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ZAZEN TALK
Tuesday Evening, July 20, 1971
Tassajara

This lecture was the source for the chapter of *Not Always So* called "One with Everything" on p. 120.

I wanted to see you earlier, but I was too busy so I couldn't come.

Can you hear me?

Student: Yes.

Oh. Okay.

Anyway, it is very good to see you and Tassajara, which has improved a lot since I left here. Tonight my—I didn't have any idea of giving talk, but as you know, we have many guests and some of you may leave tomorrow, so I decided to talk a little bit—maybe, I said, ten minutes [laughs]. But it is rather difficult to say something in ten minutes, so I don't know how many minutes my lecture will last.

What I want to talk about tonight is something—some idea or some understanding of Buddhist which may not be unfamiliar to you.

We observe things in two ways. We understand that things have two sides. One is the phenomenal side. The other is, maybe, more an ontological side. Most of us understand things in the light of difference, like big or small, black or white, material or spiritual.

If we say "spiritual," usually it is something which is not material. But, according to Buddhism, even though you say "spiritual" that is not much different from the physical or materialistic side. "Spiritual" or "materialistic" we say, but those are, according to Buddhism, not much different. It belongs to the understanding of the phenomenal side of reality. Spiritual understanding, too, includes phenomenal understanding.

The other side is, as I said tentatively, the ontological side—a noumenal side which we cannot see. Before you existed, something existed in dharma: big or small, black or white, heavy or light, spiritual or material. Things looks like spiritual sometimes, material sometimes, but there is something before it can be spiritual or material. Let's think about this point more: spiritual and material.

When you think something material is quite different from something which is spiritual, that is not Buddhist understanding. We understand

spiritual, and material also, belongs to one side. There is a partition here [laughs], and spiritual and material also belong to this side. It doesn't belong to the other side.

So we say spiritual and materialistic things, spiritual being and materialistic being is one, not different. It belongs to this side. [Sighs.] Let us think about this very carefully. If you think a spiritual being is something different from material, then your life will be split in two [laughs]. One side of you want to be very spiritual [laughs]. The other side of you want to be material or physical or emotional. The other side of you may want to be more calm and good. So there is some separation. That is why you feel that kind of separation. Your understanding is not clear enough.

For instance, while you are alive, you think as long as you have a body, you are a physical being and only after you die, you will be a spiritual being. That kind of understanding is a very usual understanding. You may understand in that way. That is why you have problem after this. Or, even though you are still alive, if you lose your friend, then you feel very lonely because you think, so long as your friend is alive, he is with you, which is material or physical. But after your friend dies, he is changed into a spiritual being, leaving the physical body behind. People may call it "soul" or "spirit," but that is not our understanding. That is still the understanding you have in your mind—understanding of your mind or brain [laughs] in term of spiritual or material, because there is no right or wrong. You don't know the other side of something which you don't understand, which is not possible to understand. Even though we do not understand what it is, you cannot deny things which are not understood by your small mind. And you will know that to understand things in term of big or small, black or white, man or woman, is to put a limitation to actual being. Actually I am not just physical. I am spiritual too. But even though I say I am spiritual and physical, I put myself in the limitation of spiritual and physical. But the actual "me" is something more than spiritual and more than material.

So as long as you are trying to understand what is actual reality, what is actual "me," it is not possible to understand who you are. That is our way of understanding. If your understanding can reach this point, there is something more than spiritual and more than material, more than right or wrong, more than man or woman—and that is reality, and that is actually each one of you. Then you will have renunciation from good or bad, life or death. You will be free from the idea of good or bad, life or death.

Even though you try very hard to be very spiritual, still you exist on this side, ignoring the other side of yourself. That is why you suffer. If you really want to attain enlightenment and realize what is the real you, then you have to try to go beyond the idea of good or bad, life or death.

And how we can go beyond the idea of life or death, physical or spiritual, is zazen practice. So our practice should not be involved in "good practice" or "bad practice." You should be just you, and you shouldn't think anything. If something comes, let it come. But don't think about it in terms of good or bad. Let it come and let it go away [laughs]. Don't say "this is good" or "this is bad." Or don't think "it is not good to think"—to have something in your mind while you are practicing zazen.

That is actually our zazen practice: to go beyond various ideas and to be just yourself. And that is possible. If you think about yourself or if you think about someone, you or he is not spiritual or physical. You cannot say he is good or he is bad. Even though it looks like he is doing something wrong, it looks like that to you or to other people. But who says so? People say so. You say so [laughs]. But he is not good or bad.

In this society people have some kind of moral standard. Tentatively we have some moral code and say "this is good" and "this is bad." But it may change. If the moral code or standard of judging which is good and which is bad changes, then someone who was bad may be good, and someone who is bad can be good tomorrow [laughs] or in one or two years. It is as you must have experienced. So our world is changing rapidly.

When I was young there were many moral codes, many ideas of how we are involved in good and bad, ideas of good and bad: "You shouldn't do this or do that." But more and more we have less moral code. As Dōgen-zenji said, "There is, actually, no good or bad. There is no good and no bad. Good is up to the time. Time makes things good or bad, but things themselves are not good or bad," he said.

It is actually how things go, that's all. It is just a matter of cause and effect. Things go. Things which exist now will result in some effect, and that effect will cause another effect. Things go in that way, that's all. Actually there is no good or bad. What is going that way is the point. What is going in that way? Something which is not good or which is not bad is going [laughs]. That is the reality. Things going in that way. Anyway, everything is developing itself. By itself it is going. That's all.

