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Saturday, April 22, 1967
Sesshin Lecture A
San Francisco

¹ ... students. I want to give some important points. First of all, when you want to study Buddhism or Zen, you must give up worldly desires or you must realize that it is useless to seek for worldly desires. But it may be rather difficult to realize that it is foolish to seek for worldly desires.

Sometime, people mix up religious way-seeking mind and worldly desires. They think they are—there is—are seeking for a truth or a religious truth, but actually they are seeking for the worldly desires by name of religion. The religious sentiment is quite different from worldly desires. By "worldly desires" I mean to seek for—to seek for fame or profit. To seek for fame or profit, this kind of desire is very much like, in some point, religious desires.

If you understand something about Buddhist philosophy or deep teaching of Buddhism, you may be very much proud of it. To have some profound unusual understanding of life or view of life, while others foolishly study something which is not so deep or profound, you may say: "You are wrong. My understanding is right. Look here, Buddha says so-and-so. This is true understanding of life." But reflect on your mind when you say it—say so. In your mind there is just pride, and no mercy, or no kindness in your mind. You are just proud of something, that's all. Whatever you say, that is out of question. You should reflect on your mind. So in this case you mix up, you know, study of Buddhism and worldly attainment.

If you study Buddhism people naturally respect you. And if you say something unusual, people may say, "He is very great." And if you practice Zen quite well, people will respect you. But in this case, in this situation, what kind of feeling you have is the point, you know. If you are very much proud of yourself, that is wrong. You are not studying Buddhism. And even though you have sometime—if you are too much proud of your understanding or your practice, eventually people will get tired of seeing you [laughs, laughter]. Then you will be very much discouraged. "But I am studying [laughs] Zen [laughs]." That's very, you know, foolish.

So without knowing how to study Buddhism you cannot prac- [partial word]—study Buddhism. This is why we practice zazen with group in this way. If you practice—you can practice zazen alone pretty well, but there are many danger, and there are many pit [pot?] hole in your

¹ The opening words were not recorded on tape.

practice. And you will be—you will easily fall into the pit hole of the practice. But if you practice in this way, it is very difficult to be lost. Everyone watching you beside yourself. Of course in our practice we are very careful with ourselves. And so, this is pretty good. But even though you are—you think you are very careful, but actually people knows you more than yourself. If you want to know about yourself ask people what they will say. You will find out quite easily what kind of person you are.

You may say people has misunderstanding [laughs], you may say, but that is just excuse. You think people misunderstand you, but we are—we exist in the world of interdependency. So we cannot separate it from the meaning of our existence—cannot be found out—cannot be understood [as] something separated from others. So we have to study ourselves by the mirror of the people. And if your understanding of yourself and others' understanding of yourself does not accord with—you have to think.

In short, it is more safe to have very little desires in your study. Don't try to achieve something great. Don't try to study something profound. Just study about yourself in your everyday life. Then you will not make not much mistake in your study. When you intend something great, you will be—your practice will be—will not be so good. In your desperate—desparatory condition, you have to study. You have to accept the situation you are [in], and you should think this is the best occasion to practice—to study yourself or to study Buddhism.

So when you practice zazen with people—I mean by "practice" not only zazen practice but also cleaning or work—we call it *samu*.² In *samu*, or in your zazen practice, or observation of rituals you should try to work on something difficult and something hard, or something which people do not like to do it. Usually, you know, if you are in the position of teacher, you will be very happy. But to study Buddhism as a disciple always will [laughs] not be so good. But you should think which is better: to be a teacher or to be a disciple? When you feel something good, you know, there is some danger. Or you will be lost in your practice. So if you want to practice, or if you realize how difficult it is to practice Zen in its true sense, you should rather prefer some—something—try to work [on] something which people will ignore or will not like it.

