

LESSON 1 • JANUARY 1

“Nothing I see in this room [on this street, from this window, in this place] means anything.”

Practice instructions

Purpose: To teach that everything you see is equally meaningless, that no real differences exist between any of the things you see.

Exercise: Two times—morning and evening, preferably, for one minute (but do not hurry).

Look leisurely about you, applying the idea specifically and indiscriminately to whatever you see, first in your immediate area and then farther. Say, for example, “*This table does not mean anything.*”

Remarks: It is essential to specifically exclude nothing. Do not, however, try to include everything. Do not hurry; leisure is essential.

Commentary

The early lessons do not seem particularly inspiring to most people, but they are carefully planned to begin undermining the ego thought system. “Nothing I see...means anything.” We are so certain, in our ego arrogance, that we really understand a lot of things. The lesson is trying to plant the idea that we don’t really understand anything we see, that our vaunted understanding is an illusion. As long as we think we understand what something is and what it means, we will not begin to ask the Holy Spirit for its true meaning. Our belief that we understand closes our mind to any higher understanding. We need to become like little children, who realize they do not know, and ask someone who does know.

*Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*¹ is the title of a wonderful little book that introduces Zen thought. The idea is that we grow most rapidly and reliably when we admit we are beginners who do not know, and need instruction in everything. A “beginner’s mind” is an open mind, ready to find unrecognized meaning in everything.

¹. Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* (Trumbull, Conn.: Weatherhill Inc., 1972).