

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
EVENING *SESSHIN* LECTURE
Friday Evening, December 1, 1967
Zen Mountain Center
Lecture B

This afternoon, in my lecture¹ I told you why we should practice zazen and what is our practice. After all, our practice is quite different from other activity we have in everyday life. Of course, according to some schedule, we practice zazen at certain time every day. So you may think now it is time to have to have meal, and it is time to recite sūtra, and it is time to sit. So you think there is not much difference between zazen practice and other activities we have.

Actually if you understand the true meaning of zazen, there is no difference. Whatever you do, that is zazen practice. As long as we have innate buddha-nature, what we do is expression of our true nature. And if it is so, whatever we do that is practice—true practice.

But usually, because we do something with some aim and we want to do something [in a] more perfect way, sometime you do not—you are not satisfied with what you do, and sometime you will be pleased with what you did. When this kind of discrimination happens, that activity is not anymore true activity—at least your understanding of the activity you have done is not true activity itself. It is already a dead idea within your mind. And actual limitless activity is no more. So if you think zazen practice will be the same as our usual practice, there there is big misunderstanding.

Zazen practice is fundamental practice which you should always—you should not always lose. We say, "Because of our practice the mountain is high. Because of our practice, the sea is deep. Because of practice, bird flies. Because of practice, fish swims." It is actually so, but fish do not know where he is. We do not know where we are. We are in the air, but we do not aware of where we are because we do not feel anything in the air. So you do not feel anything. But without air, we cannot live.

Whatever you do, that is actually our true practice. But you are pleased with the limited pleasure of the practice, and you do not know the boundless meaning of our everyday life. And we always complain with what you have to do, or with what you have done, or what you should do. So you are always forced [into] something in your every day life. You feel as if you are living in some certain framework. If you come to Tassajara, you should observe our way. But when you are—you do not realize the true meaning of your life, a rule is just a

¹ SR-67-12-01-A.

kind of framework in which you are put.

But—so you think zazen is the same—a kind of rules you have to do. But if you realize what is our true practice, you will have no more this kind of mixed-up idea. In its true sense, zazen should not be practiced because zazen gives you some advantage in your life, or zazen should not be dismissed because of its hardship of practice. Why we practice zazen is just because we always spoil our life and spoil our practice—true practice in our everyday life. So our effort is directed to the—to the opposite way. We do not practice our way to attain something, but we practice zazen to be free from a dualistic gaining idea.

So far is what I said this morning in my lecture, and I recited *Fukan Zazen-gi*. And it is too dark, or even [if] I have glasses I cannot read this print. So I will not read it, but usually in evening zazen, we recite this *Fukan Zazen-gi* every night. If you read it over and over, you will realize the true meaning of it.

And in last *sesshin*, do you remember, I talked about Zuigan's² calling his—name of his own master—his master, or—and I interpreted [that] Zuigan is calling his own name because it is the same.³ This shift of understanding is possible because our everyday life—there is no difference between our everyday life and our true practice. When we [are] satisfied with our practice, with our everyday life, if we have always gratitude of carrying on our life, that is true practice. To have gratitude or to enjoy our life does not mean to have some special feeling in our life, or special enjoyment, or special gratitude. By "gratitude" or "enjoyment," we mean something deeper than that: gratitude before we have gratitude, enjoyment before we enjoy it.

Usually when—when you say, "I enjoyed very much," you say after you enjoyed it [laughs]. So it is too late to say that [laughs]. When you are actually, you know, enjoying it, you have no words. You have no feeling whatsoever. You don't know what you are [laughs] doing. Later, you may say, it was very good [laughs]. "This *sesshin* was very good" [laughs]. But when you are, you know, practicing [laughs] it—what you will say [laughs], you know? You didn't enjoy it all the time [laughs]. But later you say, "It was very good." [Laughs.] So someone may think it was not so good [laughs]. Which is good? Which is right? Maybe both is right, or both is wrong [laughs].

² Juiyen Shihyen (Jap. Zuigan Shigen): n.d. Ninth-century Chan master who appears in Case 12 of the *Mumonkon (Gateless Gate)* kōan collection, "Zuigan Calls His Master."

³ *Mumonkon*, Case 12: "Zuigan Gen Oshō called to himself every day, 'Master!' and answered, 'Yes, sir!' Then he would say, 'Be wide awake!' and answer, 'Yes, sir!' 'Henceforward, never be deceived by others!' 'No, I won't!'" (K. Sekida, *Two Zen Classics*, p. 53). (See also SR-67-12-02.)

So if you want to know what is zazen, you must practice it. Even though you ask someone what is zazen, he will not give you right idea of right practice. Even though he say something about it—if he could say something about it, you wouldn't be able to understand it by words. To have direct experience of it is the only way to know what is zazen.

