

Shunryu Suzuki Lecture – 68-06-29
Esalen Institute
Second of two lectures

Last night I talked about construction of teaching and our practice in one word, how to, you know, organize, organize, this realistic, you know, teaching or this paradoxical teaching into our actual life. It's the purpose of practice, zazen practice. In zazen practice, as I explained symbolically what does it mean to put this leg here and this leg here. [Demonstrates?] This is supposed to be our activity, this is. More or less this is openness, this is calmness of mind and this is activity. If this is wisdom this is practice. And when we put one leg, left one, on the right side, it means we don't know which is which. [laughs] So here we have, you know, already oneness, symbolically. Here this side is, you know, already activity and wisdom and hand and our posture. Our posture is vertical without tipping right or left back or forward. This is also expression of the perfect understanding of teaching which is beyond duality of the teaching.

I want to explain this kind of idea into our rituals and/or precepts. When we extend this kind of practice into relationship between teacher and disciple naturally we have there precepts, idea of precepts, how to observe our precepts and what is the relationship between teacher and disciple. This is also extended idea of, extended practice of zazen practice. Zazen, this posture, is not only, not originally maybe a kind of training or something but it is not just training it is more the actual way of transmitting Buddha's way to us. Through practice we can actually transmit Buddha's teaching because words is not good enough to actualize its teaching. So, naturally how we transmit it through activity or through contact, through human relationships. Here we have relationship teacher, between teacher and disciple. Disciple, of course, can, will, must choose his teacher. Teacher should accept disciple when he wants job, when he's job should accept him as a disciple. This is sometimes teacher may recommended some other teacher for, you know, disciple. Or else, you know, human relationship will not be perfect. So if a teacher think, think his friend is maybe more perfect teacher for him, he may recommend him as a teacher. But, between teacher there's there should not be any conflict.

So, it is quite natural for some teacher to recommend some other teacher for some disciple. Once he become a disciple he should try hard to devote himself to study his way. At first, and because he maybe he, disciple like him, you know, just because, not just because he want to study Buddhism but for some other reason he may want to study under him, but it doesn't matter, you know, anyway if he devote himself completely to the teacher he will understand, he will be his dis.. teacher's disciple and he can transmit our way. And teachers should be, should know what, how a teacher should be. And teacher, relationship between teacher and disciple is very important and at the same time it is difficult for both teacher and disciple to be teacher or disciple in its true sense. On this point,

both teacher and disciple should make their best effort. And this is relationship between teacher and disciple. If, when we have our teacher or our disciple there we have various rituals. Rituals is not just training, it is more than that.

Through rituals we communicate in its true sense and we transmit the teaching in its true sense. That is the meaning of ritual. And we have many precepts. Precepts of the relation is also based on this idea of relationship between teacher and disciple or between disciple and disciple. Rituals, true of all ritual or precepts its to understand our teaching in it's true sense. We put the emphasis on selflessness so teacher and disciple, as long as they have their observation of rituals or precepts it's, is not selfless then that is not true ritual. For instance, when we observe one thing together, we should forget, you know, our own practice, we should practice when we, when we practice something with people it is partly each individuals practice and it is partly it is also, it is also others practice. So, we say, for instance, when we recite sutra, we say, recite sutra with you ear, really?, you know, to listen, you know, to some other chanting. So with my mouth we practice our practice and with my ear we practice, we listen to other's practice. So, this kind, here we have the complete egolessness in it's true sense.

Egolessness does not mean to annihilate or to give up our own practice, you know, individual practice. Egolessness, you know, true egolessness should forget egolessness too. So as long as you understand my practice is egolessness, then it means you stick to, you know, ego too, ego practice too, you know, practice of giving up ego center practice. So, When you practice your own practice with others true egolessness happen. That egolessness is not just, you know, egolessness, it is also maybe ego practice. And at the same time it is practice of egolessness. So this egolessness is beyond ego or egolessness [laughs]. Do you understand?

This is also true in observation of precepts. If you observe precepts you know, that is not true observation of precepts. When you, when you observe your precepts without trying to observe precepts, then, you know, that is true observation of precepts. So, we say, in observation of true precepts there is positive way of observation and negative way of observation. And true (two?) of that and not true (two?) of that, there must be, you know, for our ways. But those four ways, should be, should not be different. To observe precepts should be, not to observe precepts at the same time. Not to observe precepts means not just observing precepts but when you do not try to observe it then there you have both observation of truth and not observation, not observing precepts. So, one is positive and one is negative. Looks like so, you know, but in its true sense, anyway we have to observe it and out inmost nature, you know, help us to observe precepts.

So, when we understand our precepts from our, from some point of inmost nature that is not observation of truth precepts it is, you know, the way as we

want, or way as it is and there, there is not precepts, you know. Precepts is not necessary. So, we are not observing any precepts. But, on the other hand, inmost nature is so, but we have on the other hand, the opposite nature, we are double nature, so on the other hand we want to observe precepts or we, we fear we have to observe it, you know, and we fear the necessity of precepts which will help us, you know.

