

70-05-27.s1 [70-05-27]

## FIRST SANDOKAI LECTURE

by

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*This lecture was given by Shunryu Suzuki-roshi on May 27, 1970, at Zen Mountain Center, and was the first in a series of thirteen lectures on the Sandokai, a forty-four line poem by Sekito Kisen, the Eighth Chinese Patriarch of Soto Zen.*

*This lecture covers the following words of the Sandokai: "Chikudo daisen no shin..."*

I am so grateful to have a chance to talk about the *Sandokai*. This is one of the most important teaching for us. Its meaning is so deep and the expression is so smooth that it is pretty difficult to have some feeling when you read it. Sekito Kisen, who wrote this poem, was the dharma grandson of the Sixth Patriarch and the son of Seigen Gyoshi, the Seventh Patriarch. As you know, under the Sixth Patriarch there were many disciples, but the most important disciples were Seigen and Nangaku. Later, under Seigen, Tozan, the founder of the Soto School, appeared, and under Nangaku, Rinzai appeared. And Soto and Rinzai are the most powerful schools to grow out of the Sixth Patriarch's way.

Seigen's way was more gentle than Nangaku's way. Seigen's way may be that of the elder brother, and Nangaku's way is like the younger brother. In Japan often the first son will be very gentle, but sometimes not so able. We say "*soryo no jin roku*." *Soryo* means "first son," and *roku* means "not so bright." Anyway, the first boy is mostly very gentle, and we understand in that way when we talk about Soto and Rinzai. Tatsugami-roshi<sup>1</sup> put emphasis on *memmitsu-no-kafu*. *Memmitsu* means "very considerate," "very careful in doing things." That is more the Soto way. The way of Sekito, who wrote this poem, was to find everything in his mind; to have the great mind which includes everything was his practice. If you read the *Sandokai*, you will understand this point clearly.

Usually, even though we say "to observe things-as-they-are," or more accurately, "as-it-is," actually we are not observing things-as-they-are, because we think, "Here is my friend; there is the mountain; there is the moon," usually the friend, or the mountain, or the moon, is not the moon itself, or the mountain itself, or your friend himself. You think your friend is your friend. The moon, you think, is the moon. But it is actually not the moon itself, or your friend himself, or the mountain itself. When you think, "Here am

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<sup>1</sup>Tatsugami-roshi: Head of training at Tassajara for three practice periods.

I; there is the mountain and I must climb that mountain when I go to San Francisco," that is a dualistic way of observing things. We understand things in that way, but that is not actually the Buddhist way of observing things. We find the mountain, or San Francisco, or the moon, within ourselves right here. That is our understanding, the so-called big mind. Within the big mind everything exists. But to see things is not like finding out things which are on a shelf, one, two, three, four.... Most people understand things in that way, but in that case, "I am here, my mind is here, and there are many things on that shelf."

*Sandokai san* means "things" or "three"; *do* means "sameness" or "same." To identify something with something else is *do*. *San* means "many beings"; *do* is actually "oneness" or "one whole being," which means "great mind." This one big whole being which includes everything, and there are many things which we find in that one whole big being. Even though we say "many things," they are many parts of one whole big being, including all of us. So if you say "many," that is "many"; if you say "one," that is "one." Many and one are different ways of describing one whole being.

To have complete understanding of this relationship between one whole big being and the many things which exist in one whole big being is *kai*. *Kai* means "to shake hands." When you shake hands you feel really one; you have a real feeling of friendship. So "many things" and "one whole big being which includes many things" are good friends, or more than friends, because they are originally one. If you say "many," that is "many"; if you say "one," that is "one." So two names of the same thing should be very good friends. So we say, "*Kai*": "Hi! How are you?" This is the name of this sutra: *Sandokai*.

Originally this title, *Sandokai*, was the title of a Taoist book, and Sekito tried to describe Buddha's teaching in almost the same way, and under the same title. Do you know the difference between Taoism and Buddhism? In a book they are maybe the same, but the way it is read is different. When a Buddhist reads it, it is a Buddhist book; when a Taoist reads it, it is a Taoist book. It is actually the same vegetable, but if a Buddhist eats it, it is Buddhist food; and if a vegetarian eats it, it is vegetarian food. There is a kind of difference. We Buddhists eat not just because a certain food has some particular nourishment-yang, or acid, or alkaline-but because eating food is part of our practice. That is the difference. For the sake of practice we eat food. To help our way, to practice Buddha's way we eat food, not just to support ourselves as a kind of animal called human being. To eat food for the sake of its particular value or nourishment is more the Taoist way. The Buddhist way is to include always our practice and our mind, not small mind but big mind which includes things. So to think, "This is just a vegetable," is not our way. We must treat things as a part of ourselves, as something which exists in our practice or in our big mind. Do you understand this point? Small mind means the mind which is under the limitation of desires, or some particular emotional understanding, or some discrimination about good or bad. So, even though you think you are observing everything-as-it-is, actually you are not, because of your discrimination and your desires. The Buddhists way is to try very hard to eliminate this kind of emotional discrimination and prejudice or good or bad. After doing so , it is

possible to see everything-as-it-is.

