

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
SESSHIN LECTURE: 9 AM
Thursday Morning, July 29, 1965
Lecture A
Soko-ji Temple, San Francisco

Tape operator: Nine o'clock instruction, Thursday morning.

Suzuki-rōshi: Purpose of practice is to have direct experience of buddha-nature. That is purpose of our practice. So whatever you do, it is—it should be the direct experience of buddha-nature.

We say—in fifth precept we say, "Don't—don't—don't be attached"—not "attached," but—"don't be—don't violate event the precepts which is not here." [Laughs.] It is rather difficult to understand. In—in Japanese it is not so difficult, but in English it is rather difficult to understand. It means, anyway—we say when you sit, you say I have something—something occurred in your mind which is not so good. Some image come. Something covered your wisdom or buddha-nature. When you say so, you have the idea of clearness, you know, because you have—you think you have to clear up your mind from all images; you have to keep your mind clear from various images which will come to you, or which you have already—you have—which you have already should be cleared up. This—so far you understand it, but Dōgen-zenji says:

Don't—don't even try to clear up your mind, even though you have something here. Don't want to be pure. If you want to be pure, it means you have attached in—to pureness—purity. That is also not so good. Don't attach to purity or impurity.

Do you understand? So when you [are] bothered by what you have done, it means you—you are attached to purity. This is not good.

Our buddha-nature should be beyond pure or impure. It means just to be aware—just to be aware of your true nature which is beyond pure or impure. Do you understand? Purity is not—to attach to purity is good, but buddha-nature is not pure or impure. Do you understand this point? If you understand this point, just to sit without thinking—without [being] bothered by something which will come, or even though you have something in your image, don't try to escape from it. Just sit. It will go. And you are beyond it. Those come and—come in and come out of the images. This is so-called-it—you have—you are beyond intoxicating liquor.

This is fifth precept. And interpretation to the fifth precept. In fifth precept we say, "Don't take, don't sell, or don't buy intoxicating

liquor." Don't buy [laughs]—don't buy some images, or don't sell some images, some intoxicating liquor, some attachment. Don't sell any attachment to anyone. Or don't buy [laughs] any attachment from outside.

And to this precept he said, "Don't be attached even to the purity, even to the evil which—which is not here. To attach to the evil which is not here means purity." You know, if there is no evil here, you are pure. But don't be attached to even the state of mind you—you have in purity. And even though you are not pure, don't try to be—escape from it. If you try to escape from it, it means you are attached to the purity. A small ego is working [laughs] still. Your small ego is trying to push out the evil thought. So still you are occupied by small ego as long as you are trying to get out of it.

So the most important point is to acknowledge exactly what is buddha-nature. The buddha-nature is not small ego; it is big ego which is observing what you do and accepting what you do always. Whatever you do, he will say, "Ah, that's good." [Laughing.] "Nothing wrong with it," he—he may say.

So if you have—if you are always aware of the true nature, that is enlightenment. There is big misunderstanding in our practice, I think. Most of people have this misunderstanding:

The practice is some—something which we try to get out of evil. This is our practice. If we by training—eventually we will attain enlightenment, and we would be completely free from evil. That is our practice.

This is usual understanding. But this practice is small practice, not big practice, not pure practice. That practice is your small practice. There is no big mind in your practice. So to be aware of—to—knowing what is true buddha-nature—what is true nature—being aware of it, and—and practice our practice as a practice of big mind is our true practice.

So in our practice there is no evil or no good. It is not matter of evil or good. Both is good. There is no need to fight with it. Just let them come and let them go out. So-called-it evil or good are something which your small mind created. In—for your true nature there is no good or bad. Your true nature is something which is beyond good or bad. It is valuable because it is beyond good and bad. It is valuable—it is—because you cannot figure out what it is.

If you cannot accept something intelligible, you are still pursuing good or bad in worldly sense, scientific way, philosophical way, or ethical way. You are not pursuing religious practice.

Ryōkan—do you know Ryōkan?¹ A famous Sōtō priest. He didn't mind—[he said] "nothing bad"—the secret of the Sōtō way. Concerning Sōtō practice, he was very strict, but [laughs] he didn't—he didn't mind whatever they say or whatever he himself feel. He doesn't mind—he didn't mind at all. Even though he is sick, he didn't mind. Even though people did not understand him, he did not mind at all. But if someone ask seriously—seriously, if he is not serious he didn't mind, but when he thought someone was quite serious or sincere, he mind very much. And if he—if someone ask him what is Sōtō way, he was very serious. While he has strict sense of buddha-nature, his buddha-nature is very very sharp and strict. Because of that strictness, he can accept whatever life he had—he could accept his life—his poor and humble and unfortunate life. But he didn't mind at all because he had, you know, strict sense of buddha-nature.

So our practice is the practice to accept everything as it is and to do things as much as you can. Don't be greedy about your progress in your practice. If you can make progress, little by little, as much as you can, that is enough. But concerning to the sense of buddha-nature, it should be very clear and strict.