So to participate with practice, or with the great activity is the only way to be familiar with it. So in this sense, whatever you do, if you do not mixed up understanding in this area, that is true understanding. So in this sense—before, I say zazen is quite different practice from other activities. But now I can say zazen is not different from the other activities we have. Only because your understanding is mixed up, I should say zazen is quite different practice from other practice.

But for many hundreds of years before Dōgen-zenji, this point was not so clear. In Buddhism or in Zen, there were many schools—five or seven. And each school, including Sōtō, [was] supposed to be the best, you know, school of all the schools of Zen. They say, you know, "Best school." But to say "best school" is to put limitation [laughs] to their own way [laughs]. If it is really best school, there is no need to say so. So in this sense, each school will be the best one for him. So it is silly to say, "This is best school," or "This tradition or lineage is the right one." This kind of silly understanding sneaked into our zazen practice. And when we realize what is zazen, what we have been practice—we had been practice was not right—was not zazen anymore. We call it "fox zazen."

Do you know—in Japan, fox is something [laughing] to disguise or to change into or to fool people in disguise of a woman, you know. He will appear in beautiful dress with white—with white face and skin. For Japanese, white means something beautiful: white skin, white face. So that is why we use a powder on our face. And fox, you know, change into a beautiful lady, and he may—he fools us. And then become a fox that, you know—he thinks this is zazen, but the way he appears is not zazen anymore. A fox try too much. Fox change into something else. If you try too much, you know—if you try to understand what is zazen too much, your zazen will change into something else. So, you know—if—when you just practice it, that is true zazen.

In this way, if you observe your way—whatever it is, zazen practice, eating meals, or taking bath—whatever you do, that is true practice. Although it may be difficult to understand if I say, you do not take your bath because you are dirty. You do not wash your face because your face is dirty. We say, what it means is your practice of—your everyday activity should not be involved in too—too much in some restrictive idea. You should obtain freedom in your way. And you

should realize limitless meaning of our activity. You should not be—you should not over-value—or what do you say?—or you should not evaluate too much or too less.

So to do something with—with right feeling is the purpose of practice. You will see someone who do things in quite appropriate way with, you know, with very harmonious feeling. Even though he is, you know, practicing something very rigidly, if someone else imitate his practice, it be—it will be extremely rigid way. But for him it is quite natural. I know some Zen master who had this kind of feeling. When we—when I would go with him to the bath, you know, he sit—he never sit [in] the middle of the bath—bathtub. He just sit in some corner—not corner, but some appropriate place. And after taking bath, he may arrange everything which other students misplaced, you know—the wooden—this is—I cannot pronounce this [laughs] word—wooden bar? You know, wooden—

Student: Brush? Okay.

Suzuki-rōshi: Okay [laughs]. Okay. He put—you know, arrange everything quite naturally, you know. So he do it so naturally that no one notice it, and it doesn't—he doesn't bother anyone. And way he talk, way he eat—this is very harmonious with other people, and yet very—very beautiful anyway. This kind of, you know, activity is, I think, well-trained Zen monk's activity. It may take pretty long time before one can act in that way.

So he himself does not know what he is doing. If he is aware of his practice, you know, naturally, we will bothered by his being with us [laughs]. "Oh!" Here he came, and, you know, you may not like him at all. It is not just because of training, but because of his liberation from the idea of good or bad. I cannot express. This is so subtle activity that—and I cannot behave like that, you know. If I work, you know, I stay work so long [laughs], and I shall not be in time for service [laughs] [1-2 words] sometime. This is very bad. When we, you know, stop working, we should stop working. We should not be too enthusiastic, you know. Because I am caught by some—something in your work, I lose the complete freedom from the work. Without much zeal in your practice, to practice it quite naturally in appropriate way, without trying being—without trying to be appropriate, is the way it should be.

But if you do not know the point of the practice, even though you have good Zen master, you cannot study Zen because you cannot appreciate the true activity. If you know why you should practice zazen and what is zazen, you will find out the way we should be: how to achieve something without not much effort. So we say, "To go eastward one mile is to go to westward one mile." Even though you

make great effort, you cannot go back to one mile. You cannot step forward—you cannot go forward one mile—always equal. The power to pull is the power to push. There is no power just to pull or just to push. So that you can go one mile means that you can go one mile backward. So in your everyday life, if you want to go one mile, you should practice zazen and go back to one mile. So without practicing zazen [laughs], just to make your effort means nothing. You think you did something, but actually you didn't [do] anything. It is nothing to do with the rest of the people. "He himself thinks I did, but [laughs] actually it is not so."

So we should make hidden effort—secret effort. Not secret, but effort which is not—which cannot be found by anyone. This kind of effort is true zazen.

I think you—I hope you [laughs] have understood what I said. But if you don't, you should think more.

Source: Original City Center tape. Verbatim transcript by Adam Tinkham and Bill Redican (3/31/01).