

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
SESSHIN LECTURE NO. 1
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Purpose of *sesshin* is to be completely one with our practice. That is purpose of *sesshin*. *Sesshin*. *Sesshin* means— We use two Chinese characters for *setsu*. *Setsu* means to treat or, you know, like you treat your guests or like a teacher [student?] treat his teacher, is *setsu*. Another *setsu* is "to control" or "to arrange things in order." Anyway, it means to have proper function of mind.

When we say "control," something which is controlled is our five senses and will, or mind, Small Mind, Monkey Mind which should be controlled. And if—why we control our mind is to resume to our true Big Mind. When Monkey Mind is always take over big activity of Big Mind, you know, we naturally become a monkey [laughs]. So Monkey Mind must have his boss, which is Big Mind.

And when we say "Big Mind," then while we practice zazen, it is the Big Mind controlling the Small Mind. It is not so, you know, but only when Small Mind become calm, the Big Mind, you know, start to start its true activity. So in our everyday life, almost all the time, we are involved in activity of Small Mind. That is why we should practice zazen and we should be completely involved in this kind of practice.

Good example of our practice is, you know, a turtle, you know, which has four legs, you know, and head and tail—and six, you know, six parts of his body is sometime outside of the shell, sometime inside [laughs]. We must have that kind of, you know, activity. Sometime, you know, our head and tail and legs should be out [laughs], or else you cannot eat or anything. You cannot walk. So when you want to eat or go out [laughs, laughter], four legs should be out. [Laughs.] But if it is always out, you will be caught by something [laughs]. So, you know, in case of danger, you know, you should [laughs] draw up all the legs and head and tail. This is *sesshin* [laughs, laughter]. For, you know, one week our [laughs] head and tail and legs should be inside of the shell. Then, you know, no one can catch you [laughter, laughs]. In scripture said even demon or devil cannot destroy you if you, you know, are inside of the shell—if your six parts of your body inside of—actually, six means five senses and, you know, mind.

But in zazen we do not try to stop thinking, you know, or we do not try to listen or hear or see anything. But we, you know—if something appears in your mind, leave it, you know. And if you hear something, you should hear it, and you should just accept it, you know. "Oh

[laughs], that's all." No second activity appears in your zazen—should not appear. Sound—that is one activity. Second one is, "What is the sound? Is a motor car or, you know, or garbage car, or something?" you know. That is second notion, second activity. If you hear it, that's all, you know. You hear. If you see, that's all. You have no—you don't make any judgement. You do not figure out what it is. Just open your eyes and see something. Maybe when you practice zazen, you may, you know, try to make some sense by what you are watching, you know. What, or "It looks like river" [laughs]. "It looks like dragon" [laughs]. While you are thinking, you should not do so, you know [laughs]. When you are sitting pretty long time, you know, watching same place [laughs, laughter], it may look like, you know, various things [laughs, laughter]. It may be good idea, you know, to kill time [laughs], but it is not *sesshin*.

It may be good idea to be concentrated on something, you know, but to have good-concentrated mind is not zazen, you know. It is not zazen. Of course, it is one of the many elements of the practice, but calmness of mind is necessary, and you shouldn't intensify five sense organs' activity. You should just leave your sense organs as they are. That is how you free your true mind, or how you open your true mind. Only when you can do so in everyday life you will have soft mind. You don't have not much preconceived idea. Some bad habit of your way of thinking will not appear so strongly. It will appear, but it will not appear so strongly. And you will have generous mind and Big Mind, and what you will say will help others.

I think you have *Zuimonki*. If you read *Zuimonki*,¹ you will understand why we practice zazen. One night, he [Dōgen] talked to his students and said, "This story is—the story I was told by someone, so I am not sure if that is correct or not." But he said some influential person, Ichijō Motoie, you know, maybe his—he may not be his direct relative but was one of the many relative. One day his sword was stolen, you know, and they knew that no one else couldn't broke into, so they thought some of his men must have stolen it. So naturally they tried to find out, and the sword was found and took back to him. But Motoie said, "This is not my sword [laughs], this isn't—so give it back to someone who own it. This is not mine," he said. But most of the people knew that that man who had it had stolen that sword, but because he said he did not accuse of it, so no one couldn't say anything. So, you know [laughs], nothing happened [laughs, laughter]. That kind of, you know, calmness of mind is the mind we should have, he says.

And he emphasize, you know, life of bare life, you know. Hardly support him to live—something poor, you know—a bare life. Without

¹ Book 4, No. 16.

expecting anything, just practice our way. But many student asked him why that is possible, you know, without any plan—just to live and just to practice zazen, how is it possible to support his temple or his group? But he said, "When it is difficult to support our temple, we will think about it. But [laughs] until then, it is not necessary to think about it." [Laughs, laughter.]

So before something happens, to think about it too much is not our way. If we have generous Big Mind and if we have strong spirit of practice, then, you know, there is no need to worry about anything. That is the way how we have complete calmness of your mind. Because you have something, you should worry about it, but if you don't, there is no need to worry about losing it.

One night he said, "Even some teaching you think it is complete and right teaching, even though you think so, there may be someone who tell you better way. Then, you know, you should change your understanding of the teaching." In this way, we should improve our understanding of the teaching forever. That is our way. So even something you think which is completely right, you know, you shouldn't stick to it. It is right at that time, so because you think so, you followed the theory or rules, but you have some, you know, space in your mind to change the idea. That is soft mind [laughs].

