

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**MUDRĀ PRACTICE AND HOW TO ACCEPT INSTRUCTIONS FROM**  
**VARIOUS TEACHERS**  
**Sunday Morning, July 26, 1970**  
**San Francisco**

This morning, I want to talk about our practice, as usual [laughs], as—especially when we have various teachers. So far we had Tatsugami-rōshi<sup>1</sup> and Yoshida-rōshi.<sup>2</sup> And you will be—you will have—your practice must be confused a little bit [laughs], this way or that way [laughs]. But actually for you there is only one practice. There is no need to be confused when you have right understanding of our practice of Dōgen-zenji. But I don't say Dōgen-zenji's way, this way, or that way.

For advanced students, what I want to talk about will be easily understood. You know, for an instance, when you, you know—about *mudrā* you have in your zazen. Keizan-zenji,<sup>3</sup> you know, says: "Put your mind on your *mudrā*, or in your palm." And some teacher—Yoshida-rōshi says—say: "Put your thumb on your middle finger, like—over your middle finger." Some other teacher says, you know, "put your thumb—have a vertical line by [between] your pointing finger and thumb, like this [presumably gestures]."

Recently what—I notice that some—some of you [laughs] [were] doing this too much this way. Someone's finger—finger—thumb is not right over middle finger, you know. Maybe [laughs] like this. Going the extreme, you know, like this. That is not what Yoshida-rōshi said. This is too much.

We say if you—if your thumb is too much like this, it means that your mind will be contaminated, you know, too rigid and too narrow. [Loud sound of a falling object.] Uh-oh [laughs, laughter]. If your, you know, thumb is too much like this, you know, your mind is too open or too easy, or, you know, too much free, you know. So when—when your finger—thumb is like this, or just in right place, someone may say "this" or will say "this [that]," but it should not be like this, or should not be too—or inside.

The point is, you know, the point is, to let you—let your hands practice zazen and find your *mudrā*—right posture, and let your *mudrā* practice zazen, you know. When you practice zazen, you are not putting your

<sup>1</sup> Tatsugami Sōtan Ryosen: *Ino-rōshi* of Eihei-ji temple in Japan. Head of training at Tassajara in 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Yoshida Eshun. Teacher of *okesa* sewing in the lineage of Hashimoto-rōshi.

<sup>3</sup> Keizan Jōkin (1268-1325). Fourth patriarch of Japanese Sōtō Zen.

thumb this way, or—outside or inside too much. Just find good place for them to practice zazen, for *mudrā* [to] practice zazen, and it is not you are controlling your *mudrā*. Let—let it have the right practice. That is the—how you adjust your *mudrā*.

So when you do like this, when you practice zazen, your *mudrā* is also practicing zazen, for your *mudrā* is independent from your practice and your—as your practice is independent practice, including all the practice—all the practices—all the Buddha's practice, when you practice zazen, all the Buddhas also practicing zazen.

And as your *mudrā* is practicing zazen, you yourself is also practicing zazen, and every part of your body is practicing zazen. In—with this, you know, feeling or idea, if you practice zazen, that is real practice. Here you will have some question. When actually your legs has pain, or when actually you find it difficult to have good *mudrā*, you know, it—it may be necessary to have some idea controlling your *mudrā* this way or that way.

Here, Dōgen-zenji's—there is Dōgen-zenji's answer for that. He says: "For the beginner, if there is no idea of this way or that way [laughs], that is not true practice," he says. For beginner—for beginners there must be some rules, or some idea of controlling, or having this posture or that posture, or which is right or which is wrong. There must be some idea of right or wrong, good or bad. If there is no idea of good or bad for beginner, that is not right practice either, he says. I think this is very true. I think for most of you it is necessary to—to force or to make some effort, you know, to keep right posture.

If you, you know, let your necks—neck or *mudrā* practicing—practice zazen as they like [laughs], it will not be good practice either. So he says—Dōgen-zenji says: "It is necessary to have some idea of practice, good practice or bad practice, but true pra- [partial word]—in the true practice, there is no idea of controlling or—controlling your physical posture. It should be quite natural with your hand, with your legs, and with your necks—neck, and every part—part of your body.

Here is Dōgen-zenji's poem:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Waka* 19-J (composed in 1247):

***Shōbōgenzō***

*Nami mo hiki  
kaze mo tsunaganu  
sute obune  
tsuki koso yawa no  
sakai nari keri.*

**Treasury of the True Dharma Eye**

In the heart of the night,  
the moonlight framing  
a small boat drifting,  
tossed not by the waves  
nor swayed by the breeze.

From Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dōgen*, Boston: Tuttle, 1997, pp. 36-

Tide ebbed, tide ebbed, no blowing wind,  
an abandoned boat on the lonesome shore,  
the moonlight shining meets sky—midnight sky.

Tide ebbed, no blowing wind,  
an abandoned boat on the lonesome shore,  
the moonlight shining midni- [partial word]—midnight sky.

This is actually, you know, Dōgen-zenji's, you know, Dōgen-zenji—  
Dōgen-zenji's practice:

Tide ebbed, no blowing wind,  
an abandoned boat on the lonesome shore,  
the moonlight shining midnight sky.

