

OCTOBER *SESSHIN* LECTURE
Shunryū Suzuki
October 16, 1965 (*Wind Bell*, Nov.–Dec. 1965)
Transcribed by Trudy Dixon

NOT VERBATIM

Late Afternoon Lecture:

We have finished *sesshin* with unusual results. We have practiced in our own way and our Patriarch's way, expressing our true nature, transmitted by Buddha to us. Our responsibility as Buddha's disciples is to manifest his way according to time and age, according to circumstances. Although how we express his way is not the same, that which is expressed is one true nature, which is universal for everyone and every existence.

Someone may ask us how this kind of practice will benefit our everyday life. The answer may be no benefit, as Bodhidharma said, "no merit." But we mean by merit: merit and no merit. Beneficial and not beneficial. Mahāyāna Buddhists emphasize the saving of others and the saving of ourselves. To save others is to save ourselves. It does not mean to save others after we save ourselves, or to save others before we save ourselves. Our way is "to save others is to save ourselves." To hear a sound is for the sound to arise. It is one activity. We practice this kind of practice because for us there is no other way to appease our inmost desire. Until we attain this way of life, our inmost desire will not be appeased.

So Dōgen-zenji always emphasized "beginner's mind." We should always remain in beginner's mind. It means our experience should always be refreshed and renewed. It means always have the joy of discovering something. The same joy as children discovering something new. This kind of experience is not possible to attain just by training through which you expect some result.

Dōgen-zenji said Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva's hundreds of arms are like seeking for something, for our pillow in complete darkness. Because the darkness is complete, we stretch our arms in no particular direction. Although we are seeking for something, we cannot say we are seeking for something. His hand is not his hand, his hand is always, as are also his eyes and his mind. This kind of activity is true activity, which is based directly on our inmost nature.

Seeking for something in the dark is no usual activity based on an idea of gaining. He cannot say he is seeking for the pillow with an idea of gaining. He cannot say he is acting with an idea of gaining. He may not even know what he is doing. So Nangaku said to Baso: "If you practice zazen to try to attain Buddhahood, there is no Buddhahood."

You think you are practicing zazen in that way, but Zen is not some particular form. Whatever you do, that is Zen. Everyone is Buddha. There is no particular person who is called Buddha. The to practice zazen is just to practice, without any idea of attaining Enlightenment or Buddhahood through zazen. To take some activity that appeases our inmost desire, that is our way.

As you know, Nangaku picked up a tile and started to polish it. Baso asked his master what he was doing? "I want to make a mirror," he said. Mirror (laughing). "How is it possible to make a tile a mirror?" the disciple said. Nangaku answered, "When a cart does not go, which do you hit, the cart or the horse?" Which do you hit, the cart or the horse (laughing). Baso could not answer. If Baso had known the true practice, he would have said: "I will hit a horse!" The answer is quite simple (laughing), but he started to intellectualize, so he couldn't answer his master's question. So Nangaku kindly said to him, "If you want to acquired Buddhahood, there is no Buddhahood. If you want to practice zazen, just to sit on a cushion is not zazen." Baso hearing this instruction felt as if he was drinking ambrosia. He appreciated and was able to understand his master's remark.

As long as we have some idea of attaining Buddhahood or enlightenment by practice, it is not possible to understand what Zen is. But when you just whip the horse, the cart will go. When you just practice zazen, enlightenment is there. But when you start to intellectualize or start to understand the value of Zen in terms of some gaining idea, zazen, you cannot value zazen, because you are trying to figure out what is Zen in a worldly sense. Thus you will get no answer to your question. There is no answer to that. We don't know why we practice zazen, why we have been practicing for such a long time, thousand of times practicing zazen in this way. No one knows, but we just did. There must be some meaning. That is why we practice zazen. But while you are doing it, you will find out for yourself, you cannot stop the practice of zazen. This is the so-called true practice from Buddha to us.

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