

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Winter Sesshin, Lecture No. 1
WAY-SEEKING MIND, Part I
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Tassajara

... mind.¹ Without this way-seeking mind, our practice does not work. We say "just to sit," or *shikantaza*. Only when we have a strong way-seeking mind, just to sit make sense. Without this mind, just to sit means maybe—will mean just to sit mechanically and formally. The way-seeking mind—when way-seeking mind vitalize the form you have in zazen may be actualized and make sense.

People say "form" or "spirit"—but to—actually, you know, maybe if you do something without intellectual understanding, without knowing why you do it, you know, that is, you know, formal practice. We—usually we understand in this way without knowing what it is, you know—just to imitate, or just to do something as others do, or in the way you are told to do is the formal practice.

And knowing what is the actual reason, maybe, and practice something is more spiritual way. But actually, you know, Zen is not something which you can understand it. Intellectual understanding cannot reach the true understanding of Zen. So only way is by actual practice to find out the meaning of it is our way because intellectual understanding does not make much sense. If you have no way-seeking mind, your, you know—even though the only way to—only approach to the enlightenment is practice, but practice without way-seeking mind is dead practice.

That is why we put emphasis on way-seeking mind, because intellectual understanding does not work. If, you know, intellectual understanding is proper approach to the enlightenment, then there will not be—no need to put emphasis on way-seeking mind. But intellectual understanding—we do not, you know, take intellectual approach, but actual—by actual practice, we find the true approach to the enlightenment. But without way-seeking mind, you know, the practice cannot be actual practice because of the lack of the spirit.

When I was—when I was studying at Komazawa [University], I was—at that time I was studying, you know, [with] Takada. Professor Takada taught us education—what is formal education and what is real education. And his, you know, understanding of formal education is opposite, you know, to—for an instance, to read scripture without anything—without knowing what it is, like you recite *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*. That is real, you know, approach—real education. And to, you

¹ First words missing on tape.

know, to explain what is the meaning of the sūtra and let them understand what it is—is according to him, that is formal—or that formal education he says. [Laughs].

At that time, you know, we had to, you know—we have to note whatever he says [laughs]. When I was, you know, taking note, I thought it is funny. Maybe my, you know, misunderstanding that it looks like opposite [laughs], I thought. But anyway, I came home and checked up my note again, but in my note and my friend's note was same: "Formal education is to explain, you know, what it is—what it means. And more actual education is to, you know, to let them read whatever it is [laughs] without explaining it." "That is," he said, "that is more actual, you know, education." [Laughs.] I couldn't understand, but because I couldn't understand I remember it still [laughs]. What I could understand [laughs] I forgot, but only what I couldn't understand I remember. And now I think after I started zazen, I could understand what he meant [laughs].

But if you have no, you know, way-seeking mind, the only way, maybe—first of all you should understand it by here, you know [probably pointing to his head]. And if it is—if you think it is good, you will start your practice. Actually, in that way, you can—I don't say you cannot, but it takes long, long time because you—your study will go round and round and round same area, you know, until you are—you get tired of [laughs] trying to understand what it is.

The best way—it looks like foolish—it looks like silly to—to do as what—only—only because what is—because—only because you are told [laughs] to do so by Shākyamuni Buddha. Looks very silly, but even though it looks like silly, best way is to do it actually without thinking what it means so much. This is very important point. The purpose of our practice is, of course, to get rid of small idea of—idea of small self.

When you say, "If it is good," you know, "I will do it." [Laughs.] That—that is—that is, you know, big small self [laughs]—very big small self—maybe this much. [Laughs.] "If I," you know—"if you convince me," you know, "to do so, I will do it. I will do it. If I could agree with you, I will do it." [Laughs.] Big self, you know.

So your practice is based on big small self [laughs]. That doesn't work [laughs, laughter]. When you forget, you know, small self or big self and just do it and feel it, that is the actual approach to the reality. That is a direct experience, we say. And thinking mind will be a barrier of direct experience

Whatever it is, for an instance, if you eat it, you know, you will have actual taste of it. And you will—you can eat it, but, you know, if it is—if you think nibble a little bit and [see?] whether it is good or bad

[laughs]. Most food, you know, will not be so good for you. "Ah, this is too sweet. This is too fishy [laughs]. This smell is funny smell; I don't know what it is [laughs]." You can never appreciate its taste properly as it is. If you—anyway—I think only way to taste—to taste a real taste of the food is to eat it [laughs] and chew it without thinking, and without thinking what it is. Then it may be you can eat it and you can appreciate the food even though afterwards you are told that what you eat was head of the snake [laughs] or smashed [laughs] head of the snake with *shōyu* sauce [laughs, laughter]. "But it was very good!" you may say.

That is, you know, how to taste the real taste of the thing. You know, if you think what it—if you ask me—ask [laughs]—if you—if you ask what it is, and if you are told this is smashed snake with *shōyu* sauce [laughs, laughter], you will never eat it. But it is—I think it is foolish, you know, not to eat it when it is so good. You know, whatever it is, it doesn't matter. It is not poisonous, and it—so best way is to practice in our way, and to have direct experience of it.

You may think—you may understand if I say in this way, how much difficulties we have just because of thinking mind—just because of, you know, your understand- [partial word]—intellectual understanding. Zazen practice is to bet- [partial word]—to be ready for eating everything, experiencing everything, and to have true understanding—actual, real understanding of things.

The way-seeking mind arise when we understand how silly we are, you know, even though you, you know—we look like very wise—even though you look like very sophisticated—but how silly we are [laughs]. Then you will have real way-seeking mind. We should not be so silly. That is way-seeking mind.

I promised with my *jisha*² not to talk so long time [laughs]. So I don't know what time it is. Maybe better not to appeal to my thinking mind. My lecture is finished.

Thank you very much. [Laughs, laughter.]

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Katharine Shields (7/18/00) and Bill Redican (7/20/00).

² Traditionally, a monk who attends the head monk.