

**Shunryū Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**1 PM *SESSHIN* LECTURE<sup>1</sup>**  
**Monday, July 26, 1965**  
**Lecture A**  
**Soko-ji Temple, San Francisco**

A talk is always—the conclusion of my talk is always why we should practice zazen. This is not—my talk is not just casual talk. And basically, my talk is based on *Shōbōgenzō*. And fortunately we have a system of—we have a complete system [of] how to understand true religion.

The true religion cannot be understood by philosophical way or scientific way. The only way to understand or to realize our true nature is just through practice. Without true practice it is impossible to realize our true nature. Of course, what we do, whether we are aware of it or not, what we do in our everyday life is based on true—our true nature. True nature drive us to do something, but if you do not understand, or if you do not realize your true—what is true nature, and if you have no system to know the actual meaning of your true nature, you will get into confusion.

There are many and many scientists who become interested in religion, it is true. Some of them [are] perhaps interested in true religion, but some of them will not have the true understanding of religion. As long as there are just—their understanding is just limited in scientific realm, it is impossible to know what is true religion because religion should be understood by religious way. Religion shou- [partial word]—is not understood by philosophy or science.

And some philosophers, of course, may [be] interested in true religion, but it is impossible for philosophers—it is impossible to reach the complete understanding of religion through philosophical study, because in philosophical study the conclusion of philosophy will be different. The authority of Greek philosophy is still powerful in this age. So it is very difficult to understand—to reach the true understanding of religion which everyone will agree with it.

So—but Sōtō school has pretty deep philosophy, but as I said last night, the *Shōbōgenzō*, or the philosophy of Zen, is just a lid, just a cover of a pan, because people may interested in Zen, but it may be rather difficult for them to know what is true Zen. Without some intellectual understanding, it is difficult to figure out what is Zen. So that is why we have philosophy of Zen. But by philosophy you cannot have true understanding of Zen. Zen should be understood by Zen, by

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<sup>1</sup> According to a note in *Wind Bell* (1965, IV, No. 4, p. 1), this seven-day *sesshin* began at 5:45 am, Monday, July 26, 1965.

practice of Zen, not by philosophy—even by *Shōbōgenzō*, even reading—even by reading *Shōbōgenzō*, you cannot [laughs] understand what—you cannot realize what it—actually realize what is Zen.

So only way is just practice Zen with right understanding. If you do not have right understanding, the—your practice will be mixed up with some other practice. And that is why, I think, in America there are so many misunderstanding of Zen.

So by *Shōbōgenzō* we have to polish our practice, and we have to keep various misunderstanding—keeps our practice [of] Zen from various misunderstanding. That is why we have *Shōbōgenzō*. That is why in *sesshin* I should talk. This kind of talk is not, you know—the purpose of my talk is not to give you some knowledge, but to—by my talk I want you to—I want to encourage your practice without being interested in philosophical depth of our system. In this point, if you make misunderstanding, result will be pretty serious.

And fortunately our system of encouraging people is the same—is the same as other schools—philosophy of other schools. So if you understand *Shōbōgenzō*, you will understand some other schools and why there are so many schools in Buddhism. If we do not have this system of various schools in Buddhism is quite different from other schools, and there will not be any connection with each other. With this system, we will—each schools—we will find out the meaning of existence—why Sōtō Zen exist, why Rinzai Zen exist, why Pure Land school exist, why Tendai school exist, why all those schools are important. Unfortunately, it is rather difficult to translate *Shōbōgenzō* in English, but we are making effort to do it. And many scholars has given some interpretation—some modern, or some up-to-date interpretation to it. So if we only have time, it is not impossible to give you complete system of our understanding of Buddhism.

We say we have two kinds of knowledge: intuitive knowledge and— and thinking, discriminating knowledge. The scientific knowledge and the philosophical knowledge is the dualistic thinking knowledge. As long as we use word and we think by words, it is impossible to reach the absolute conclusion. When we just resume to our own nature, which is universal to everyone, we can achieve—we can realize our true nature, which is universal to human being and even for animals, and plants, and everything—existence. And that is why in Zen practice we stop our mind. We do not put any consideration to our sensitivity or thinking. Whatever image come, you just accept it and let them go out. [Laughs.] And whatever sound you hear, you let them come in and let them go out. When you do not pay any attention to outward object, you will find out your true nature.

This true nature, when you are healthy and practice zazen in this way, it—it is just calm and some inexplicable thing itself. But when you have some actual problem—when you have pain on your legs, you will have direct experience of [laughs] your true nature. But, you know, don't [make the] mistake [that] that is true nature. That is true nature plus something—plus your painful legs. Something is added on true nature, and true nature takes the form of pain. This relationship is very important, and if you understand this relationship—your true nature and your pain—there is a key to solve all the problem of life. Through problem we will realize our nature—true nature. When we—when I am hungry, what I feel is what you will feel when you are hungry [laughs]. There might be some difference, but not much difference.

