

GENJŌ-KŌAN NO. 2 [1?]
Monday, August 21, 1967
Zen Mountain Center, Tassajara
Edited by Brian Fikes

This lecture is not verbatim.
The tape is no longer
available. Suzuki-rōshi is
commenting on ¶¶ 6 and
9–11 of *Genjō-kōan*.

There is a slight difference between your usual activity and the activity in our monastery. Of course, we do our best in our everyday work in order to support our activity. The work you do should be done with your very best effort and to the best of your ability. But you should not be too attached or take pride in your ability. Forgetting all about your ability and the result of your effort, you should still do your best in your work. This is how you work in a monastery as a part of practice.

And everyone has their own responsibility. We should work within our responsibilities; we should not invade someone else's responsibility. This is also the teaching of "form is emptiness and emptiness is form." We are working on something right now, and we do not know what we will work on tomorrow. But right now, what you are working on is your practice, and when you work, just work in your position. In your position and in your work there is meaning. So each one's responsibility or position is very important for us. If this is the case, we should not invade someone else's work. Each of us should work on our position. When you do so, there is our practice. Form is emptiness and emptiness is form. When you work on the form which is your responsibility, which is your work, there is emptiness. But the form, or the position, you have right now is not a permanent one. Right now you are working on it, and right now you should work on it. Through your position, you can attain your own enlightenment. We should work in this way.

When Dōgen-zenji arrived in China, his boat could not land because of the inspection, so he had to stay on the boat. At that time, an old priest visited his ship. He was very interested in that old priest, and they talked about Buddhism. He found out that the old priest was taking care of the kitchen of Ekoso [Ayü-wang?], a monastery. He thought there must be many young priests because it was a noted big monastery. So he said, "Why don't you stay? Even if you stay for the night in this ship, someone will work in the kitchen." But the old priest said, "You don't know what our practice is," and, "Others are not you." Others are not you; others cannot take my position, my practice. It is my practice. Each one should work on his practice. There there is enlightenment.

So today we have today's work, tomorrow we have tomorrow's work,

and each of us has his own work, which should be perfect. As Dōgen-zenji said, firewood does not become ash. Firewood has its own past and present. Ash has its own perfect position, it has its own past and future and its own perfection. So firewood never turns to ash. Ash is ash; firewood is firewood. And firewood includes everything past and future, and ash includes past and future, and everything which exists in this moment. So when you do your own job, your own job includes everything and has its own past and future and perfection.

If you are wandering about, forgetting all about your place, it means you are deluded. You have no idea of practice, and you are losing your own practice. That is not our way. We should not put emphasis on our skill or the result of our work, but on knowing the meaning of the work more deeply. Then most of the difficulties in our monastic life will be solved.

Usually what we do is not so difficult. The problems which follow because of your imperfect understanding of work are more difficult. You will suffer from the useless problems, and you will lose the whole monastery. If the point of your work is lost, it is not a monastery any more. If you visit a monastery and everything is in order, the plants and vegetables are healthy, every place is clean, and the tools are well polished and sharp, that is sure to be a good monastery. But polishing your tools or raising your vegetables is not the main point of your practice. The main point is whether or not your effort is real practice. When there is good teaching and good practice, there is good feeling, and everything will grow. But the purpose is not just to get larger crops or to have a great amount of work. So even though you have some special ability, you will work on something you are not familiar with. But as long as you have something to work on, you should do your best in your position.

This is also what *prajñāpāramitā* is. Although it may look like we are doing ordinary work, if you have right understanding of our work, the meaning is quite different.

The next paragraph of *Shōbōgenzō* "Genjō-kōan" says, "We gain enlightenment like the moon reflecting in the water. The moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken. Although its light is wide and great, the moon is reflected even in a puddle an inch wide. The whole moon and the whole sky are reflected in a drop of dew in the grass."

"We gain enlightenment like the moon reflecting in the water." Here the use of the parable of the moon and its reflection is different. Earlier he said our way is not like the moon reflecting on the water. At that time he meant to symbolize a dualistic idea of our practice and enlightenment. But here he means that even though you attain enlightenment, there is no difference in what you do.