So when we say "everything-as-it-is," this means to practice hard to get rid of our desires...not get rid of, but to know, to calculate, to take into account our desires. If there is a computer, you must pull in all the data. One of the data will be our desire; this much desire, this much nourishment, this color, this weight. Usually we don't take into account our desires. Without reflecting on our selfish judgement we say, "He is good," or "He is bad." But someone who is bad to me is not always bad; to someone else he may be a good person. So we should take into account our desires. In this way we can see everything-as-it-is. When we understand the mind transmitted from Buddha to us, we can see everything-as-it-is. This is Buddha mind.

"*Chikudo daisen no shin...*" *Chikudo* is "India"; *daisen* is "great sage"; *no* means "of"; *shin* means "the mind, the big mind which includes everything." "The mind of the great sage of India..."

The mind we have when we practice zazen is the great mind in which we don't try to see anything. We stop thinking; we stop emotional activity; we just sit. We are not bothered by whatever happens to us. It is like something happening in the great sky. The sky doesn't care what happens in the sky, what kind of bird flies in it-even the atomic bomb. It doesn't care. That is the mind transmitted from Buddha to us.

When you sit maybe many things will happen. You may hear the sound from the stream, or you may think of something, but your mind does not care. Your great mind is there, just sitting. Even though you don't see things or you don't hear, or you don't think you are seeing things or hearing things, you don't think you are thinking things, still maybe something is going on in the big mind. And that is how we observe things. We don't say "good" or "bad"; we just sit, and we say "Oh, good morning." We enjoy things, but we have no special attachment. We have full appreciation of them, that is all. And one after another things will happen to us in that way. That is the mind which is transmitted from Buddha. That is how we practice zazen.

So if you do not practice zazen, even though you enjoy an event or something, later it will cause some trouble. Do you understand this point? I think you have various experiences of this kind. Because you think, "This is it! It should be like this! Zen Center should be like this!" Maybe so, but it is not always so. If the times change, if Zen Center loses Tassajara or moves to some other mountain, the way we have here cannot be the way we will have in some other place. So we should not stick to some particular way, and we should always open our minds to observe things-as-it-is, and to accept everything-as-it-is. Without this preparation, if you say, "This is the mountain; this is my friend; this is the moon," the moon will not be the moon itself.

So Buddha's teaching is the study of human nature, of how foolish we are, what kind of desires, discrepancies, and tendencies we have. So I always remember to use, in your words, "to be liable to." We are liable to live like this; we are liable to say in this way. We should remember these words: "to be liable to" or "tendency." You may say

the tendency is also the thing itself, but if you say so, it means you ignore yourself.

When I was preparing for this lecture, someone came and asked me about self-respect. "What is self-respect? How do we obtain self-respect?" Self-respect is not something which you can feel or have. When you feel, "I have self-respect," that is not self-respect anymore. Without thinking anything, without trying to say something special, just talking about what you have in your mind, and how you feel, when you are just like this, there is naturally self-respect. So when I am closely related to you all and to everything, then I am a part of one big whole being. When you feel something, you are maybe almost a part of it, but not quite. When you don't feel anything, when you do something without any feeling of doing something, that is you yourself. When you are completely with everyone, you don't feel who you are. That is self-respect.

So when you feel you are someone, you have to practice zazen harder. Actually, as you know, it is very difficult to sit without thinking and without feeling. When you don't think, either you are feeling something or you are asleep. But without sleeping, without thinking, to be yourself, that is our practice. When you are able to do that, you will be able to say things without thinking too much and without having any purpose. Just to express yourself, you will speak, you will do something. That is self-respect. That is complete self-respect.

How to obtain this self-respect is maybe to practice zazen, and to be strict with yourself, especially with your tendencies. Everyone has their own way which is peculiar to himself and which is not universal to everyone, and so we must know that. However, if you try to get rid of your tendencies, if you try not to think in your practice, or if you try not to hear the sound of the stream, that is impossible. So let your ears hear the stream, let your mind think about something, but without trying to think, without trying to hear, without trying to stop hearing or thinking. That is our practice.