And how you feel when you sit is how everyone feels when you sit. Strictly speaking, that is enough, even though you do not attain enlightenment [laughs]. If everyone sit and find out how you feel when you sit, that's good enough. We will—in this point—we will reach some agreement. But if you are caught by some fancy idea of religion —there may be various religion—and you don't know what religion is yours [laughs]—Buddhism, Christianity, or Indian religion, or some folk native religion—you don't know what to choose. Sometimes everyone—every religion looks like same. Sometime it doesn't look like same. But when religion is studied [in] the most simplest way, the most universal way, for an instance, want of sleep, or hunger, or pain, or—we will reach the universal religion—universal religion even to animals. Here we have common playground. Everyone will play in this common playground.

So you shouldn't have—according to Buddha, or our patriarchs, or founder of various religion—you should not have too fancy idea of religion. Religion should be understood [by] the most foolish [laughs] man, not learned wise man. Wise man's religion is compli- [partial word]—very complicated and very fancy. If he is s—too great, you will —you will be attached to his religion. That is good. If you really want to do it, that's good [laughs]—but just because of the name or, you know, some gaining idea.

We should not attach to some particular religion. That is why we say don't study religion with gaining idea—gaining idea. Gaining idea is not—gaining idea is not based on your true nature. That's a very superficial desire—not so deep as your hunger. When we give up various gaining idea, we will find out our true nature. And this true nature is very primitive, of course. And at the same time it could be very, very refined and deep, lofty idea—desire. In this primitive, fundamental desire there are true strengths and various possibility. But if you start from fancy idea of religion, you will be conf- [partial word]—more confused. So to realize why we study—why we study

religion is to find out the meaning of our fundamental desire—how important it is, and how miraculous it is, and how much possibility it has.

When we—all of us is concentrated on this point, there will not be any religious sectarianism. Because we start from some particular philosophy of religion, we have various sectarianism. When we have just one lid, just one cover which covers various pan and bowls [laughs], there will be no problem. Our cover, our philosophy, is not the same philosophy as usual philosophers will provide for us.

Today, I just gave you some general—general idea of our system. But this point—we sh- [partial word]—as a Sōtō student, this point should not be neglected. We should be—when we study Buddhism intellectually, we should be concentrated on this point and—as well as your practice. Just practice is not so good, because you may practice zazen for sake of something. You will abuse your Zen practice until you mix pure practice with various fancy or wrong practice.

In short, Sōtō way is to use everything in right purpose and to put everything [in] its own—its own place. What should be put on high place should be put on high place, and what should be put on floor should be on floor.<sup>2</sup> In America, you know, you put scriptures [laughs] on the floor where you walk. We don't, you know. But I don't know how to do it—how to treat those scriptures in your way of life. So until I find out [laughs] some way, I don't say, "Don't put scriptures on the floor." But this is not supposed to be put on—supposed to be treated as a rubbish, you know—as rubbish. This is not rubbish. Scripture should be put on table, or altar, or in your hand. Those small things is very important.

And this idea—with this idea, we study science: What is science? What is religion? What is philosophy? There is the way to study philosophy. There is particular way to study science. There is particular way to study religion. Religion should be studied by religious way, not by science. Scientist cannot criticize [laughs] what religion unless he become religious. But—and religious—religion gives—or give way [to?] science and philosophy. The find—to find the meaning of science is religion. To find the meaning of philosophy is religion. But science or philosophy—in science or in philosophy, there is no religion. This relation—this relationship is very important. Dōgen-zenji says, "Our ordinal [ordinary] way—although you know our ordinal [ordinary] way—in our ordinal [ordinary] worldly life there is no Buddha's way." People understand that or not, I don't know [laughs]

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<sup>2</sup> From Dōgen's *Tenzokyōkun (Instructions for the Cook)*: "For all the various things, put away in high places things that belong in high places, and put away in low places things that belong in low places" (trans. by T. D. Leighton and S. Okumura, 1996, pp. 35-36). See also SR-69-12-02.

—may not understand it, but he says: "They may understand there is no—it is impossible to realize—to know what is religion in worldly way. But from viewpoint of religion, there is no worldly life. Everything what we do is religion.

This kind of system is very important for us. I shall be very glad if you find out why this kind of understanding is so necessary for us. It is very important because it is the only way to find out the harmony in various religion we have. When various religious people understand this secret—this system, the religion will be one: not Buddhism, not Christianity, not one school of Christianity or Buddhism. The one whole big family of religious people will be established. There is this possibility in his [Dōgen's] understanding.

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Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Judith Randall and Bill Redican (5/17/01).