

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
WHAT IS OUR PRACTICE?
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San Francisco

In our zazen practice, we stop our thinking and we must be free from our emotional activity too. We don't say there is no emotional activity, but we should be free from it. We don't say we have no thinking mind, but we should not be—our activity, our life activity should not be limited by our thinking mind. In short, I think we can say [we trust ourselves completely, without thinking,]¹ without feeling anything, we—without discriminating good and bad, without saying right or wrong, we should trust our life activity. Because we respect ourselves, because we trust completely, put faith in our life, we do not think, we do not discriminate, and we sit. That is, you know, our practice.

Tentatively, this morning, my version of our practice is like this because I want to extend this kind of understanding to our everyday life. Between—human relationship, for an instance, should be based on this kind of understanding. If our love between us is not based on this kind of understanding, respect, and complete trust, we will not have completely peaceful life.

And relationship between ourselves and nature should be like this. We should respect everything, especially something which we are related directly. This morning when we were bowing, you know, in zendō, we heard big noise here, you know, because everyone fling chair [makes noise by moving a chair along the floor] like this, you know [laughs]. I thought this isn't—may not be the way how we should treat chairs [laughs]—not only because it may cause disturbance to the people who are bowing in the zendō, but also fundamentally this will not be the way to—how we should treat things.

This has a wheel [castors?] here [moves chair again], you know. Wheels, you know, it has. This is very convenient. So I, you know—sometime I don't like something too convenient, you know. It gives us some—some lazy, you know, feeling which does not accord with our spirit of practice. And this kind of laziness, you know—I think our culture is started this kind of lazy idea. And, you know, eventually we—because of this, we should eventually fight with each other. And we have our cultural background, East or West, nowadays, is something, you know. This kind of lazy idea. Instead of respecting things, we want to use it for ourselves. And if it is difficult to use it, we have idea of conquering something. I think this is not—this kind of idea does not accord with our spirit of practice.

¹ Text within brackets is from the original transcript. The original tape was apparently erased during that passage.

We are thinking about rituals and how to decorate our buddha hall—having some beautiful buddha and offering some beautiful flowers, you know. But Zen Buddhists says with a leaf of—with a blade of leaf we should create buddha—*jōroku-konjin*—golden body of buddha which is sixteen inches—feet high. With, you know, blade of leaf, we should create big buddha. That is our spirit.

But here, you know, to create sixteen-feet-high buddha with a blade of, you know, leaf need a great effort [laughs]. I don't mean to accumulate many leaves, and [laughs] grain [?] it, and make a clay and big buddha. I don't mean that. But anyway, to see—until we see the big buddha in a small leaf, we need a great amount of—I don't say how—how much effort we need. I don't know. For someone it maybe quite easy, but for someone like me it [laughs]—it needs a great effort.

It is much easier to just to see a great golden buddha. It is much easier. But when you see a great buddha in a small leaf, that joy may be something special, I think. But we need a great effort.

My teacher, Kishizawa Ian,² you know, did not allow us to shut *amado*—to draw *amado* more than one [at a time]. We should, you know, draw it one by one. Do you know? Perhaps you don't know *amado*, the door outside of *shōji* screen. There is—outside of *shōji* screen there is wooden wood [shutter] to protect *shōji* from storm or rainstorm. It is, you know—the end of the building there is a big box for the *amado*, and one by one we put it in the box, you know. It is sliding doors, so one by one we, you know, put it in that box.

So one priest is there, and another priest is there, and if you pull—if you push [laughs] five or six doors, you know, like this [probably gesturing]—another one can be wait there and put it in the box. But he didn't like it. He told us to do it one by one [laughs], so if you—so one by one—so one person can do it, you know, and push it—put it in, and next one. That is how he told us to do it. And it is more—I think, anyway, it may be in that way we will not make much noise, of course, but the feeling is quite different when you do like this, you know [probably gesturing]. The feeling we receive from it is something, you know—lack of respect. But when you do it one by one carefully, without making much noise, then we will have there the feeling of practice there.

