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Tassajara

It is rather difficult for us to figure out why we started to practice zazen. It is rather difficult, and I think it may be same for you. But the more you think why you started zazen practice, the more you will find out how deep it is—the meaning you started zazen practice. And once you start our practice, even though your determination is not so strong, or you don't feel your determination is not so strong, but you will find out how strong the determination has been.

It is rather difficult, you know. You think—when you are here, you think sometimes or, you know, once in a while it may be better to give up [laughs]. But actually to give up our study or practice is not so easy. But you have some, you know—when you—your determination—you think your determination is not so strong—when you think in that way, your—you will not make much—much progress. So anyway once you study—start to study zazen, it's better for you to have strong, you know, determination not to give up our study or our practice. That is why we Sōtō students put emphasis on way-seeking mind or determination to practice our way forever. And trust in our true nature, who—which is always seeking for our true nature. You know, we say, "True nature is seeking for true nature." You know, true—because we have true nature, so naturally we seek for [it]. It is quite natural for us to seek for true nature. So, "Buddha seek for buddha," we say.

Anyway, you know, even though—once you study—start to practice zazen, even though you stop it, or you leave Tassajara, or Zen Center, I am sure you will come back [laughs, laughter]. I am quite sure about that. But it is rather, you know, waste of time. So once you st-[partial word]—anyway, you are caught [laughs, laughter] by buddha-nature which you have, you know. So it is better to continue it until you have complete freedom even from sitting zazen. That is much better.

So to get through, you know, our practice until you have freedom from it. Then, whenever you do, that is extended practice of zazen. If you—if you stop practicing it until you have freedom from even zazen practice, your life will be always shaky, you know. So you feel as if you waste your whole life.

For a man who realized what is practice, even though we haven't attained enlightenment—so-called-it "enlightenment," we don't feel we waste—we have been—our practice have been waste of time. We don't feel in that way. If you—you are—even though your practice is

not perfect, you think someday or in next life you will, you know, sure to—you will have—sure to have that kind of feeling. And we are quite—we know what we sh- [partial word]—what kind of life we should have.

So even though you don't feel your life was perfect, you will leave for your descendent some problem which they should solve. So your descendent or some of you will find out the meaning of our practice, and find out it is necessary for human being to solve this problem and to continue our practice. So if no one start this kind of practice, your descendant will not find out what is our true life and what is the way to solve personal problem as well as social problem.

Especially, I think, in America not much people knows the meaning of practice. And even in Japan, too, you know, it is—in Japan, I think there are—they have wrong understanding of layman and priest. The priest is, you know—priests are quite different Buddhist from layman. But that is not right. So although priests practice zazen, layman doesn't. Layman don't practice zazen. Of course, some of them do. But quite few people practice zazen. They understand—they think zazen practice is too difficult, you know, for layman, so the priest only should practice zazen. But that is—they have this kind of idea. So I think most of Japanese people doesn't understand why we practice zazen. It is not matter of layman or priest. For all of us, it is necessary to practice zazen: not only Buddhist but also for all followers of various religion.

But zazen practice is not just personal practice. Buddhist practice is for each one of ourselves and for the others too. And to help themselves and to help others is the purpose of practice and reason why we practice zazen.

I think it is—now it is the time to practice zazen for—with every one of us. So if you realize this point, our practice is not just, you know, for ourselves. And we should know this point. Al- [partial word]—I know the American people are very individualistic, you know, and so their practice is very sincere. I know that. But their practice is just—tend to be just for himself. And so if he think, you know, he has—he thinks he has freedom of choice whether you should practice—whether he should do it or not. But we—actually we don't practice our zazen just for ourselves. And here I feel some difficulty, some, you know—in spreading our true way in America. Maybe, you know, personally I think you may have very good teachers. But—and good teacher will give up personal things, you know, and sacrificing their—his own life, and he may devote himself to the practice in its true sense. But people may think, you know: "That is just," you know, "his choice. It doesn't," you know—"just his choice. So for him that may be," you know, "very good thing, but I don't—I don't," you know, "agree with

him." Or, "His practice is nothing to do with [laughs]—with me—with our life." So even though you have—you may have good teacher, I think you will appreciate his value, or his practice, his being so much—you may not appreciate him so much [corrects previous clause].

But that is, you know—that kind of understanding of individualism is not so good. Individualism, in its true sense, is very good. And our religion should be for each one of us, you know, first of all. He should do it for his own sake. He should not [be] concerned about other's criticism, you know. He should have strong determination to do it. In this point, individualism is very good. But if you think individualism is absolute, you know, teaching, like bible or scripture [laughs], it is, you know—we don't take that kind of understanding.