The ebbed tide, no blowing wind, an abandoned boat, and the moonlight. Those are one whole, you know, beautiful picture of seashore in—in a—in midnight—in a midnight. The moon—the moon is practicing zazen. A boat without anyone, you know [laughs] boat—abandoned boat—boat on the shore is practicing zazen, where is—where there is no wind and no tide coming. No wind disturbing his practice. No tide or wind is disturbing the boat, but above the sky the big moon is shining calmly. So you may say the moon does not control anything, the abandoned ship is not disturbed by anything. They are—each of them are practicing complete zazen. And those are—but this whole picture is also the picture of zazen practice or of whole world in the midnight.

But if you don't understand the point of zazen, you don't understand this picture in this way. You may put emphasis on the moon or on the abandoned ship. But if you, you know, see the abandoned ship that will be the point of this picture, but if you see the moon the moon will be the point of this whole picture. But actually both abandoned ship and the moon is—can be the point of this picture. But there is no two points [laughs], but one point. But that one point could be, you know, boat or the moon.

So your practice could be practice of the *mudrā*. So I think that is why Keizan-zenji said: "Put your mind on your palm." Here, right here. At that time, the *mudrā* is practicing zazen, not you [laughs]. But if you don't understand what Keizan-zenji really meant—"If you don't put your mind on your palm, that is not true zazen," [laughs] you may say. That is wrong understanding. When you practice real zazen, you know, actually, you know, the palm is—your *mudrā* is practicing zazen. So naturally the mind of the *mudrā* will be on the *mud*- [partial word]—in the *mudrā*.

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Keizan-zenji is not emphasizing some particular practice of putting mind on your *mudrā*, and he does not say if you do not put your *mudrā* on your, you know, hands, on your palm, that is not true practice. In the true practice, you know, actually *mudrā* is practicing zazen with its own mind, and *mudrā* is—practice—*mudrā's* practice—zazen practice include your practice and practice of whole world.

So Dōgen-zenji said: "If your practice does not include everyone's practice, that is not true practice." I am talking about actual feeling in your practice. I'm not [laughs], you know, I'm not talking about some particular practice of mind. When you reach—when you have that kind of, you know, feeling or interpretation of zazen, with its actual feeling, I think that is so-called-it Dōgen-zenji's *shikantaza*.

If you practice, you know, in that way, you will not be confused by various teachers' instructions. Various teachers' ins- [partial word]—instruction has some, you know, purpose, some reason why he—why they say so. If you understand why they say so, you will, you know—various teachers' instruction will help you. But if you bec- [partial word]—it is, you know, very—very usual for us to say: "This is the right posture, this is not right posture, he is good teacher, and he is not good teacher." But when you, you know, sincerely practice your own practice, you know, seeking for the maturity of your practice, various teachers' instruction will be a good food for your practice, and you will appreciate various teachers' instructions. And you will not understand—accept their instructions with hasty mind. You will carefully, you know, ask: "What does it mean?" And you will carefully show your way to him—to them, and ask their advice. Then you will have good instruction.

Actual zazen practice is not something which you can, you know, explain in some—in—in—in your book, you know, this way or that way [laughs]. That is almost impossible, because each one of us has different difficulties in our practice. That is why you must have your teachers, and you must have *dōkusan* with your teacher.

So Dōgen-zenji says: "The point of practice is practice of zazen, actual practice of zazen." And *sanshi monpō*<sup>5</sup>—*dōkusan*—to ask instruction from your teacher. Both is necessary, he says.

I want you to, you know, to practice more carefully and more sincerely our zazen. Constant, you know, effort, constant careful effort is necessary for your zazen, or it is not zazen—actual zazen. As Sekito-zenji said: "Step by step," you know, "observing things, you should practice zazen, or else even though you practice zazen it will not make any sense. And don't say 'this way or that way.' And don't set up any

<sup>5</sup> *San* (visit); *shi* (master); *mon* (ask about); *pō* (dharma)—Japanese.

rules. And don't be restricted by some rules."

So if you—when your—your practice is sincere enough, then, you know, you cannot be restri- [partial word]—restricted in some particular way of practice. Day by day, year after year, your practice will make some progress, and then—then your—your way of practice will be changed. So there could be any particular wa- [partial word]—actual way, actual—special way. [*Sentence appears to have been finished. Tape turned over.*]

... your practice is not sincere. Practice you are talking about is someone's practice [laughing]—maybe Yoshida-rōshi's practice or Tatsugami-rōshi's practice, and not your practice. Putting aside your practice and talking about someone's practice doesn't mean anything. If you—if some teacher said: "This is—will be the be- [partial word]—good way," then you should, you know, actually think if that is appropriate practice for you or not, and you should ask question. Then, you know, you will have your own practice.

Anyway, I am very grateful to have various teachers for—for you, and to have various instructions from various teachers. Actually we need more teachers, but unless you have, you know, real—unless you know how to practice zazen, no one can help you. You know, in the heavy you know, rain may wash away the seed, small seed like sesame [laughs] when it has no root [laughs]. We should not be like a sesame without—without roots [laughs]—without its own roots. Because if you have no roots in your practice, you will be washed away. But if you have really a good root, even your sesame—your practice is like sesame—like—the heavy rain will help you a lot. So I want you not to lose our good—our good chance to practice our way.

Thank you very much.

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