

67-12-01.A [67-12-01-B]

12-1-67, morning
ZMC, sesshin

(edited by Brian F.)

In yesterday's lecture I told you why we practice zazen and what practice is. After all, at first our practice is different from the other activities we have in everyday life. Of course, according to our schedule, we practice zazen at certain times every day. So you may think, "Now it is time to have a meal, and now it is time to recite sutras, and now it is time to sit." You may think there is a lot of difference between zazen practice and other activities which you do. But actually, if you understand the true meaning of zazen, there is no difference. Whatever you do is zazen practice. Whatever you do is an expression of your true nature. And, if this is so, whatever we do is practice, true practice.

But, usually, because we do things with some aim, and we want to do them in a more perfect way, sometimes we're not satisfied with what we do, and sometimes we are pleased with what we do. When this kind of discrimination happens, that is not true activity anymore, or at least your understanding of the activity is not itself true activity. It is already a vague activity within your mind, and actually, Buddha's activity is no more.

So if you think zazen practice will be an unusual practice, therein lies a big misunderstanding. Zazen practice is fundamental practice. You should not always say, "Because of our practice the mountain is hard, because of our practice the sea is deep, because of our practice birds fly." It is actually so, but the bird does not know where he is. We do not know where we are, because we do not see anything in the air. But even if you do see something, although that is actually our true practice, you lose the real nature of the practice if you do not know the fundamental meaning of everyday life. And then you always complain about what you have to do, what you have done, or what you should do. You are always caught by something in your everyday life. You feel as if you are living in some second framework.

When you come to Tassajara you should observe our rules. But when you are doing this, you do not realize the true meaning of your life. This is the kind of framework within which you are caught. You think zazen is one of the things you have to do. But if you realize what our true practice is, you'll have no more of this kind of criticizing.

If you are practicing zazen because it gives you an advantage in your life, it is not practice in its truest sense. The reason we practice zazen is that we always value our true practice in our everyday life. So, our effort is in the other direction. We do not practice our way to attain something, but to be free from all dualistic gaining ideas.

So far what I've said this morning in my lecture is not what I had written down. It's too bad I cannot always read this speech. But usually your evening zazen should be as I have explained. If you do it over and over, you will realize the true meaning of it. This kind of understanding is possible because there is no difference between our everyday

life and true practice. When you are satisfied with your practice, with your everyday life, and if you feel you have always practiced our way of life, that is true practice.

To enjoy life does not mean to have fun or some special form of enjoyment. By "enjoyment" in our practice, we mean something deeper than that, an enjoyment before we enjoy. Usually when we say, "I enjoy that very much," it's actually too late to say it. When you are actually enjoying, you have no feeling whatsoever, you don't know what to do. When you are practicing, what you may say is that you don't enjoy it, but later on you will say, "Ah, that was very good." Even so, someone may also say, "That's not so good." That's good. Maybe both are right.

If you want to know what zazen is, do not ask someone what it is. He will not give you the right idea of what right practice is. Even if he says something about it, you won't be able to understand it. To have a deep experience of it is the only way to know what zazen is. So we say, true practice is the great activity, and is the only way to be familiar with zazen. We say whatever you do with that understanding is true understanding.

Before, I could say that zazen is quite a different practice from other activities. But now I can say that zazen is not different from any other activity you do. It seemed different only because of immature understanding. Zazen is not different from other practices.

For many hundreds of years before Dogen Zenji this point was not clear. All the different schools of Zen used to say their school was the most important, the only way. If it's really "this school", there's no need to say so. But each would say that its school was the best one. It is a foolish mistake to say, "This is the best school, this is the real one, this is the right one." This kind of silly understanding ruins our zazen practice. When we say that when we realize what zazen is, we don't have to practice, our practice is not zazen any more--we call it sick zazen. When we decide to say either of these things, we are mistaken. Dogen says the relative appearance is not zazen any more. The ones who say the first thing try too much, but they do something. If you try to understand what zazen is too hard, your zazen is too late. Just practice. That is true zazen. In this way, if you observe your practice, whether it is good or bad, whatever you do is true practice.

All things will be difficult to understand if I say, "You do not _____ because you are dirty." You do not like yourself because your sleeve is dirty. We say instead that what for me is your practice of everyday activity should not be regarded too much so that it becomes an exclusive idea. You should realize the deepest meaning of our activity. You should not over-value or over-evaluate your activity. To do something with right feeling, to just do it is our practice. You will see how to do things in a quite appropriate way. This gives a very familiar feeling even if you are practicing something very difficult. If a man has a toothache, his practice will be extremely difficult. But that activity is still quite natural.

I know someone whom I never see sitting in the middle of the bathtub when I go to the baths, but always in an appropriate place. And, seeing this person, I thought, "Taking a

bath, he must arrange everything." Another student could arrange everything quite naturally so that no one realized it. And he doesn't go in the river, he is so harmonious with other people. This kind of activity is, I think, Zen training, Zen monk activity. It is not just because of training, but because of liberation from the idea of good and bad. You should not say, "It will take a long time before I will be able to act in that way. I cannot do things in that way even if I work at it. I'm so mixed up, I cannot do some activities at all sometimes." This is very bad!

When you practice, just practice. You should not criticize your work, because if you are caught by some quality in the work, you lose complete freedom from the work. When there is not much thinking in your practice, it is quite natural and appropriate. Without your trying to do the appropriate thing, your practice will be appropriate. But if you do not know the point of practice, even if you already have a good Zen master, you cannot study Zen because you cannot appreciate the true activity.

If you know why you should practice zazen, and what zazen is, you will discover the way in your activity. Try to appreciate something without thinking about whether it is good or bad. We say, "To travel one mile is to forget to go one mile." Even though you make a great effort, you cannot go back one mile, you cannot go further. Sit just to sit...just to sit. To forget you can go one mile means that you will go one mile. When you are able to do that, if you want to go one mile, you should practice zazen and go back one mile. So without practicing "good zazen," but just with your effort, you "do nothing". You should do something, but actually you don't do anything. It has nothing to do with the rest of the people. You may say, "I did it," but actually it is not so. Serious effort is not defined by anything. This kind of practice is true zazen.

I hope you have understood what I have said. But if you haven't, you should sit more.

EZT – early SFZC transcript - 67-12-01-B
