

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
WINTER *SESSHIN* LECTURE NO. 6
Thursday, December 4, 1969
Tassajara

Our *sesshin* is already nearing to the end. As I said before, this *sesshin* will not come back again. So we must make best effort in our practice. And when you want to [make] best effort in our practice, of course we have to practice zazen seriously.

But at the same time, tomorrow we will have *shōsan*¹ ceremony. And the day after tomorrow morning we will have *jōdō-e*.² Those ceremonies should be observed as if you practice zazen. And when you [are] in zendō, when you do something, there is some—there is rules. Rules we have in zendō is called "pure rules." Pure means oneness—oneness of the rules and who observe rules. And the students and rules should be always one. That one student—where one student is, there should be rules. And rules should be taken care of by all of us as if you take care of your zazen. That is why we call it pure precepts—pure rules. So rules we have in zendō is not some rules which is set up by someone for some purpose.

So the difference between the usual rules and our rules is [that] our rules has freedom in it. The rules which has no freedom in it is not pure rules. The restricted side and freedom side in our pure rules is one. And how we take care of rules is how we take care of our practice—zazen practice.

Buddha said it is—those who take care of our mind, which means zazen practice, should be [like?] a man who take care of reservoir for irrigation. The bank—we should take care of bank. Bank is rules. As if, you know, a farmer take care of the reservoir, we should take care of our everyday life and organize our everyday life so that we can practice zazen. So where we have good practice, naturally good rules or pure rules is observed, or else we cannot continue our zazen practice. So whatever you do, it should be well taken care of.

Sometime most people, maybe, thinks zazen practice is something special practice, and everyday life is something quite different from our practice, and attitude of everyday—attitude in everyday life and way we observe zazen changes. That is not the monastic life. Especially during *sesshin*, whatever you do, that is the extended practice of zazen practice. And I want you to observe *shōsan* ceremony and *jōdō-e* for Buddha's enlightenment day—would be

¹ The head monk (*shuso*) answers questions in a formal ceremony.

² *jōdō-e*: Ceremony performed on the anniversary of Shākyamuni Buddha's enlightenment. In Japan it is observed on December 8.

observed like we practice zazen.

I think you made a great progress in your practice. I am rather amazed at your progress. So I think we must make our bank of reservoir higher, higher, and higher so that wisdom water does not leak. So—so we must take care of leakage of the high bank. The—if the bank is high, you know, small leakage will become a big one. So it is necessary for us to make our bank higher, and at the same time we must pay a great care for the leakage.

Small leakage cannot be ignored now. Some mistake for beginner may be all right anyway. The wisdom water is not so deep, so damage will not be [laughs] so big anyway. But when we have big amount of wisdom water, I think we must have—will have pretty very hard time to take care of the reservoir we have, like we have upstream.

Especially I am very grateful for the—for your old students who is taking care of the leakage of the bank. Our practice, bodhisattva practice, is not—through and through—is not just personal practice. And the—all the people who flow into the reservoir will be a one big wisdom lake, and there we must have good practice.

If—but if you come in the deep water, you will be drowned because it is pretty deep, you know. You know, something good for foolish one is —will give him a big damage. For a plant it is necessary to have rain. But for weak, you know, small—small shoot of or seed of, for an instance *daikon*³ [laughs]—do you know *daikon*? It is very small seed. If it rain hard, the seed will be, you know, lost. Even though rain is good for plants, but it is not always good. So each one of us should take care of ourselves so that we should—we wouldn't be lost in high water.

And we should not [track] dirt in zendō, you know, with dirty shoes. Zendō is always cleaned up and taken care of by us. But someone carelessly will [track] dirt in zendō with dirty shoes. That kind of things always happen. So Dōgen-zenji, in his rules of monastery, [says] if you come—if you dirt in—if you come to monastery by mistake—by mistake—you should go out. This is very important. In zendō we don't sit so much. Although we have various unwritten wo-[partial word]—rules, we do not talk about it so much, and it looks like a big freedom in zendō. So someone, you know, may feel very good to play with dirty shoes in zendō. But, you know, we should be—he should be ashamed of it if he found out what kind of place zendō is.

The—some poem says, "Don't you see the red flower? It is autumn,"⁴

³ *daikon*: Large white winter radish.

⁴ A seven-day period around the autumn equinox (September 23 or 24), when many red flowers are in bloom, is traditionally observed in Japan, The

you know. In autumn we have—in Japan, we have, you know, *hyakujiko*,⁵ you know. It means red flower which last one hundred days—*hyakujiko*—and its skin is very slippery and smooth. And the—not much bulk on it, and the bark is brown. And small leaves and—and red—pink—thick pink color. "Don't you see the flower of *hyakujiko* or *saru-suberi*?"⁶ We say *saru-suberi*—*saru-suberi*—monkey slips. Monkey—it—the bark is so slippery, so even the monkey will slip [laughs]. "Don't you see the flower of *hyakujiko*?" Those are nothing but the blood of former teachers.

So we, you know, just—when we see the *hyakujiko*, we just say, "Oh, beautiful flower!" [Laughs.] Maybe that's all, you know. If you have no experience of real freedom of life, what kind of freedom is really—real freedom? You know, "Oh, beautiful flower!" Maybe that's all. But that is nothing but the blood of—blood of ancient teachers. You say "just Tassajara zendō" [laughs]. You may say, "Oh, wonderful place!" You may say it has hot springs and a calm nice place, you may say. But it is the result of the effort of ancient teachers.

The ceremony we have—we had—we—today looks like, you know, simple but those ceremony is observed—originated, maybe, in China—Hyakujō⁷—and observed in China and introduced to Japan by Dōgen and many Zen masters, and has been observed for maybe one thousand years. To you it is something unfamiliar ceremony. But those are the blood of our ancient teachers.

It is rather difficult for me to observe those ceremony with the same spirit I observe it in old zendō. It is rather difficult. And so I'm sorry, you know, I lose the spirit of observing or taking it. But I hope by your help, by your respect to the ancient teachers, those ceremonies will be observed with some respect and with some spirit. Even one word, when it is said with true spirit, it will give you a great, deep feeling.

Perhaps I may be too friendly with you, you know. Maybe I was Americanized quite a lot [laughs, laughter]. I think that is maybe good, and sometime it is not so good. And as you want me to be more strict and to be more like Zen master, you know [laughs, laughter], I'm happy to be strict. But, you know, I cannot be strict when you don't understand, you know. It is rather difficult.

Buddhist term for this period is *higan*. The poem or line cited by Suzuki-rōshi may be from *Manyōshū*, an anthology of 4500 poems from 5th-century Japan.

⁵ From *hyaku*, "hundred," + *jiko*, "-----".

⁶ *saru-suberi* (Jap.): *Lagerstroemia indica* L., the crêpe (crape) myrtle tree (Eng.) or monkey-slip tree (Jap.); from Jap. *saru*, "monkey," + *suberi*, "slip."

⁷ Baizhang Huaihai (Jap. Hyakujō Ekai): 720–814. Disciple of Baso Dōitsu.

I feel as if I am playing game with you [laughs]. Maybe I am playing game with you. But it should not be like this. We should not waste this valuable time, especially when we have—with a great effort when we have build up some spirit so far.

I am very grateful for your effort. And with mutual trust I think we will have good concluding ceremony for this training period.

Thank you very much.



Saru-suberi tree (Lagerstroemia indica L.)

Source: Original City Center tape transcribed by Diana Bartle (10/20/00) and checked by Bill Redican (3/26/01).