

Rev Suzuki lecture
April 13, 1867
Los Altos

There may be various kinds of practice, or ways of practice, or understanding of practice. Mostly when you practice zazen you become very idealistic with some notion or ideal set up by yourself and you strive for attaining or fulfilling that notion or goal. But as I always say this is very absurd because when you become idealistic in your practice you have gaining idea within yourself, so by the time you attain some stage your gaining idea will create another ideal. So, as long as your practice is based on gaining idea, and you practice zazen in an idealistic way, you will have no time to attain it. Moreover you are sacrificing the meat of practice, set up for the future attainment, which is not possible to attain. Because your attainment is always ahead of you, you are always sacrificing yourself for some ideal. So this is very absurd. It is not so bad, rather not adequate.

It is much better than to practice zazen involved in some competition—competing your practice with someone. This is very bad shape. This is rather ridiculous and shabby--poor practice much better than that, but not so good. We emphasize shi kan taza. This is... We do not call our practice shi kan taza, or we have no particular name for our practice, but when we practice zazen we just practice it, whether we find joy of practice or not, we just do it. Even though we are sleepy, and we are very tired of practicing zazen, repeating the same thing day after day, even so we continue our practice. Whether or not someone encourages your practice we just do it. Here, I think there is some, especially when you practice zazen alone, without teacher, I think you will find out some way to find out whether your practice is right or wrong. When you are tired of sitting, or when especially I mean when you are disgusted with your practice, or when you are discouraged with your practice there you should think that is warning. Why you are discouraged with your practice is because your practice has been very much or somewhat idealistic. Because you have had gaining idea in your practice, and your practice was not

pure enough, or your practice is rather greedy practice, you become discouraged...you are discouraged with your practice. So you should be grateful that you noticed or that you have a sign or suggestion to find out your weak point of practice. At that time, forgetting all about your mistake, and renewing your way of practice and you resume your original practice. This is very important point.

So long as you are continuing your practice you are quite safe, but as it is very difficult to continue it there must...you must find some way to encourage yourself. But the way you encourage yourself is not adequate. Your practice will be involved in some other practice, or some poor, shabby practice so without being involved in some poor practice, to continue our pure practice is rather difficult. Maybe pretty difficult. This is why we have teacher. With your teacher you will be correct...correct your practice. Of course you will have a very hard time with him, but even though you find it hard, you are always safe from wrong practice.

We are...we have had pretty difficult time with our teacher. When we talk about the difficulties we have had you may think without this kind of hardship you cannot practice zazen or you cannot attain some stage. But this is not true. Whether you have difficulties in your practice or not, as long as you keep continuous practice you will have our pure practice in its true sense. Even when you are not aware of it you have it. So Dogen-zenji said, "Don't think you will be aware of your own enlightenment. Whether or not you are aware of it, you have your own True Enlightenment within your practice." While you are...if you see people involved in various practices, you can compare your practice with the other's practice and you will...then you will feel true gratitude for our way.

The other mistake will be to practice it with some joy in it. But this is not very good shape, you know. This is pretty good, of course, not bad, but if you compare it to the true practice it is not so good. In Hinayana Buddhism they classify our practice in four ways. The best way is just to do it without having any joy (even spiritual joy) in it. Just do it,

forgetting our physical and mental feeling...just do it and forget all about yourself in your practice. This is the fourth, highest stage. The next one is just to have physical joy. This stage...you can compare this stage to the stage you find some pleasure in practice because you like it you practice it. In this stage you have still physical joy. And the second stage is the stage you have mental joy and physical joy. But in the third stage you have just physical feeling, physical good feeling. In the second stage you have mental and physical good feeling. In the second stage you have mental and physical good feeling. So, those two stages are the stages, because you feel good, you practice zazen. So this stage is the best stage, the second and third one. The first stage is the stage you have no thinking, you have no curiosity in your practice. This is the first stage. When you stop your thinking you have the first one. This is also true with our Mahayana practice. The highest stage is just to practice it, and if you find some difficulty in it that is the warning that you have some wrong idea in your practice, so you have to be careful but don't give up your practice; continue it knowing that...knowing your weakness of your practice. Here we have no gaining idea in our practice. Here we have no fixed idea of attainment. You don't say 'This is enlightenment' or 'That is not right practice'. Even in wrong practice, when you realize it, and continue it, that is right practice. Our practice cannot be perfect. But without being discouraged by it to continue it...in short, is the secret of practice.

And if you want to find out some encouragement in your discouragement, when you get tired of, that is the encouragement. You encourage yourself when you get tired of it, or when you don't want to do it, that is the warning. Like when you have a tooth ache when your teeth are not good. When you feel some pain in your teeth you go to the dentist. That is our way.

The other day someone whom I met in New York came yesterday he came to San Francisco and I saw him and he is working with U Thant for eighteen years and he is

from the same country with U Thant. And he practiced various ways and he told me what kind of experience he had and he asked me, “Which is your practice?” He had many experiences of practice. And when I said, “This is our practice”, he was very glad to hear that. He said. “I thought this was the best practice.” And we talked about when we have conflict in our world. The cause of the conflict is some fixed idea or one-sided idea. So when everyone knows the value of pure practice we will have no conflict in our world and he was so glad. And he agreed with me and I thought this is my secret of practice and Dogen-zenji’s way. He repeats in his Shobogenzo this point. If you have this point you can practice various ways and you can find out the meaning of the various practices without being caught by it. If you do not realize this point you will be easily caught by some particular practice and you will say, ‘This is enlightenment. This is perfect practice. This is our way. The rest of the ways are not perfect. This is the best way.’ This is big, big mistake. There is no particular way in our true practice. This...in this understanding you should find out your...and you should know what is your practice you have now. Then you will now, knowing the advantage and disadvantage of the practice, some special practice, you can practice it. If you do not know this practice you will ignore the disadvantage of the practice, and you will emphasize good part of it but eventually you will find out the worst side of the practice and you will be discouraged when it is too late. This is very silly. This is...we are very grateful for the ancient teachers to point out strictly this point.

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