

**COMMENTARY BY MASTER SHUNRYŪ SUZUKI  
ON MODEL SUBJECT NO. 19  
FROM THE "BLUE CLIFF RECORDS"  
March 1963**

**NOT VERBATIM**

**Gutei's lifting up one finger:**

Gutei lived in a small hermitage to be free from the fierce persecution of the first part of the ninth century A.D. in China.

One day a nun named Jissai came to visit him, entering with her hat on her head and her pilgrim staff in her hand. She looked around the seat where Gutei was sitting and said, "I will take off my pilgrimage hat, if you give me a satisfactory statement." When he could say nothing, she started to leave. He tried to stop her, because it was late and dark out. Then she said, "If you can offer one word good enough to stop me, I will be happy to stay."

When he could not, he became quite ashamed of himself and decided to leave his hermitage on a pilgrimage in order to study Buddhism some more. That night he dreamed a Bodhisattva visited him and said that an incarnate Bodhisattva was coming to teach him.

The next day the famous Zen Master Tenryu came. Gutei told him Jissai's visit and about the dream. Tenryu, in answer, lifted up one finger. Gutei was enlightened at that moment, and he said, "I have acquired Tenryu's 'one finger zen' as an inexhaustible treasure for the rest of my life."

From that time on, he answered innumerable questions by lifting up one finger.

Later to his surprise, he found one of his disciples using the same gesture as an answer to questions. So Gutei asked him a question and when his disciple answered by lifting one finger, Gutei reached out and cut his finger off. As the poor man rushed away, Gutei called him back and held up one finger. The disciple was enlightened.

**Commentary by Engo Zenji:**

Introducing the subject, Engo Zenji said, "If one grain of dust is lifted up, the great universe is involved. If one blossom opens, the world vibrates."

**Commentary by Master Suzuki:**

One gains a good understanding by approaching this statement from a scientific viewpoint. Everything in the universe is closely related to every other things and to the whole, and the whole is involved in each separate

part.

Yet Engo from another standpoint raises a new problem: What happens before the speck of dust is picked up, or before the flower opens?

Here he is talking about the necessity of practice, if one is to realize the oneness of the subjective and the objective. If one does not practice, he is driven by various impetuses to repeatedly wrong activity. Ignorance causes illusive ideas which encourage wrong intellectualization and discourage right observation. It is impossible to attain Reality without being One with the objective world. When perfect acceptance takes place, there is no subjective or objective world.

In the realm of Reality there is nothing that disturbs perfect acceptance: there are no illusive ideas (which are usually) mistaken for the true nature of things. We cut off the complications caused by self-centered desires in order to allow one's own "home treasure" (oneness) to reveal itself.

Engo refers to an ancient saying: If one snips off one place, the whole reel of thread will be cut through.

Yet here is a great problem: We are always too much concerned with the superiority of enlightenment. This concern is caused by a kind of self-conceit. We should cut off the complications moment after moment, one after another, big or small-including such egotistical ideas.

Gutei's one finger always tells us when and where the thread of complications should be cut off.

Now the chance is right here-in this moment! There is no time for anyone to use his mouth or tongue. Tremendous numbers of blind tortoises in the dark sea are landing on Gutei's one small finger, one after another.<sup>1</sup> There is not time for anybody to lift up another finger.

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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).

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<sup>1</sup> There was once a tortoise living in the deep sea. It had no eyes in its head, but only one in the middle of its belly underneath. So the poor creature could not look up to see and worship the sun, and it was greatly distressed. But one day, by great good luck, a single board with a hole in it came floating by. The tortoise managed with considerable difficulty to cling onto it from underneath in an upside-down position. Thus he was able to put his eye to the hole in the board and look upwards to see the light. (This old legend of the blind tortoise is found in the *Parinirvāna Sūtra*, the *Āganas*, and other scriptures.)