For Buddhist there is no absolute teaching. Even though it is good, we should know good side and bad side. We should know our tendency. We should know that it is human beings who believe in some kind of teaching. And human being originally has some difficulty to accept teaching as it is. Usually we accept teaching just to make some excuse for himself—for ourselves. You know, "In scripture," you know, "it is said so-and-so. So it is good to do so," [laughs] without thinking about it so much. "Scripture says this is American way. That is the Japanese way." You know, we don't accept teaching in that way. When you want to study—accept teaching, you should know what it is. American way is not always good. Japanese way is not always good. If there is good side, there must be bad side. So we should be very careful to accept the teaching. We should know the both sides of the one teaching.

You may say this is difference of the cultural background. So Buddhist—Buddhism should be extended or should be developed according to the cultural background. And, "In America there must be American Buddhism—in Ja- [partial word]—as Japanese," you know, "Buddhism, is based on or extended on the base of the Japanese cultural—culture."

But this is, you know—one of the important characteristic of Buddhism is whatever the, you know, cultural background is, Buddhism has some power to penetrate into the cultural background. We do not ignore the cultural background, but Buddhism is the deeper foundation of various cultural background. That is why, even though Chinese—Indian Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, and Japanese Buddhism are different, quite different, are very different, I may say, but there is some traditional, you know, understanding of Buddhism which is always the same.

So I think until you understand your culture, good side and bad side, and accept the Bud- [partial word]—accept Buddhism as a deeper, you

know, foundation of your culture, I think you—your effort will—you will make a vain effort. So we should know that all of us are just human being. You know, I am Japanese and you are American. But I think even though you say you are American, you know, I don't know who is true American and who is not [laughs].

Dick [Baker]—the other day Dick wrote me [from Japan] saying: "I thought," you know, "you are—you are not—I didn't know you are not so Japanese." But when I came to America I thought many people like me, you know, in Japan. The more he understand Japanese people, the more he understand how, you know, difficult Japanese was. If I am, you know, among you, even though I—if I don't wear this robe, I don't know, you know. You may—you don't think I am Japanese. But if you go to Japan, seeing people like me [laughs], you will immediately realize, "Oh, he is Japanese"—maybe especially you saw me from, you know, back. You know, "Oh, same figure is—same figure as you see in Japan. You will find same figure, you know, you saw in Japan in me, you know. But even, you know—I think that is the idea of Japanese, you know. If there is many people like me, you know—if you see many people like me, you will have idea of Japanese. But if I talk personally with you, there is no idea of Japanese or American. And if we are just here, even though I am Japanese, when I am talking with you like this, I have no idea of Japanese. And I don't think you have any idea of Japanese.

So "Japanese" or "American" is just idea. "American way" or "Japanese way," you say, but actually there is no such thing. There may be same, you know, people doing same thing, but it does not mean he is Japanese. People may say, you know, people may have some idea of Japanese, that's all. As Dōgen-zenji said: "No one say," you know, "he is—he is Zen Buddhist or Sōtō Zen student. No one calls himself Sōtō Zen student—teacher. But people may say he is Sōtō. But that does not mean we should call ourselves Sōtō students."

So we—when you make some excuse, you say: "This is—we are American people who is raised in American cultural background." I don't think that is proper—that is right. Actually, for each individual there is no American way or Japanese way. That is his own way. So he should—he is responsible for his own way of life and understanding.

And—and I think we should not try to propagate Zen in America, you know. That is not Dōgen-zenji's way. One by one is enough. If we have, you know, good understanding between your friend, that is enough. If you love someone, you know, you should try to make—make him understand you. That's all. That is quite natural for us. But we should not try to propagate Sōtō Zen or Rinzai Zen in America. It is same thing, you know, [to] try to force Japanese way—way of life to American people, or American way of life to Japanese people, which

is not really exist.

That which exist in its true sense is, you know, mutual understanding between one and the other. I think that is true Buddhism in its true sense. We have—all human being or living being has fundamental tendency to try to find out some composure in identifying himself to others, you know. If some worm or frog—frog stay in green, you know, leaves, they change their color to the green—into green. That kind ... *[Sentence not finished. Tape turned over.]*

But we have to realize a deeper, you know, nature than—than we feel or than we feel or see. We have deeper nature which is called buddha-nature, which is not various nature—or which is not one of the various nature, but which is the basic nature for various nature. Deeper nature than we see. That is human tendency, you know, to identify ourselves to—to the majority. But, that is—for us, that is the nature to be aware of, or to be careful about, rather than to follow it with our eyes, our thinking mind, our five senses stopped [?], and our reason stopped [?]. That is the nature we should be careful about.