We say you cannot plant any plants on the stone [laughs]. You should be like a stone. You cannot plant anything on it. Any good or evil cannot grow on the buddha-nature. It is so hard and so strict. Good and bad is delusion. Any delusion can [cannot?] grow on your spirit. Or we say *shinsatsu*²—when you—this is Chinese word. You cannot—any needle can—cannot thrust into—thrust into a stone. *Shinsatsu*—when you—it is impossible to thrust a needle into a iron. This kind of spirit is wanted when you practice our practice. Then you will make—little by little you will make progress.

So Dōgen-zenji says our practice is like to go through the fog. It is not like to go out in thunderstorm [laughs]. If you go out in heavy rain, your clothes will be all-at-once wet. You will be soaked in water, but sudden rainstorm will not penetrate in your, you know, underwear. It will [laughs] [probably gestures to show water running off a surface]—but fog—when you walk through the thick fog for a long time, even though you don't know—realize your clothing is wet, it is wet, and it will penetrate into your underwear. This is the true practice. You don't think you made some progress, but [laughs] you did a remarkable progress if someone who knows what is real practice will acknowledge it.

¹ Ryōkan Daigu (1758?–1831): Sōtō priest and renowned poet.

² *shinsatsu*: "to prick with a needle." Suzuki-rōshi may be alluding to Dōgen-zenji's *Sanbyakusoku* (*Three Hundred Cases*) kōans, No. 232.

Some people asked Ryōkan, "Do you have—do you have—in—do you have *Daihannya-kyō*—*Great Wisdom Scripture*?³ We have 600 volume of scriptures about the wisdom. Do you have *Great Wisdom—Scripture of Great Wisdom*—600 volumes in your temple?" someone asked. And he asked him to write [laughs] *Daihannya-kyō* in Chinese character on his back. "You—please write down *Daihannya-kyō*—*Lo-pya-kan*⁴—here on his back. Thank you very much." [Laughs, laughter.] "Here we have *Great Wisdom Scripture—Scripture of Great Wisdom*, and today I—I want to dry those 600 volumes of scriptures in the sun so that no worm can eat it. So he write down in the sunshine. Now today we have *mushiboshi*.⁵ *Mushiboshi* means, in Japan, once a year we spread all the scriptures in the sunshine when it is—when it is fine and dry. "So tonight we will have party, so please join us," he said [laughing]. It means if you cannot acknowledge, you know, my practice, may be better to write down big *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*. "I am the big *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*," you know. "If you don't acknowledge me, please write down on your back so that you can acknowledge it."

People who has no understanding of true practice cannot acknowledge who is good or who is bad. That is true. He himself—even for he himself [it] may be difficult to know how much progress he made. But for him this is obvious [?]. For him each day is—is good day, and each day is day of enlightenment. Enlightenment is on each day, on each practice you do, as long as you have clear understanding of buddha-nature.

Dōgen-zenji looks like giving his work for us [in a] rather philosophical way. But it is not so. It is not philosophy at all. That is why it is difficult to understand in philosophical way or to translate it in English. In English you have—you haven't enough vocabulary to express it. Chinese or—for him Chinese or Japanese was not perfect. So he made many words for himself to express his idea. That is why it is difficult to translate it.

But here what we are discussing about is not philosophy at all. What I am saying is not philosophy. So if you understand what I say, it is possible to know what I mean by buddha-nature, I think. It is possible because although my English is not good but I think I can express myself about buddha-nature in my poor English [laughs]. That is why I repeat same thing over and over again. When I think you don't understand, I will repeat it [laughs] until you understand it. If my

³ *Daihannya-kyō*: *Mahāprajñā-pāramitā-sūtra* in 600 fascicles, translated from Sanskrit to Chinese by Xuanzang (WG Hsuan-Tsang; Jap. Genjō) in 659.

⁴ Phonetic only. Spelling not checked. Sounds like a Chinese phrase.

⁵ *mushiboshi* (lit. "drying bugs"): the annual custom of airing books, clothing, linen, works of art, etc. during the seventh lunar month (after the Japanese rainy season) to prevent mildew and, traditionally, to remove insects. It is observed in households as well as temples and shrines.

words is not good enough, I will hit you [laughs, laughter]. Then you will understand what I mean. As long as I understand it, you will understand what I mean—someday [laughs]. If you—if you don't understand me just now, some day you will understand. Someday someone will understand. This is great patience. I think I will wait for a island to go to Seattle from Los Angeles [laughs]. They say it—it is moving from Los Angeles to Seattle like a boat in millions of millions of years. By the time it will reach to Seattle [laughs], someone will understand it.

So if you don't understand it, I don't mind at all [laughs, laughter]. Buddha said whether you take my medicine or not is not my responsibility. Just to talk about it—just to try to help people is my way. Whether or not you take it, that is not—it can't be helped if you don't take it. That is true. But he said:

I left—I prepare—I—I prepared everything [for those] who will understand me. And I saved people—all the people which is possible to save. And I prepared to save all people when the time come. So I saved all the human being in my eighty years of age.

That is true. So I don't think—he wouldn't mind—if one of his disciple understand him, it's good enough. There is possibility to save all human being if one of the—his disciple understand him. In this way, Buddhism was spread, one by one, little by little.

When we become lazy, Buddhism looks like no more. But when we have to be sincere, Buddhism will come out. Buddhism will be understood. You may say there is no more Buddhism in India or China or even in Japan, but Buddhism is eternal teaching.

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Bill Redican (9/5/01).