

[The first part of this lecture was not recorded. Suzuki-rōshi was talking about the four stages of belief, intellectual understanding, practice, and enlightenment. This transcript begins somewhere in the third stage.]

... when you have a new experience, at first you may form a greater belief. And you may even cry over this new experience because it is so different from the experiences you have had, and because it is too real to you. That is because your practice is still lacking. In other words, you have to practice until you become accustomed to new experiences and can digest them and act properly according to them. This kind of understanding is necessary.

Before you become afraid of it or before you wonder what it is, you should practice more under the new experience, following the new experience. This is also very important. If you see your teacher when you have a new experience, he will say to practice more with the new understanding. I don't think all of you will always be able to practice our way with a teacher. Some of you will have to go to your own home and practice alone. In such a case, when you have a new experience, you should continue your practice following the new experience within yourself, and act bravely according to it. This kind of make-shift will be necessary for you. We should never be bound by the same old way. We should always be ready for new experiences. You may say it is *kensho*, but whatever you say, it is quite a new experience, both intellectually and emotionally.

And the last stage is when many of our patriarchs and Buddhas will prove your experience. Then you will have the same experience our buddhas of old had. In this way Buddhism will be developed.

So the most important thing is to [first stage] believe in our Buddha nature and then [second stage] to understand intellectually how to study our way. It is not one way. There are many ways. Back and forth we have to view life.

And [third stage] we have to have enough experiences to accord with reality. Then we have to acquire the power to act without any restriction, without even any idea of teaching. To act quite naturally without being off the track is the third stage. And to be proved by Buddha is the last [fourth] stage.

But his experience can also be interpreted in reverse. What Buddha attained is purity of mind or the absolute mind, so the last stage will be the first one you believe in. Because you have the last stage [stage of enlightenment] which every Buddha attained, and because everyone has the same wisdom, whatever we do, whatever we understand, whatever we think follows from it. Because of our true nature, it is possible for us to think of things in various ways and to act in various ways. So the last stage will be the first one. And you can act in the next stage [stage of practice] because you firmly believe in our attainment of the Buddha. You can act without any doubt. The stage where you can emotionally follow the way, when you believe in the actual Buddha who attained enlightenment three thousand years ago will be the second stage. If you believe in him emotionally, you can believe in Buddha's way, and you can intellectually understand his teaching.

In this way, back and forth, there are many possibilities in our practice. The first stage will be the last stage, and the last one may be the first one. So actually there are no stages. I am intellectualizing to help you, that's all. Actually, I don't know which is the right order, starting actually from Buddha and then going to the third (practice) stage, or starting from believing in the absolute nature which we originally have and going to intellectual understanding and then emotional activity -- practice which your emotion follows. Or you practice until your emotional activity follows your practice or follows your intellectual understanding.

So there may be two ways to order the stages. I found recently that, for most of you, it is more appropriate to follow the first order, starting from believing in the absolute nature of all being, to studying various religions or various teachings of Buddhism by various intellectual means, to practicing zazen so that you will find intellectual study a more emotional activity, and then reading scriptures or the biographies of our teachers or listening to our lectures. This is the more usual process for you. But the other way is to read the biographies of the various teachers and to live with teachers in a monastery like this, and then more and more to intellectualize the experience or the life we have here. This is also possible.

But whichever way you take, the most important thing is the practice of Zen. Either way, if the process of attaining the actual meaning of life does not follow practice, it is impossible. The problem you have will not be solved, so your life will not be your own life. It is like food: even though you take food, if your tummy doesn't digest it, it doesn't work. So the important thing is to digest the things you have had. That is practice. By practice you will attain oneness of intellectual understanding and emotional understanding.

We are so grateful to have many teachers and to have teachings which are the accumulation of the actual experience of various sages. [One line is missing here.] So we have to study with our warm heart, not just with our brain. Direct experience, direct practice is necessary. If you want to do this, you have to be very straightforward, very open, and ready for everything which will happen to you.

The most important belief we should have is belief in nothing. To believe in nothing is to believe in everything. First of all, we should believe in nothing. Don't feel lonely. You exist just by yourself. We must have this kind of spirit and then practice our way. And then read scriptures or see your teacher. Then you will have the true meaning of your own life. Religion is through and through a personal thing. Religion is just for yourself, not for others.

What I told you this afternoon is based on the four stages in the order of *shi*, *ge*, *gyo*, *sho*. *Shi* is belief, *ge* is intellectual understanding, and *gyo* is practice. Here it means a more emotional activity followed by intellectual activity. We call this *gyo*. And *sho* is the enlightenment or proof, to be proved by various teachers. This is a very important thing. Our practice includes the four stages and should follow each of them. Our practice is not just one of the four orders of entering our way.

I'm afraid my explanation was not so clear to you, but I want you to think about it more. The reason I talked about this is that I saw many students who were very afraid of their new experience. It is so unusual that you become afraid of it, and you may not be able to see your teacher in most cases. But there is no need to be afraid of it. Anyway, we should practice our way from beginning to end. As long as practice follows your intellectual understanding or your emotional activities, whatever it is, it will be adjusted, and it will be your own in its true sense.

If you say you cannot practice any more because of this or that, that is the opposite of what I mean. Because of this or that, you have to practice! Do you understand? Because you are busy, you have to study. Because your mind is occupied by some particular thing, you have to practice. Because you've become interested in something recently, you have to practice our way or else you will be lost. Otherwise, whatever you do, it won't work; you are not you. When you want to leave you, you should practice zazen. That is the most important thing for you.

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This transcript is a retyping of the existing City Center transcript. It is not verbatim. No tape is available. The City Center transcript was entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. It was reformatted by Bill Redican (10/26/01).