But most people, you know, make some excuse, numbering various nature we have. One by one, when we face to the problem, we should know our nature. And we should be careful our nature, not to stop our—not to limit our basic nature, so that we can extend our fundamental basic nature without any trouble.

So it is important to know American way or Japanese way. But more important thing is to know our own cultural background, and to have eyes to see our—each one's own cultural background, and what kind of tendency you have. If so, it—it may be very helpful for you to have Japanese friend and for Japanese to come to America and study Japanese way, or to have—to listen to criticism of [by?] American people. Then we will be aware of our tendency, which is difficult to—to notice. Not to, you know, not just to stick to American way or Japanese way, but to know our weak points. This kind of effort should be continued.

You think you have, you know—as you are in America, you know, I think you—you may say: "We have no cultural background."
[Laughs.] But you have. You, you know—I noticed, you know, many, you know, characteristic of American people. That is, you know, your cultural background. Here at Tassajara what are you doing is not just American way or Japanese way. And we are studying what should be our human way, day after day. There may be many reasons why I came to American without knowing this kind of thing. When I came to America, you know, what I thought was: "Anyway, we are all human beings [laughs], so I think I can survive" [laughter]. That was what I knew—only thing what I knew. I, you know, I didn't know where is

San Francisco, even. Anyway I came to—I bought a ticket [laughs, laughter], and I came to America. That's all. And, you know, I was rather angry if people say, you know: "He is Japanese" [laughs], you know. Why I am Japanese? You know, those who come to America is American people, you know. Whatever nationality he is, they are all American people.

Some of them must have come a long time ago, but all of them, anyway, except Indian—American Indian—they are people who came from other country. Why they call me Japanese? And, you know, sometime: "That is Japanese way." Why? I didn't know myself. But now Dick wrote me, "I find—I found—at last I found you typical Japanese," you know. And I realize, "Oh, maybe so." Because there are many people like me. It may take pretty long time to study the true relationship between various, you know, people—various—various kinds of people. But I think we should start to study our basic human nature.

And we should start to study our weak point. If you want to be really strong, you should know your weak point. Without knowing your strong—weak point, you cannot be really, in its true sense, cannot be strong person. And if you don't know your weak point, you will have various worry, and you will have various problem, and you don't have real courage to do something. If you know your weak point, you know—because you know, "My weak point is here," you know, so you—you know how to protect yourself from it. But if you don't know where is your weak point, you will—you must have protect yourself covering [laughs, laughter] all parts of your body. Maybe best thing is to enter a big bag [laughs]. That will—may be the best way, but you cannot survive in that way. So you should know the weak point only, and protect weak point and extend strong arm, you know. If one—left arm is, you know, not so weak [strong] you should fight with right arm. If you don't know which is—which is stronger, you don't know what to do.

A scroll given to me by my teacher¹ says: "Piece of stone in the air. Piece of—piece of stone in the air." [Laughs.] "Piece of stone in the air." It means that the created problem, not real problem. There is no stone in the air. There may be bubbles, you know, but there is no stone in the air. But we create—we hit against stone in the air, always. "Oh!" That is what we are doing. If you know, you know, real, you know, problem, you will not hit against so many stones which doesn't exist, you know. Maybe—sometime there may be stone in the air—even in the air. But there—there is—I don't think there is so many stones in the air [laughs]. So if you know that there is stone, you know, but you know the way to go through the room even though

¹ Kishizawa Ian-zenji. (See *Crooked Cucumber*, p. 382, for a discussion of this scroll.)

several stones [are] in the air. But most people has many stones in the air, not only one piece of stone. That is, you know, the problems we have because we don't know ourselves.

Most—most of the problem are the problem we create because we don't know ourselves. If you know yourself, you will have, you know, problem. But that is actual problem which will help you—help your way of life. It is much better to have some problem than no problem. If you want to help others, the best way may be not to involve others in the problem you created [laughs]. Not only you have, you know, various problem created by yourself. You may involve many people in your problem, in your created problem. If you stop doing it, that may be great help, I think.

I may, you know, point out [laughs] something, you know, always, but it does not mean to criticize you. Because it may be difficult for you to —to know your weak point, I may point out, you know, sometime. So don't be angry with me [laughs] too much, okay?

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Tanya Takacs and Bill Redican (2/1/01). Date was changed from 6/31/69 to 7/1/00 because 6/31 was impossible, and 7/1 was a Tuesday (a common day for lectures at that time in Tassajara).