So more and more you will have this kind of habit, or strength, or power of practice. If you practice hard, you will be a boy or a girl again, like a child. When we were talking about self-respect, some bird was singing outside, "pe-pe-pe-peep." That is self-respect. "Pe-pe-pe-peep." It doesn't mean anything. Maybe the bird was just singing, or even without trying to sing it goes "pe-pe-pe-peep" in various ways. When we hear it we cannot stop smiling. We cannot say it is just a bird; it controls the whole mountain, the whole world. That is self-respect.

So that we can have this kind of everyday practice, we study hard. When we come to this point, there is no need to say "one whole big being," or "bird," or "many things which include one big whole being.": It may be just a bird; it may be just a mountain; or it may be the *Sandokai*. If you understand this point, there will be no need to recite the *Sandokai*. "*Chikudo daisen no shin...*" We recite it in Japanese-Chinese, but it is not a matter of Chinese or Japanese. It is just a poem or just a bird. And this is just my talk. It does not mean much, but...We say Zen is not something to talk about. It is something which you experience and which will be very difficult. Anyway, this world is difficult so don't worry. This world is not so easy; wherever you go, you will have problems. You

should confront your problems. It may be much better to have this kind of problem in your practice than various kinds of mixed-up problems.

Student A: you explained what each character in the word *Sandokai* means, but I didn't hear you say what they mean together.

Suzuki-roshi: It is difficult to say in one word. To express one big mind, Sekito picked out these three words: *san-do-kai*. And his teaching is, "What is one big mind? What is oneness of one and many?" That is *kai*. *Sandokai* is the title of Buddhist big mind or transmitted mind. There is no other way to say it.

Student B: The other day when I was hitting the *mokugyo*<sup>2</sup> a small spider crawled across the top of it. I went a little bit off the side, but he went right into it. There was nothing I could do. It was too powerful for him to escape.

Suzuki-roshi: You didn't kill it?

Student B: Something did.

Suzuki-roshi: But you hit some other place?

Student B: Yes, but I couldn't stop and he went right into it.

Suzuki-roshi: It couldn't be helped; Buddha kill him. He may be very happy. To live in this world is not so easy. When you see children playing by the stream or by the bridge, you will feel very scared. When I am on the freeway I always think, "Oh, how is it possible to survive without having an accident?" But if something happens, that is all. If you stop and think about it, if you stop and see and think, you will be terrified. I have heard of someone who is 165 years old who has more than two hundred boys and girls, grandchildren and greatchildren. If he thinks about it each one of them, he may be scared. He may easily lose one of them in this busy life. If you think about our practice, you may be scared because it can be very strict. You should be ready to kill something even if you are a Buddhist; whether it is good or bad, you should do it. It is impossible to survive without killing anything. We cannot survive by some feeling. We must be involved in a deeper practice than emotional practice. That is the strict side of our practice. And if it is absolutely necessary, you should stop hitting the *mokugyo* even though all of us get into confusion.

Student C: Would you explain what you mean by strict practice?

Suzuki-roshi: Things are going on in a very strict way. There is no exception. Wherever there is something, there is some rule, some truth behind it, which is going strictly,

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<sup>2</sup> Mokugyo: a wooden drum used to accompany chanting.

controlling things without any exception. We think we care for freedom, but the other side of freedom is strict rules. Within the strict rules there is complete freedom; freedom and strict rules are not two separate things. But it does not mean that someone should be put in strict rules. Originally we are supported by strict rules or truths. That is the other side of absolute freedom.

Student D: Can you give us some more examples of strict practice?

Suzuki-roshi: When you get up you should get up. When everyone sleeps you should sleep. That is an example.

Student D: Sometimes we think there is some special situation in our practice. At that time, how do we know if we should follow the strict way or if we should perhaps make an exception?

Suzuki-roshi: That is why we divide our responsibility. Almost all the time we have no time to discuss things with someone else. If we do, we will be too late. So you have to take your own responsibility. That is inevitable. If you make a mistake, that is your mistake, but when you decide things in that way, they will go more smoothly without you being involved in ideas of good and bad.

Student D: My responsibility as an officer is such that it is very easy for me to follow the strict way, because that is part of my responsibility. Other people have somewhat different situations, and sometimes, because my responsibility is to follow strictly, we have discussions, and I sometimes think that maybe they should do differently than I do. Is that right?

Suzuki-roshi: Yes, Sometimes you should shut your eyes. You are unfortunate if you see something. If you see it you should say something, so it may be better to practice your way without looking around. If I look around, if I watch the people on this side of the Zendo, the people on the other side will sleep. It is better not to watch anything. They won't know what I am doing. "He may not be sleeping, so all of us must stay awake." That is the advantage of zazen practice. If you see something, the rest of the things will be ignored; if you don't see anything, you cannot ignore anything. That is the big mind which includes everything.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 70-05-27

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