So when we are helped by precepts that is the coming of the, the blossoming of the, blossom of the true nature. And when we understand precepts in a negative sense, spiritually, as a, spiritually sense that is also expression of true nature but that is negative way of expression of our inmost nature. So precepts observation has two sides, one is negative and the other side positive. And we have choice, you know, to observe it and not to observe it. This is some of the different way of analysing the way of observing precepts.

When we cannot observe, ten or more precepts, then we have to chose some precepts which is possible to observe. And we have this choice, it doesn't mean precepts observation is not some set up, is not ruled, set up by someone, you know, it is the expression of our true nature. And so if something wrong with our expression of the true nature, you know, Buddha will say that is not the way. That is wrong way. Then you have precepts.

So, rules is not path, but the actual event or ? so this the nature of precepts, so we have chance to choose, you know, our precepts. If you go this way, you know, you will have some precepts and if you take the other way you will have some other precepts. So weather you go this way or that way is up to you. So if you go this way you have some if you go the other way you have some other precepts, because precepts is not something set up is not set up rule by Buddha. So, this is actually the extended practice of our zazen practice.

Not rules, in its true sense. When we say rules, rules is for everyone. But our precepts is not for everyone. It is the precepts is his own way of obervation of practice. This is a characteristic of Buddhist precepts.

We have chance to choose, you know, choose precepts. And precepts observation is both negative and positive. Both expression of our true nature. And it has prohibitory meaning too. To prohibit, you know, some conduct is up to your teacher. Teacher, you know, knows whether his way is good or bad, which way is more appropriate to him (you?). Before you are not familiar with our way you should depend upon your teacher, [laughs] that is the best way. So, in this case we have prohibitory precepts. But when you become familiar with your way you have more positive, you have more positive observation of precepts.

If we start to talk about precepts I think we have to explain our, you know, sin or guilty conscious too. This guilty conscious or idea of sin is, I don't know, Christian way of how you think about things, but Buddhist thinks our by nature as we say

Buddha Nature, Buddha Nature is birth? a nature to everyone, that is more good nature, not sinful nature. That is our understanding of our nature. And, in its true sense it is not either good or bad, that is complete understanding. But, in its usual sense it is more good nature rather than bad nature.

And, how sinful or guilty conscious appears in our mind because of karma, you know, because of our accumulation of personal or social karma, activity. Accumulation of inappropriate way of observing our way, will result some power, you know, which drive us to wrong way. That it is our idea sin or karma. And karma is not just, you know, what you did, but also it is more personal. One way it is social and on the other hand it is more accumulated. It is not just created by our body, this body, but our ancestors or our before like, you know, created by our former life.

If when we understand sin or karma in that way it is rather difficult to surmount to ? it just by our confidence or decisions. It is more than that. So in this point I think there is some similarity of Christian sin and our idea of sin. Both for us and Christian this idea of sin is something inevitable and something impossible to get out of it. This is, you know, the idea of karma or sin for us.

And how to get out of it is to best answer is by our practice. But before we go to the best answer, where we have no idea of good or bad, I think or... not simple. There we have to go pretty [laugh] long way in our practice, which is little by little we should improve ourself. Even though you attain enlightenment in something but you cannot change your karma as long as you live here. So, we have long way to go.

So, this impossibility of solving our problem or sin we have vows as a bodhisattva. Even though our desires are innumerable we vow to cut it, you know, put and end to it. Some thing like this, you know. Even though our way is [not?] attainable, we want to attain it. This is the vow we should have forever. In this way, Buddhist way, will have its own life. If Buddhism is some teaching which is attainable, you know, if you attain it that's all, there's no Buddhism, there's no need to study Buddhism. But fortunately, I didn't attain anything, so we have to strive, to attain it. And here we have double structure, one is, it should be, you know, we should attain it, but on the other hand it is something attainable [not attainable?]. And, how to solve this problem is to practice our way, day by day, moment after moment, to live on each moment is the best answer.

When we satisfy with our attainment moment after moment, with some improvement, we have there composure of life. We have satisfaction. So in our way, there is no idea of complete success, you know, complete enlightenment. And yet we are aiming at, you know, we have some ideal, but we should note that, we, ideal is something which you can't reach, you know, because you cannot reach that ideal. So, ideal is ideal and reality is reality. Now, we should

have both reality and ideal, or else we cannot do anything. So ideal and reality, both ideal and reality will help our practice.

And we should not treat ideal or reality something desirable or something not satisfactory. We should, you know, accept ideal as ideal and reality as reality. So even though our practice is not perfect, you know, we should accept it, without forgetting, without rejecting ideal. How to do that is to live on each moment. On each moment we include reality and ideal. So everything is included on each moment. So, there's no other way to be satisfied with what we have on each moment. That is only approach to the ideal.

And we have, we understand Buddha as the ideal, as a perfect, you know, one. At the same time we understand him as one of the human beings, you know, although we have ideal there is no need for us to be bound by ideal. The same thing is true with rituals and precepts. There is no need to be bound by precepts and there is no need to be bound by, to observe, you know, our rituals as some formality.