Dōgen-zenji established Kōshō temple near Kyōto when he was thirty—thirty-four. He says:

Only the people who already gave up fame and profit can enter this monastery. The people—students who has no sincere way-

² *samu* (Jap.): Physical labor around a temple: sweeping the grounds, gathering firewood, etc.

seeking mind cannot enter this monastery. If you enter this monastery with the idea of name and profit by mistake, [you] should go out. If you have true way-seeking mind, you will not have any idea of name and profit.

In the world—in the various world, there is not many true teachers. In this country from ancient time—this is—this temple may be the source of the true Buddhism. Because of—because I am pitiful for my descendent so I will practice—I will emphasize this point especially. The student in this monastery should be like milk and water—should be harmonious, should be friendly like milk and water. And you should practice our way. For a while we are master and disciple. But we are friends forever. And we are—you are Buddha and patriarchs. We are all Buddha and patriarchs. And we are practicing their way of Buddhism, and we are meeting with the true dharma.

You should not forget true way-seeking mind. True [way]-seeking mind is Buddha's mind and body. And with it you will be Buddha. You renounced your home and your village, and you are with cloud and water. Who is help—who helps you? Usually your parents is the most great helper, but the more helpful one is Buddha. More help is—more helpful one is your friend and friend of Buddhism.

Don't like to—to [go] wandering about or to sightseeing. If it is necessary, once a month will be allowed. Ancient people lived in the mountain or remoted wood and practiced our way, giving up all the worldly affairs and giving up his learning and his virtues. And now—and they are sincerely strive for the extinguish—extinguishing the fire on his—in their head. Recollecting those things, we should not be involved in worldly affairs. If we—if we are involved in it, we should be very ashamed of it. The evanescence of life—in this evanescence of life, we don't know when our life drops on the roadside of—like a dew on the roadside.

This three points are the most important points. He wrote some more points, but those points are very important. But we—I don't say we should observe those words of Dōgen literally right now, but why we study Buddhism will be understood by those instructions.

This—those points are the most difficult points for you American people. You know, you are very ambitious, and you are trying to do something good always, and try to be successful [laughs] always, you know, without knowing the true meaning of it. So even though you come here and study Buddhism, you know, to me, you know, you are going the other direction [laughs]. It looks like so. I hope this is my

misunderstanding, but I am very sorry, more and more [laughs] I found you going [in] the other direction.

For an American it is, you know—maybe it is not bad, but for a Buddhist it is not so good. So that is why I say you should know what you are doing. You know, you are trying, you know—your idea of Buddhism is something in the cloud, you know [laughs], where you cannot reach. And still you [are] ambitious people with big stick [laughs, laughter], and reach for that. But that is not our way.

Our way is just to stand on the ground [laughs] and step by step to go forward is our way. Sometime we may go sideways [laughs], but as long as your, you know, feet are on the ground it may be pretty good.

So we, you know, admire a cow, you know, which cannot even run. They are very slow [laughs]. Cow is our good example. Do you know the picture of—instruction of ten cows, you know, cow? Because it goes very slow on the ground. You shouldn't try to be a dragon [that] flies in the sky. If you want to be a hero [laughs], you know, hero of the most—hero of the commonest people, not to be, you know, not to try to control people or to give some big influence to others.

Here in this country some other kinds of hero is necessary. We are, you know, going—we have too much heroes—same kinds, same kinds of—too much heroes, so we don't—I don't think you want heroes like Napoleon or like some statesman. You should be a pioneer, you know, in—to the other direction. You should be a pioneer of true, you know—in its true sense. If you have some cheer [?], you know, the cheer [?] should be directed toward right direction.

Before many ambitious people took a world trip, but now who is taking world trip, spending much money? [Laughs.] This is ridiculous, you know. In this—under this situation, to stay [in] one place always is same thing to make world trip. Not much difference. If you stay one place always, you will meet, you know, if you stay [in] San Francisco you will meet various people without going anywhere because they will come, they will pass San Francisco. Whenever they come to San Francisco airport, they may come and visit you [laughs, laughter]. There is no need for you to going around, you know. We are—all of us is going, you know, another direction.