So if we notice that who is developing, what is going in that way, something which is not good or bad is going in that way. And we say this is good or bad, that's all. We do not realize this point, and we say this is good or this is bad. I'm not talking about something invisible. I am talking about something we are actually—something we have with us always. [Laughs.] Do you understand? But the difference between your understanding and my understanding is you understand things in term of good or bad. You think there is a good person and bad person, but I don't understand in that way. Things are just going in that way. Anyway, things are going in that way, and you call it "good" and "bad," that's all.

If we realize this point, we have already realization. So when you sit in zazen, you are you. You cannot say, "My practice is good." Or you cannot say, "I am a bad person." Nor you can say, "I am a good person. My practice is perfect." [Laughs.] You cannot say so.

Anyway you are perfect [laughs] from the beginning. It is not necessary for you to say you are perfect. You are perfect, even though you don't realize you are perfect. That is why we say we are all buddhas and we have buddha-nature. And buddha-nature is developing itself constantly. We understand things in that way. We say, "I am here, and you are there." It is okay to say so, but actually, without me you don't exist. Without you I don't exist. [Laughs.] It is very true. Since I am here, you are there. Since you are there, I am here. [Laughs.] You may say even though I don't come to Tassajara you exist here and are waiting for me. That is [laughs] maybe so. Maybe so, but that is not perfect. I have been at 300 Page Street, and you have been with everything. I couldn't say goodbye to the building which is related to other things: freeway [laughs], and trees, and air, and everything, stars and the moon, the sun. If I was related to the sun and moon as you are related to the sun and moon, how is it possible to say I am there and you are here when we are always related? But just your mind says you are here and I am there, that's all.

So originally we are one with everything. That is very true. And if someone dies, you may say he is no more. But is it possible for something to vanish completely? That is not possible. Is it possible for something to appear [laughing] all of a sudden from nothing? Because there was something, it appears in that way. Something which is here cannot vanish completely. It can change its form. That's all.

So we are always one. It is just your superficial feeling to feel you are lonely. So if you are very sincere, and if you really give up your small mind, then there is no fear and no emotional problem. Your mind is always calm, and your eyes are always open, and you can hear the birds as they sing. You can see the flower as it opens. And then there is nothing to worry about, actually. And if there is something to worry about, it is a kind of treatment [laughs]—special treatment for you, as if you read some interesting novel; as if some writer writes about human life. It is interesting maybe, and to read it is very interesting. But it is not something to be afraid of or to feel lonely. So we can enjoy our life fully when we understand things in that way. That is the Buddhist way.

When I was flying back from the East the other day, I saw a beautiful sunset. The sunset lasts pretty long time if you fly from the East. If you leave, for instance, New York or Boston at six o'clock, you will arrive here at nine o'clock, up in the air more than 15,000 feet or more—sometimes 30,000 feet high. When people think it is dark and there is no more sun,

but if you are flying high up in the air, you have the sunset still and you can see beautiful clouds. It is wonderful to see. But someone may feel very lonely. But if you think you are, wherever you are, you are one with cloud and one with the sun and one with the stars you see, even though you jump out from the airplane, you don't go anywhere else. You are still with everything. That is very true. More true than I say, or more true than you hear.

I am not talking about something which is very strange or very mystical. You are mystical but I am not mystical. Your understanding is strange, but my understanding is not strange. Don't you think so? But it is you who feel in that way, just your superficial feeling feel in that way. It means that you are not truthful enough to the truth. Your feeling was not deep enough to feel something true. As Dōgen said, "People like that which is not true—people feel that which is not true, but they do not feel something true. [Laughs.] They like something which is not right. And they do not like that which is true." What he said is very true. Don't you think so?

We must be ashamed to feel something very superficial. If you are ashamed of yourself you should practice hard. You should be sincere enough to be yourself. That is our practice and that is our effort—our direction of effort. Our practice is heading that way. But usually your practice is heading the wrong way. Again, Dōgen said you shouldn't try to go south heading to the North Pole, heading to the dipper. After the lecture when you are going to your cabin you will see the dipper. Heading to the dipper it is impossible to go south. But people are trying to go south heading to north. And he says also, if you want to attain renunciation from birth and death, you shouldn't try to be out of birth and death—the problem of birth and death. Birth and death is our equipment for our life. Without birth and death we cannot survive. It is our pleasure to have birth and death. That is how we understand truth.

In short, don't be involved in making too much home-made cookies [laughs] in term of big and small, good or bad. You should make just as much as you need. Without cookies, without food you cannot survive, so it is good to make home-made cookies, but don't make too much. It is good to have problems, and without problems we cannot survive. So it is good. We must have problems. But not too much. You don't need to create problems for yourself when you have enough problems. You have just enough problems to survive. Not any more than you need, you have just enough problems. The problem you have us just enough for you. That is so-called "soft-minded practice."

After all, you can create a big problem for your children and for your wife. If some husband enjoys making home-made cookies, your wife will be upset [laughing]. Don't make so much! But that is not usually what we are doing. So if you really understand your life, it is not necessary to

practice zazen even. It is not necessary for me to come or stay in America. If you just make home-made cookies, make just enough for you. It is okay for me to come back to Japan and to eat Japanese cookies. As you make too much cookies, I have to eat [laughing]. I have to help you. It is not always so good job to eat home-made cookies. Actually that is what we are doing. If we realize this point and enjoy just enough home-made cookies, that is the Buddhist way. That is how to enjoy life and that is why we practice zazen.

We do not practice zazen to attain special enlightenment. Just to be ourselves and just to be free from useless effort or tendency of human nature we practice zazen.

Thank you very much.

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