"The moon does not get wet" Even though the moon is in the water, it does not get wet. "... nor does the water get broken." There is no trace in it. You may think there exists, or you may always seek for, an enlightenment which is some special experience, where you have no problems, where you will get rid of all vicious habits. Once you have attained enlightenment, you will not drink any more sake. That may be the kind of enlightenment you are seeking. But actually, if you like sake, even though you gain enlightenment, you will have a hard time getting past the store where sake is sold. Things will still happen to you even though you attain enlightenment. So he says the water is not broken, nor does the moon get wet. The same water and the same moon will be there.

"Although its light is wide and great" You may say the moonlight is bright and great, while the moon in the dew is so small. But the moon in the sky is also in the drop of dew. Even though it is in the drop of dew, it is the moon. Even though you may say your attainment is so small, enlightenment is enlightenment. There is no difference.

"The moon is reflected even in a puddle an inch wide. The whole moon and the whole sky are reflected in a drop of dew in the grass." Enlightenment does not destroy the mind or help the mind. He did not say that, but "Enlightenment does not destroy the mind, just as the moon does not break the water. Mind does not hinder enlightenment just as a drop of dew does not hinder the moon in the sky. The depth of the drop is the height of the moon." Because you compare something to some other things, you have this kind of misunderstanding or confusion. But firewood is firewood, ash is ash. And ash and firewood are perfect, because they are whole, independent, being, or independent reality. This kind of understanding is beyond our thinking. You can explain it with logic, but the explanation will not be perfect.

"The depth of the drop is the height of the moon. The period of reflection, long or short, will prove the vastness of the dewdrop and the vastness of the moonlit sky."

Now the next paragraph: "When the truth does not fill our body and mind, we think that we have enough. When the truth fills our body and mind, we know that something is missing." This "something is missing" has a different meaning. We know that that is not enough; at least we know that we should continue. It is not the end of it all. Moment after moment we should work on it. We feel this way. There is no time for us to lie down and sleep. We must go on and on and on.

And we have our ideal ahead of us. Usually, without knowing this part, when you are caught by your ideal, which is not possible to

attain, you will just suffer until you commit suicide. Isn't that so? Enlightenment might be just an ideal for you, but even enlightenment is not always the same. It will make some progress -- I cannot explain it just now because you will be mixed up. There may be big enlightenments and small enlightenments, as the biographies of the great masters say, countless small enlightenments and several big enlightenments. This kind of description means that enlightenment is not always the same. Enlightenment after enlightenment we should practice our way. So you feel that something is not enough. Even though you feel good, even though you feel that you had enlightenment, that is not enough. When you feel this way, that is true enlightenment. But when you think you have had enough, that is not true enlightenment.

"For example, when we view the world from a boat on the ocean, it looks circular, and nothing else." "It looks circular. ..." It looks like he discovered our earth is round at that time. He said it looks circular and nothing else. It is just a round globe. He must have seen it when he was crossing the China Sea. "But the ocean is neither round nor square, and its features are infinite in variety. It is like a palace. It is like a jewel. It seems circular as far as your eyes can reach at the time. All things are so. Though there are many features in the dusty life and the pure life. ..."

"It is like a palace." For the fish it is like a palace. "It is like a jewel." For the dragon, it may be a jewel. "It seems circular as far as your eyes can reach at the time." When you see it, it looks circular, but water is not always a palace for everyone, or a jewel. It seems circular as far as our eyes can reach at the time, but it may not be circular. "All things are so, though there are many features in the dusty life and the pure life. We only understand what our study can reach." Whatever you may say, no matter how beautifully you describe this world, that is not all. That is the description as far as you can describe it.

"In our study of all things we must appreciate that although they may look round or square, the other features of the ocean or mountains are infinite in variety, and there are universes in all quarters. It is so not only around ourselves, but also directly here, even in a drop of water." Just now we are talking about our teaching, but it is not only our Buddhist teaching. Even near at hand, events will tell you this truth. When your understanding reaches as far as this, you may say you are studying Buddhism, and you work on your everyday life accordingly. Whatever you do, that is the practice. Whenever you do not feel good in your work, you must think this truth. At the time, you may not feel so good, but that is not all.

A monastery is not some particular place. Whether you can make

Tassajara a monastery or not is up to you. It may be even worse than city life even though you are in Tassajara. But when you have the wisdom of the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, even though you are in San Francisco, that is the perfect monastery. This point should be fully understood.

Transcribed by Brian Fikes. Text reformatted and notes amended by Bill Redican 2/20/02.