

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**April 26, 1967**

**NOT VERBATIM**

[Suzuki read from a letter to him by an American student. The writer mentioned her mind is "like a babbling monkey" and asked, "What should I do while sitting?"]

This question cannot be answered directly. But anyway, your Buddha Nature exists whether you do zazen or not. Anything you do is an expression of your Buddha Nature, not someone else's or a demon's, etc. this is so whether you realize it or not.

However, though anything you do is your own true nature, you misunderstand the occurrence. The purpose of zazen is to correct this misunderstanding. Such misunderstanding includes judging one self as being angry or kind, etc. Actually, it is not so. We practice zazen so as to learn to accept our true nature as it really is, e.g., to be able to accept without putting labels (e.g. anger) to it.

Dogen said, in our true nature there is no reason to practice zazen. But when even a hair of delusion exists, the gap between true and misunderstanding is as between heaven and earth.

Mind and Body are two misunderstanding of the same nature.

The student whose letter I read has good practice, but his understanding of it is not correct.

When your mind pervades all parts of your body, that is good practice. In such practice body and mind are one, neither "is" apart from the other. For example, in good practice one's mudrās will not be slack nor will one's mouth hang open, etc.

You will have problems in your practice if you have doubts in it. Trying to "control" your mind is only superficial effort, and it (effort) will be in vain and endless.

Dōgen's mother's family lost much status during one tumultuous period in Japan. The his mother became ill and died while Dōgen was still young. These events, including his mother's dying words, led Dōgen to his Buddhist life. His study started from human calamity, not from academic interest.

Religion develops in a manner different from the way in which science progresses. In the overall relations of culture, religion is the driving force of the other aspects of the society. Religious effort is based upon our true human nature, which does not change from culture to culture

or generation to generation. Our human nature and that of the Buddha is the same. However, although this true nature doesn't change, our particular and changing understandings lead to changes in how we variously live.

In our life there are three elements: intellectual, emotional, and will. Buddhism does not emphasize intellectual understanding; but Buddhism doesn't ignore the intellect-and the intellect develops because of this lack of emphasis.

Zen Buddhism puts emphasis on the emotional faculties. That is why Zen emphasizes practice. Because we are so much "made" of emotions, we need a practice to study and discipline them. Our emotions are deeply rooted to our true natures. Therefore to correctly study our emotional problems, we need to understand our deeper selves.

Religion is supported mainly by our emotional power. On the surface, emotions may seem very changeable-but this is only appearances. The depths of our emotional powers are stable.

Through practice we should understand the true nature of our emotional power. By this understanding we should give up concern with our superficial emotional levels. Understanding the true nature of emotional power should lead to transmutation of this power into will and the way-seeking mind. Thus what was once described as anger toward others becomes anger at one's own stupidity, and increased will-power.

Its relationship to emotional power is the most important part of our practice. Our practice should be directed toward our basic emotional problems, not toward our superficial emotional concerns and hang-ups.

In this way religion develops within a culture, giving the culture direction and drive of a fundamental and human character.

Buddhism as a religion of many sects is not characterized by conflict among these sects; this is because Buddhism has developed a balance and understanding toward the three elements of human life: intellect, emotional, and will.

I have discussed this because Dōgen's religion is different from that of Zen Master. Dōgen's religion is deeply rooted in emotional problems; and his teaching is full of true human sentiment. Dōgen is different from other Japanese and from Chinese Zen Masters. Some people even say that he was not really enlightened because what he says is too human! But although his teaching *is* very human, his life was very

pure.

Dōgen said that it is useless to try to escape from one's emotional problems. In a remote mountain hermitage, for example, such problems become worse instead of better.

There are two ways of considering the individual regarding religion:

(1) he finds his place in the big religious world;

(2) he leaves the religious world and extends its truth and character into the non-religious world.

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**Student:** What is an example of emotion which is not superficial?

**Suzuki-roshi:** One fundamental emotion is our desire to support our life. One should not try to create an intellectual excuse for an emotion and its problems. Most people don't know what deep emotional powers or problems are. Most people are conscious only of superficial emotions.

Though it may seem that rationality is stable and emotion is unstable, the reverse is the truth. Deep emotion is much more stable than is rationality.

Although the personal is the most important element in religion, the social element is also evident and important.

In Sōtō Zen even children practice Buddhism through bowing correctly to the Buddha. (Suzuki considers bowing very important practice for everyone). Bowing is a fundamental practice which children can do. Bowing seems simple, but involves various techniques.

To find composure is to find ourselves (presences?) in nothing, true nothing. This means forgetting about everything including (or maybe even-especially) our ideas of Nothing.

Observing rituals is observing your own position. It is knowing where you are and what you are to do.

**Student:** What about breathing? (Suzuki told of four ways): Two are shallow breathing; and two are deep breathing (for deeper meditation). Of the two deep abdominal breathing ways, one is forcing strength into the abdomen in accord with its in and out movement. The second way is to put strength opposite to the natural in and out movement of the lower abdomen.

Practice is first understanding comes afterward. During zazen one's mind and body should be a unity. This includes keeping one's *mudrā* in its correct shape, not letting one's mouth slack open, etc.

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This transcript is a retyping of the existing City Center transcript. It is not verbatim. No tape is available. The City Center transcript was entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. It was reformatted by Bill Redican (10/26/01).