

69-05-18

SUZUKI-ROSHI'S 65TH BIRTHDAY

May 18, 1969

I don't know what to say. I am already 65 years old. Today I became 65. And I am...in one way, I feel very good to become older. And on the other hand, I regret for my past practice. Not regret...I am not so regretful, but reason why I am not so regretful is we have now pretty sincere students in America. That is big encouragement for me. Why I am regretful is...on the other hand, why I am regretful is because I am not so good teacher for you, because of my past practice. I try to be sincere but I find now that I was not sincere enough. That is my feeling, so I don't know what to say.

But let us, anyway, have more sincere practice. Even though you think you are sincere, you may not be sincere enough. That will be how you feel when you become old.

You know Joshu, famous Zen Master Joshu...he joined...or he attained enlightenment when he was eighteen, and he was practicing hard until he was sixty. And after sixty he started new practice, making trip to visit various famous Zen Masters. And he never sit in perfect chair like this. His chair was always broken. He sit always on broken chair, mending the chair by piece of wood and rope, like this.

I think that is true spirit of Zen Master or priest. The image of the priest you have, an image of priest we have maybe something different. For us, _____, or Joshu is the best example for us. With great spirit and with humble life, they strive for the truth. So what I feel is I wish I could make a trip to visit various teachers. So far I had so busy days, when I was in Japan. I was too busy. In America, for a while I was not so busy. I enjoyed American life here. But now I feel pretty busy. So actually I have no time to visit various teachers.

Tassajara I am lucky to have, but I am lucky to have good teachers visiting Tassajara. But if I could make a trip, you know, it maybe much better. As an unknown priest to visit...a known, humble priest, you know, and to ask question and to receive instruction. In this way they studied.

Joshu said: "If someone is good I will study under him. If I am better, I shall be teacher, wherever I go. Whether he is old or young is not the point." Joshu said. So we should be always equal, you know. If you now better than I, you should teach me. If I know something which you don't know, I should teach you. In this way, we should practice our way.

We have many students now. That is, I think, good. But it is difficult for me to take care of you, because you are so many. I don't know what to do with so many students. I am thinking always that point. And while I was in bed, what I thought was that it maybe

better for us to be concentrated on more simple practice. The most, I think the most simple practice is counting breathing practice. (He gives the Japanese word for this practice). This is very old style of practice. This practice was for Hinayana Buddhists and for Mahayana Buddhists and for Bodhidharma's zazen. And for various teachers' practice. And which is very simple and...but it is pretty difficult just to count from one to ten, over and over. That is practice.

From old time, many people tried this way. Just counting inhaling, only, or exhaling, only. Or both inhaling and exhaling. Can you hear me? Inhaling and exhaling. So there are three ways. So you can try, you know, any of those three ways. I am practicing on counting exhaling only. And I want you to try this practice more. I think you have tried already, but before you can complete it...many people asked me, so far: "I tried counting breathing for a year. Maybe the time to start, how about just following our breathing, without counting? Just follow the breathing."

So...but I always said O.K. But I think I was not so kind to you. I know he couldn't...even though he tried one year, he may not be able to do it. Why he said that is because he lose...he forget to count. So many times he forget counting or he may go from ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen...and forget. Maybe forget, sometimes. So that is why he said...that is the reason why he said: "It maybe better just to follow our breathing."

So I said it maybe alright. But recently, I don't think so. We have...we should be able to do it. After you are able to do it, you should start another practice, one by one. That way we should practice. That is very interesting. When you are too tired, you cannot do that. And when you are too much involved in something, especially, you cannot also do it. For instance, at Tasajara, like Paul, who is always thinking about building, his practice will be always, you know, building practice. I think that is not so good. I see something wrong with their everyday life, when he is involved in something especially, forgetting all about our practice.

If we ...if we ignore this point, Tassajara will not go smoothly, and you will not be friendly with each other. Someone maybe, you know, involved in building. Someone maybe completely involved in office work or kitchen work, and someone maybe involved in pure practice. So there is no common practice for us. So we should not lose the fundamental practice. I noticed this point recently.

And especially older student...old student is not so good for their practice, zazen practice. This is serious matter for Zen Center. The reason why is not because our practice is not mature, but we are not sincere enough in our practice. So everyone of us, for everyone of us, the most important point should be our practice, as long as they enter zendo. Then they should practice our zazen sincerely. And we should be involved in, we should devote ourselves for beginners practice like counting breathing.

We say koan zazen, koan zazen, or *shikan taza*, but, you know, that is only... in its strict sense, koan Zen or *shikan taza* is for very advanced students, not for us.

Before we can practice koan Zen or *shikan taza*, we should be able to practice counting breathing practice. And...or following breathing practice. It is very close to *shikan taza*, just follow our breathing. And then, maybe we can say our practice is *shikan taza*.

People say Soto Zen is sleepy zazen. Soto priest, even though their posture is good, but they are sleepy. That is true. We become easily sleepy. Especially when we are completely involved in some heavy, physically heavy work, or when we are want of sleep. And to count breathing is...if you count breathing, you will easily notice that you are not taking care of your everyday life. So if you...if you find out some physical reason, or some reason why you cannot do that, you will notice the reason why, and you can organize your everyday life more. That is the one advantage of the monastic practice. If you are at Tassajara, you are comparatively in good situation. Although those things look like very minor problem, but actually, if we ignore this point, even though you try to achieve something great, you will not be able to do it.

In Japan, you know, they...scholars and teachers study Zen from various angles...Zen and Buddhism from various angles. But if they ignore those points, maybe like counting sand...counting sands of Ganges. It doesn't work at all. They will create more problems. So Buddhism will be lost. I think this is very serious problem. But before I think we talk about or worry about those things, we should do it, you know. We should practice real practice, without counting others' treasures. It doesn't mean anything to count someone's treasure. Let's start, you know, counting breathing practice, with all of us. I...I think I will go to Tassajara again next month, maybe for the third or fourth. We have two more weeks, so we will be concentrated on our counting breathing practice.

I have not much things to say this morning, but I thought I must ask you...it might be a very good idea to ask you to be concentrated on counting breathing practice. One by one, in this way, we will solve our problems. You made a great progress, actually, but, on the other hand, there is some danger with it. So. We must, step by step, we must make mule step. Better than horse, maybe. The cow step is best for us, but that is too slow for American people. Let's make our practice sure. Sure and steady.

Thank you very much.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 69-05-18
