious heroes have limited themselves by devotion to this kind of work. Just as the pieces of wood which make up a barrel will not work as a container unless they are held together by a hoop, so a human being should have a ring around his head—a limitation—if he is not to lose the meaning of his existence. If you are very clever and capable, you can do anything you like and people will ask you to do many things. But if you try to accomplish many things you will accomplish nothing and only be a tool of people. If you can really help others completely in that way, it may be all right. But if you really want to help others it is better to devote yourself in a limited way. If you help people when they ask you, they will feel very helped at that moment. But even this kind of help is rather superficial and casual. Actually to help people, you have to devote yourself to some particular thing and you have to help with full confidence in your work. Then you can help people spiritually and physically. If you try to help superficially, that help will usually spoil people without helping them. Mutual help of this kind will result in depravity. It is the same way with religion, if you compare various religions and take good points from each. Too much honey from various flowers is not necessary. It will spoil you. A little bit of honey is enough for us. There is no need to be greedy. If this is true, a little bit of truth, a faint idea of truth is enough. You should devote yourself completely to the truth you have, to what is good or bad. It is a matter of whether or not you devote yourself to the truth completely. This kind of idea is very important in Japanese or oriental culture.

In the *Lotus Sutra* Buddha says light up just one corner—not the whole world. Just make it clear where you are.

This is an extremely valuable point in our Zen practice. It does not mean to be negative, or to be narrow-minded, or to be sectarian. It is the way it should be, and everything exists in that way. Bamboo cannot be a pine tree. Bamboo is always bamboo and so it is valuable. A mixture of bamboo and pine will not serve for anything, because bamboo is straight and pine is crooked. So each is valuable in its own way. There is no need for us to be famous, no need for us to be useful. First of all each one should be—should be what he is. This way we will find our world very convenient. If we try to be the most famous, useful, or powerful, everyone will lose the true meaning of existence. So we say when you become yourself, Zen becomes Zen. When bamboo is bamboo, that is Zen. When a tree is a tree, that is Zen. This is to realize our inmost nature, or the innermost request ourselves. Our innermost request works for every existence and is developed from every other existence and is universal, but the way of expression for each should be different.

Recently the followers of the Soto way completed a large building, called the Taisodo, at Sojiji Temple in memory of the Fifth Japanese Patriarch, Gasan Zenji. Dogen Zenji is the First Patriarch. Keizan Zenji, the Fourth Patriarch, had many good disciples. Although Gasan was very good, Keizan did not allow his transmission and Keizan gave him a question: "Have you seen the double moon?" Gasan could not understand what was meant. He studied for many years and still he could not understand what his master meant by double moon. Although our innermost request or nature is the same, our way of expression should be different—it should be double moon. It is...you know...when I devote myself to my innermost request you will understand how hard an effort I make to express it. Here we have mutual understanding, but the way you and I express our innermost request is not the same. Because it is not the same and cannot be the same, we can respect each other's effort, and at the same time we can know how difficult it is. That is mutual understanding. This is the double moon; not the single moon, not the same moon, and the moon they see in Japan is the same moon—it is the same. But it is not the same, it is double. I don't know how many moons we see, but the feeling of seeing, of observing the moon is the same. Even though sometimes we see the moon with sadness and sometimes with joy, the moon is the same. We see the double moon, it should be the double moon, but the moon is the same.

Thus as long as you are caught by the single moon which is always the same for everybody, you cannot see the true moon. You are seeing the painted moon which never changes. There is no meaning to it.

We say, "white bird in the snow." You cannot see the white bird in the snow, but still it exists. When we devote ourselves in true practice, our practice is not visible, but this invisible effort, the accumulation of invisible efforts will build your character and you will obtain the power to be a master of the surroundings. As long as you just chase after visible things, you will never

understand the meaning of our life. This is how we devote ourselves to our way.

The following are questions from two students at the end of the lecture.

QUESTION: I have the general idea. I can see that if we look at the moon projecting our own emotions, we won't see the moon. On the other hand, we must be one with the moon and must be fair to it in a special way so that it has particular meaning for us and so we experience it ourselves. Would you clarify?

ANSWER: Yes, I understand your point, you know. To see...if you want to see the double moon...Let me put this way. Unless you have eyes to see the double moon you cannot see it. As long as you observe the moon as an object of your eyes, you cannot see it. If you want to see the double moon, you must build up your character and have the power to observe the double moon. In other words, through your practice obtaining your power to observe it. As long as you just seek or try to figure out what is the double moon—is that the double moon? is this way of observing the moon right or wrong?—you cannot see it. When you are quite sure in your observation you can see the double moon. Even though you say that is just the moon, not the double moon, I may say that for you it is the single moon, and for me the double moon. If someone says it is double, I may say it is single. It doesn't matter to me whether it is double or single, because I am quite sure about my eyes. When you are quite sure with yourself, when you own your eyes as your sense organ, then you can see the double moon. But as long as you are enslaved by your eyes, you cannot trust your eyes. (Here Reverend Suzuki laughed greatly). So if someone says that is a double or single moon, you will, you know, wonder. You cannot trust your eyes. Do you understand?

This kind of strength can be acquired by your own effort, not by other's effort. Before you believe in yourself you cannot see the double moon. Actually double or single moon doesn't matter. (laughing) That is double moon. So as long as you are proud of your practice, concerned with your reputation, you are still relying on something, someone. If you are quite independent, you are not proud of yourself or anything. The Fifth Soto Patriarch in Japan was proud of his deep understanding of Buddhism, so Keizan Zenji did not accept him. Naturally you cannot see the double moon. When you forget yourself you have full strength. Do you understand this psychology? It does not mean to become lazy, or to become wood or stone. It is zazen—Zen. You are alive and your mind is not working, but you are in full activity, and your activity is not relying on anything. That is zazen. Okay? Did you understand?

QUESTION FROM ANOTHER STUDENT: I am curious to know...

ANSWER: Don't say "curious to know."

QUESTION: Did these Zen Masters have to be certified—verified by a higher authority?

ANSWER: Before you have full confidence in yourself you will not be certified by anyone. Even though someone says you are good, it doesn't mean

anything. So your confidence is first. There is no other way to be confident. We are not talking about something very difficult. If we are quite sincere with ourselves and if we are conscientious—not conscientious, but if we are aware of our idle practice and ashamed of it, that is the way. Even though we are not perfect, if we are aware of our imperfection, that is good, very good.

And after trying to polish ourselves until we think our practice is good, we will be recognized by our patriarchs, by Buddha, by our teacher. Then you are pretty good. Not perfect, but pretty good.