Why, you know, is it possible for you to change your idea, you know, is because you know what kind of monkey is thinking [laughs, laughter]. So sometime he may follow monkey's suggestion—"Oh yeah [laughs, laughter], that's right [laughs]. If we go that direction, we may have some food. Okay, let's go!" [Laughs, laughter.] But if there is something better [laughs], he may say, "Oh monkey, maybe better to go this way!" [Laughs, laughter.] Because he is naturally he is a monkey, he may follow, you know. But if you stick to, you know, your greed or anger or some vulgar, you know, emotional mind, stick to the thinking mind, monkey mind, he cannot change his former notion.

So in our practice, we should rely on something great. So in that great area we should, you know, sit. The pain you have in your legs or some difficulty you have when you are sitting is something happened—something happened—something may happen in the great area. But as long as you do not lose the feeling that you are in the area of buddha-nature, you can sit, you know, even though you have some difficulties. But when you want to escape from it, or when you try to improve your practice or improve your being in that big area, that is—it means you created another problem for your being. But if you just exist there, then you will have chance to appreciate something which surround yourself, and you can accept yourself completely, without changing anything. That is our practice.

So it is a kind of belief or faith which is, of course, different from usual faith to believe in some concrete idea or being. But believing something which is supporting us and supporting all our activities—thinking mind or emotional feeling. All those things are actually supported by something big which has no form or color. Which is impossible to know what it is, but something exist there, not in the sense of material or spiritual, but something not material or not spiritual. We say "spiritual or material," but it is something more than that. Something like that always exist, and we exist in that area. When you feel in that way, that is right pure thinking. You feel in that way, that is pure feeling of being. Every activity should start from this, you know, kind of feeling.

When I was young, you know, many Zen masters says, "What is Buddha? Buddha is something which make bamboo bamboo [laughs], which make bamboo long [laughs], which make stone round." That is [laughs] buddha-nature, they said. I couldn't understand [laughs] because I wanted to figure out what it is, you know [laughs], and I didn't feel so good if I cannot, you know, figure out what it is in usual sense: big or small, right or wrong, good or bad. But if you practice zazen, and, on the other hand, if you realize how foolish we are, you know, if you see yourself like animals in the zoo [laughs, laughter], then you will understand who you are. Each time I go to the zoo, you know, I think, you know, animals may be very much interested of human being, or American people who is black, white [laughs], yellow, and many Americans, you know. I am [laughs] American too, you know. "Oh, he is also American! [Laughs, laughter.] How strange American he is!" [Laughs.] They may, you know, enjoy us, you know. Animals in San Francisco Zoo is very lucky, you know. [*Finished sentence. Tape change.*] If they are in Japan, you know, they always may see small [laughs, laughter] human being—small and short leg [laughs, laughter]. Not so interesting at all [laughs, laughter].

I don't say you should fool yourself, you know. It is exactly so [laughs]. But usually you say, "I am an American [laughs]," or, "I am a human being. So it is alright for us to kill animals, to eat animal." But that is not right. Maybe we have to eat, but, you know, it is not right. But while you are repeating the same thing, you know, you use, you know, you begin to think in that way. So you lose your pure thinking, pure observation of yourself.

If you practice zazen, if you are brave enough to throw yourself on the floor, you know [laughs], for seven days [laughs], you may be a little bit better—not too much, but [laughs, laughter] but that little bit is very important, you know. That little bit understanding will help your rigidness, you know, your stubbornness. Almost all the problems we create because of our stubborn mind will be vanish.

But actually, zazen help us not so much, you know, not so much. But if you know how to help yourself, you know, and if you know how valuable it is, if you have even smallest, you know, understanding of the reality, your, you know, way of thinking will completely change, and the problem you create will not be problem anymore. But as long as we live we have problem. And that is also true [laughs]. So you shouldn't think—you shouldn't practice zazen to, you know, attain some big enlightenment which will change your whole being [laughs]. That is not right understanding. That maybe so-called-it, you know, "Zen," you know, but true Zen is not like that.

Zen does not include all the teaching of Buddhism, but Zen—this kind of understanding will save various labor of studying so many scriptures. If you understand little bit of this, you know, if you read scriptures, it will make sense. You don't have to, you know, seek some truth in the scriptures we have. We even try to read all the scriptures. It maybe whole life job to read our scripture once, but if you don't know the point, you know, you have to, you know, seek for the truth in the scripture. If you know this point, all the scripture you will read will help you, will be a good nourishment for us.

In this *sesshin*, I think we will be concentrated to have experience or to have real experience of true practice. Forgetting all about gaining idea, we should just sit here. If this room is too cold, we will make it warm, and if your legs become painful, you can stretch your legs. And if it is too difficult, you know, you can rest, but we should continue our practice for seven days.

Thank you very much.

["For this seven-day sesshin, there are only transcriptions for lectures given on Days 1, 3, 5, 7, and the closing words. I don't know if those were the only lectures given, or the only ones recorded, or the only ones transcribed." —Brian Fikes.

One of the lectures on Day 2 of the sesshin, and maybe others, was given by Ryogen Yoshimura. —Bill Redican, May 2000.]

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