And in Soto practice, you know, we do not put too much emphasis on enlightenment, you know. When we say enlightenment I. we mean something perfect, perfect stage, you will have, you will attain. But actually [laughs] that is not possible, you know.

End of tape – and end of Shinshu's transcription [See note at end]

Rest of transcription is from Ed Brown's version which is slightly edited

as long as you experience it in term of good stage or bad stage, high or low stage. That is not perfect enlightenment. So we do not you know expect anything perfect, but we do not reject it. We have it, always have it, but ideal is ideal and reality is reality, and in our practice we have to have both side again. This is original nature of Buddhism.

It may be necessary to talk about repentance when we start to talk about precepts. Repentance you know or teacher you know... let's understand in this way...teacher will point out you know some mistake of a student. The way he point out the student mistake is very difficult one, you know, how he points out...uh... its mistake ..because teacher does not understand that is his mistake you know. If a teacher something what his student did is mistake he is not a true teacher. He should understand on the hand it is the expression of his true nature, so we should respect. If we respect our students true nature we should be careful how to point out. In scripture five points is pointed out.

One is you have to have...you have to choose the chance(chuckles),..you know. point out to the student. At least it is not so good to point out his mistake in front

of many people. If possible he should point out his mistake personally in appropriate time. This is the most..this is the first one. And second one is...uh... he should be...just a moment, last one is...he should be..uh..truthful to his disciple. He should not point out ..uh..his mistake ..uh..just ..uh...he himself think you know that is his mistake, but he should respect why, he should understand why he did so, so he should be truthful to his disciple. That is the second point.

Uh...and there,,uh..there are three more...I will,,uh..umm. say what I'll say will not be in order, but the fifth one is to ..uh..point out his mistake by compassion. He should be uh ..one with..compassion means to be friend of disciple, not as a teacher, as a friend he should point out, he should advise, he should give some advice. That is the last one.

And..uh.....and the fourth one is he should..uh...umm...I forgot...uh...you know...very similar but little bit different (everyone laughs) How different is very you know..very delicate. Excuse me. chuckles. ..I went maybe wrong direction... and he should when he talk about his disciples mistake he should use most gentle and most calm mind. With his calmest mind, with low voice he should not shout (audience chuckles, roshi chuckles) very delicate, something like truthfulness, but here...uh...uh...the scripture..uh you know put emphasis on..um..calm gentle attitude of talking about someone's mistake. So here you will understand the relationship between teacher and disciple.. Teacher is also his friend and his teacher. And the fourth one (chuckles, laughs) fourth one is very different trouble (laughs) trip. The fourth one is for the sake of you know to help student we should give him advice or point out his mistake. So even though he want to talk about you know his student wants to talk about his mistake or some um even though he make some excuse you know for what he did....we should not treat it..you know...uh...easily. Teacher should be very careful how to treat it, and if teacher thinks he is not serious enough then you shouldn't listen to him. You should ignore it until he become more serious. That is to give advice for sake of, only for sake of helping student. So we should not be always easy with student. Sometimes we should be very tough with the student or else we cannot help him in its true sense. This is the fourth one, and it is described in this way. To help student we should give some instruction.

So it is not so easy problem you know,uh, to be a teacher, to be a student, is, is not at all easy and we cannot rely on anything, even precepts. We should make our utmost effort to help with each other. And in ritual observation ritual too this is also true. We do not observe our precept just to, uh, for sake of precepts, for perfection of rituals. There were famous Zen master maybe about 70 years ago he passed away...maybe fifty..maybe...umm forty years ago , and he had very good disciples and they were so sincere students that when he lived with students in poor monastery in near Odara city near tokyoohdihara city is not so big city and they were very poor, but disciples wanted to buy bell you know to chant and asked him to buy some bell for the temple and he was very angry when his students asked him the bell. Why. What is the intention of reciting the

sutra. It looks like you recite the sutra because people in the town may appreciate our practice. If so, that is not my way. We have to practice for our sake not for others. So if you can only chant sutra that is enough. there is no need to buy bell so some others can hear it. That is not necessary. but by rules. We have some rules in our chanting. Without bells that is not perfect ceremony. But if our intention is not right, even though form is perfect it is not our way. There is rules but actually there is no rules. Rules is like precepts. We have precepts, but no precepts. Precepts should be set up according to the circumstances. That is why we chance to choose our precepts in small monastery there is suitable precepts for the monastery. So you may say our way is very formal, but there is some reason why we should be so formal. It is not just formality and even though we have 250 or 500 precepts it doesn't mean we should observe one by one all of them. This is our way of observation, our way of practice.

First part up to "End of Tape" Transcribed by Shinshu Roberts circa 2004. She got the tape from Michael Wenger. They obviously didn't realize that it was Shunryu Suzuki's Esalen lectures, this being the second of two. Might be from a different tape set, as she only figured out this was another lecture because of the opening line and this lecture was presented in the transcript she typed as a continuation of the first lecture which was labeled "At Sonoma Mountain Center, no date." The lecture does continue from the point that her tape stopped. For now, Ed Brown's slightly edited transcription is used from that point to the end. Should be checked against the audio in the archive which is a copy of the commercial tape. – dc