

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
MAIN SUBJECT NO. 36

NOT VERBATIM

FROM THE *BLUE CLIFF RECORDS*

Cho-sha's "Strolling about Mountains and Waters"
November 1963

Attention! One day Cho-sha went for a walk. When he returned to the gate, the gate-keeper asked, "Sir, where have you been walking?" Cho-sha said, "I have been strolling about in the hills." "Where did you go?" asked the gatekeeper. "I have walked through the scent of herbs and wandered by the falling flowers." said Cho-sha. The gatekeeper said, "Very much like a calm Spring feeling." Cho-sha said, "It transcends even the cold autumn dew falling on the lotus stems."

Setcho, the compiler of the *Blue Cliff Records*, adds the comment, "I am grateful for Cho-sha's answer."

Commentary by Reverend Shunryū Suzuki, Master of Zen Center:

"Strolling about mountains and waters" means in Zen the stage where there are no Buddhas or Patriarchs to follow and no evil desires to stop. Not only climbing up a mountain or wandering about waters, but all activities of Cho-sha are free from rational prejudices and emotional restrictions. His mental activity is free from any trace of previous activity. His thinking is always clear without the shadows of good and evil desires.

It is important to have a good memory and to be able to go into every detail of activities so that effective decisions can be made. Yet one's mind cannot respond to the coming of new objects into the consciousness if it is full of the traces of former thinking. It is useless to remember everything. There is no point in remembering things just so we can cry, be jealous, or be proud. The mind should be spotless so that everything may be observed as it is. If the mind is free from the traces of past thinking and is always clear, without tainted ideas or desires, then mind will always be calm and natural like the flowers that come out in Springtime or the red leaves that turn in the Autumn. Your mind and your nature will have the same pace.

When you have reached this stage, your everyday life is called the life of *yusan gansui*—the life of wandering about mountains and waters. Cho-sha's answer, "I had walked through the scent of herbs and wandered about by falling flowers," refers to his well-trained everyday life which surpasses good and bad experiences and is always calm and clear.

The gatekeeper's reply that this is "very much like a calm Spring feeling" suggests Cho-sha is attached to the calm Spring feeling when his mind should always be like a mirror reflecting everything as it is, transcending forms, colors, and feelings. So Cho-sha replied meaning that: the state of mind expressed in my statement that I have walked through the scent of herbs and wandered by the falling flowers transcends the warm Spring feeling and the cold Autumn feeling when icy dew is on withered leaves and stems of the lotus.

Engo's commentary says, "The first arrow is shallow, the second one is deep." Yet we must know the pain by the first arrow (statement). Because the gatekeeper did not appreciate fully Cho-sha's second statement, Setcho in his commentary says, "I am grateful for that answer."

Appreciatory Word by Setcho:

The Great land¹ transcends its small dusts.² What man's eyes are not open? Following the herbs and wandering around by falling flowers.³ The enfeebled stork flutters around a cold withered tree. The mad monkey chatters on a balcony.⁴ Oh! Cho-sha's impossible way of putting things into words.

TOTSU!⁵

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).

¹ "Land" can mean a well-trained Zen mind.

² "Dusts" are evil desires, anger, ignorance, stagnation, agitation, doubt, remorse, etc.

³ This remark of Cho-sha' means that his mind is always one with falling flowers and the scent of herbs (outward objects). There is no trace in his mind of former activity.

⁴ This is Setcho's or Cho-sha's remark is better.

⁵ **TOTSU!** is a kind of exclamatory word or scolding voice. Sometimes it is the same as **KATSU!** It is shouted in order to cut off entanglements completely. In this case, Setcho means infinity or endlessness.