So there we have feeling of zazen practice. So even you carry, you know, even you arrange your chair—[drags chair back and forth]—if you do like this, you know, there is no feeling of practice. If you do it one by one

² Kishizawa Ian-rōshi (1865-1955): a leading interpreter of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*. He received dharma transmission from Nishiari Bokusan. Suzuki-rōshi attended him at Eihei-ji monastery when Kishizawa was *seido* (distinguished visiting priest in residence). Suzuki-rōshi continued to study with Kishizawa-rōshi from 1932 until Kishizawa's death in 1955.

[moves chair in one motion], then you have complete feeling in dining room. I don't feel good to practice zazen in the first floor where we eat—no, under—under the dining room.

When we practice zazen we are Buddha himself. And Monjushiri³ is there. When we recite, maybe, *sūtra*, you know, we are reciting *sūtra* underneath kitchen. I don't feel so good [laughs], but if we have this kind of feeling in each corner of the building, I think that is much better because we—our practice is beyond the idea of the first floor or the second floor. But that is pretty difficult.

But we should know that, you know, even though we have this kind of beautiful building, there is difficulties in our practice. If it is easy when we have complete building with nice buddha hall and zendō we can practice zazen, that may be mistake, I think. But, at the same time, I know how [laughs] difficult it is to practice with this spirit in this kind of building because building is so good that there is—on the other hand, there is difficulties.

Because I know, you know—I know that anyway to practice our way is not [laughs] easy. It is anyway—it is difficult. And what kind of difficulty we will have is—I know what kind of difficulty we will have—which way we may take. As this is, as you know, city zendō—city zendō where everyone come and practice our way, not only old student but also those who don't know anything about Zen, there is double difficulties, you know, for new student and for old student too. I think old students have double duty, you know, and new students will have difficulties which they do not ever dream of—dreamed of.

So we must—old students must make their practice easier, you know. How to make them easier is, without telling them this way or that way, you should do this or you shouldn't do that, you should lead them so that they can practice our way easier. There may be various way, but I think our traditional way—we say "traditional way"—is set up with this idea: how to help people to practice right practice.

We say in our practice is "ornament of buddha-land." Our practice itself is ornament of buddha-land—*bukkokudo*⁴ *shōgon*.⁵ You know, even though they don't know what is Buddhism, if they come to some beautiful, you know, buddha hall then they will—naturally they will have some feeling. That is, you know, the ornament of buddha-land. But essentially for Zen Buddhist, ornament of buddha hall is the people who are practicing there.

³ Japanese name for Mañjushrī Bodhisattva.

⁴ *bukkokudo* (also *bokkoku*): by extension, a realm of countless worlds influenced by a buddha's teaching (see Kazuaki Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, New York: North Point Press, 1985, pp. 266, 344).

⁵ *shōgon*: decoration. Close to *sōshoku*: ornament.

Each one of us is—should be beautiful flowers, and each one of us should be Buddha himself who lead people in our practice. So whatever we do, there must be some way of doing it. And we should always think—consider about this point. Of course there is no special rules for, you know, to treat things, to be friendly with others—there is no special rules. But how we find out the way we should do at that time is to think about what will be the way to help people to practice religious way. If you think—if you don't forget this point, you will find out how to treat people, how to treat things, how to behave yourself. And that is, at the same time, so-called-it "bodhisattva way." You know, our practice is to help people. And how to help people is how to practice our way on each moment, and how to live in this world, and how to practice zazen.

To stop thinking, to be free from emotional activity when we sit is not just to have concentration in our mind. It is not just for concentration, but there we have complete reliance for—to ourselves, to find absolute, you know, refuge in our practice. That is why we do not have emotional activity or thinking activity in our practice. We are just like a baby who is on the lap of mother, you know. That is zazen practice, and that is how we should extend our practice to our everyday life.

I think we have very good spirit here in this zendō and Tassajara. I was rather amazed at the spirit you have. But how you should extend this spirit to our everyday life is—will be the next, you know, question. And how you do it is to respect things, to respect with each other. When we respect things, we will find the true life in it. When we, you know, respect plants, we find—there we find the real life of, you know, life power of flower and real beauty of flower. So love is important, but more important element will be respect. And sincerity and big mind. With big mind and with pure sincerity and respect, the love could be real love. Just love separated from those factors will not work.

Let's try hard how to take big buddha [laughs] with, you know, with our effort.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997.
Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Bill Redican 8/3/00.