My father's—my father was a priest. And his friend—my father passed away long, long time ago. But his friend who was a priest stayed only [at] one temple, but he had many good friends. But he is a kind of exception, but there is some truth in his way. So try not [to] study Buddhism in your pleasure. And choose something—choose your way in some common and plain world. There there is true pleasures of life, and eternal truth is there.

In your sitting, if you have this kind of confidence you will understand many things which is quite different from the understanding you will have by some other way of study. You can do many things, but without realizing this point, to do it means nothing. That is why we practice zazen. What I mean is to change your direction of study. I do not say, "Don't do this," or "Don't do that." But we have to study Buddhism for [?] a different way from your ordinal [ordinary] way of studying, or else Buddhism is—will be just a interesting philosophy.

[SR appears to be responding to question not heard on the recording, which had been stopped for an indeterminate period.]

Hmm? Oh. Love of another person? Worldly desires? Yeah, sometime. Or most of time it may be so [laughs]. But true love is not, you know. But true love is, you know, it is same thing with Buddha's teaching, you know. Something which is very exciting is not, you know—there is—many things will be involved in it, so you have to know which is the most important element, you know—basic element of the love. It is like love may be a—like a beautiful building, you know, very beautiful. But if the foundation is not good it will not last long. So we sh- [partial word]—you should find out what kind of foundation is necessary for the building of love.

Did you—you know, you have to study, you know, about love, you know, just, you know—usually, you know, your way of—you study love in comparing [comparison to] something, some other thing—or hatred, you know. And to—to be—to feel resistance is, you know, to build resistance to war or something, you know, is love. You may understand this way. This is very realistic understanding, and it will not reach to the bottom of the meaning. So forget all about it, and intuitively, you know, study it.

So to attain liberation from—even from yourself is important. This is why we sit, you know, with firm conviction. Some of, you know—whatever people may say, you know, don't be bothered by it. And watch yourself, whether you have true love or not. That is, you know, how to study what is love. So if—usually if someone say "white," you know, you may say "black" [laughs]. This is quite usual thing. If someone say, "white" you may say "black," you know. We have this kind of tendency. And we have this kind of understanding always. It is—it means you will have no freedom from it. To imitate or to follow others is—may be foolish. But to feel resistance is also foolish. So don't be caught by words. And rely on your intuitive direct experience. That is the important thing.

Worldly desires—all the desires is not worldly desires if you have this point. But if you do not have the foundation, you know, the—even the

beautiful building is not true love. Don't be caught by fancy—fanciness of the world or technique of the world. We have various, you know, nature, so psychologist or religious leaders studying our nature and organizing big [laughs] organization—and you will be captivated by it if you are not wise enough to know yourselves.

The hero in the Meiji Period, Saigō Nanshū,³ said: "It is difficult to manage someone who do not want fame or profit." [Laughs.] It is very difficult to manage people like that. But, "The most trustworthy person is the person who has nothing to do with name or profit." He is the most trustworthy person, he said. That is very true. All right? [Laughs.]

Zen master may say: "What you said is right, but what you mean is not right" [laughs]. What you say is right, but what you mean is not right [laughs]. So, you know, "Under—under many scolding slap, you should study." [Laughs.] What, you know, do they meant—did—do they mean [laughs]?

As we are pretty—we are big group now, so [laughs] it is—we must, you know, be very strict with ourselves. Okay? We have not much candy [laughs]. You are too many, so [laughs] instead of candy we have to give you some salt so that [laughs, laughter] we have not much, you know, problem—difficulties. If we serving just salt, not much people will come [laughs, laughter]. We have no—no more candy. Now let's sit without candy [laughs, laughter].

Thank you very much.

Source: Original City Center tape. Verbatim transcript by Diana Bartle and Bill Redican (10/26/01).

³ Saigō Takamori (literary name Nanshū): 1827–1877. A popular leader in the overthrow of the Tokugawa Shogunate and in the restoration of the Emperor Meiji. He was trained in both Zen Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism.