

## Before thoughts arise

THE PRACTICE OF ZEN BUDDHISM is understanding life as the constant flow of activity rather than as concepts and beliefs. This is particularly true of Dogen Zenji's teaching. But when I say the world is more than our concepts, immediately you are confused. There is nothing for you to get hold of. Consciously or unconsciously, you try to depend on a conceptualized world.

The Buddha and other great teachers have always pointed to the world that is here *before* we conceptualize it. We have to taste this world and understand it as it is. Conceptualization is important, of course. It is a kind of blueprint of the world that we draw upon. We can't live without a blueprint. But neither can we live inside a blueprint. We become onlookers in the world of concepts. We look and think and imagine, and though we study our blueprints, we don't understand just what it is that we are imagining.

When you burn paper, you probably think that the paper is something other than the fire. This is the world of conceptualization. But actually, there is no separation. Paper is fire. Fire is paper. But even saying "paper is fire, fire is paper" is dualistic.

If I talk of my death, I can't explain the reality of it in

words. Why? Because first I have to say the subject, I. Next comes the verb, die. First there's me, who isn't death, and then comes "dies." It's very dualistic. In Reality, things are not separate in the way they are in language. The paper is fire. I am life, I am death. There is no gap between them. But we get used to understanding the world through the concepts we use to describe it. This is why, no matter how long we discuss this problem, we don't get it. We have to *just see* it.

Zen master Gasan was asked by his master, Keizan Zenji, "Do you know there are two moons?" Gasan didn't understand, but he contemplated this statement for three years. Gasan's practice was very serious and very deep, and eventually he understood Master Keizan's point.

If we see the moon in the sky, we would say it is just one moon. But this is just our common understanding, the understanding of our conceptual mind. It is not really *seeing*. When we conceptualize, we always bring ourselves up first. When we say, "I see the moon," there is some separation, some duality. But in Reality, you and the moon are merged completely. Our practice is to see this Reality in which there is no separation between "you" and "moon."

Beyond our likes and dislikes, something is constantly happening. Beyond all human criticism and evaluation, life goes on. In Reality, your life is always being supported

by many things. This is why Master Keizan told Gasan that there are two moons. There is the moon we conceptualize and there is the moon as it is, completely interfused with all beings. If I see the moon, I am moon.

Conceptually, we believe there is one moon. And of course it is so. But the moon of our thought is not the real

moon, because the conceptualizing mind always inserts the self first, before we acknowledge the moon as it is. But beyond mundane thoughts and speculations, you and the moon are wondrously interfused. This is True Reality. It is not an idea. It is inconceivable. It is where you and moon are interidentical. This is our life.