

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
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Tassajara

NOT VERBATIM

Tonight I want to give you a correct idea of Buddhism or Zen. In a word, Zen is the teaching or practice of seeing "things as it is" or accepting "things as it is" and of raising things as they go. This is the fundamental purpose of our practice and the meaning of Zen. But it is, actually, rather difficult to see "things as it is." You may say you are seeing "things as it is," but actually, you do not see "things as it is." I don't mean that it is a distortion of sight, such as when something of one shape looks shorter than something of another shape. I mean that, as soon as you see something, you already start to intellectualize it. As soon as you intellectualize something, it is already it is not just what you saw.

When I was young, I wanted to practice true practice, and I wanted to know what the way-seeking mind is in its true sense.¹ I thought that to do something good might be the way-seeking mind. So I got up very early, and washed the toilet and sink before the other students got up. I thought that would be a very good thing to do. But while I was doing this, I was afraid someone would see me. I wanted to do it just by myself without being noticed by anyone else. "If someone sees me, that will not be pure practice," I thought. But, before they saw me, I was already going wrong in my mind. I asked myself whether I liked doing it without being noticed by anyone, or whether I wanted it to be known by someone else. Why am I doing something like this? So, in a way, I couldn't accept my way-seeking mind. I was not so sure of the purity of my way-seeking mind.

When I saw a lamp lit in one room, of course, I hid myself. I thought that someone had gotten up already and might come down. It seemed as though I was at least trying to do something good with a pure mind, but that my mind was not so pure. My mind was wandering about. I couldn't make my mind sure, and I was at a loss for what to do. I suffered a little bit. And I thought, and thought, and thought about what I should do.

One day, when I was listening to a psychology lecture, the teacher² said, "It is impossible to catch our mind exactly. It is especially impossible to know what we have done. The mind which acted some time ago, the mind which belongs to the past, is impossible to catch. And even the mind which is acting right now is impossible to catch, actually." So I thought, "no wonder it is so difficult for me to understand my mind." And I gave up trying to be sure of my way-

¹ Suzuki-rōshi also tells this story in SR-69-09-00.B.

² Professor Yoshitaka Iriya. See Lecture SR-69-11-13.

seeking mind. Since then I have done things, without thinking, just because they were good. And, at the same time, whether or not people saw me was not my problem anymore.

So when you want to see, or be sure of, your mind, you cannot catch it. But when you just do something, and when your mind is just acting as it is, that is how you catch your mind in the true sense. Anyway, it is rather difficult to see "things as it is," because seeing "things as it is" is not just the activity of our sight or eyes. This is why we put emphasis on practice. To do something without thinking is the most important point in understanding ourselves. Since it is difficult to see "things as it is," we should practice our way.

People may say if the purpose of Zen is to see "things as it is," then there is no need to practice. That is the big problem. I think in your everyday life, the root practice may be to raise flowers or to grow your garden. That is, I think, the best practice. You know, when you sow a seed, you have to wait for the seed to come up. And if it comes up, you have take care of it. That is our practice. Just to sow a seed is not enough. To take care of it day after day is very important for the good gardener. When you build a house, your work is finished. If someone has written a book, that is enough. But for a gardener, it is necessary to take care of the garden every day. Even though you have finished making that garden, it is necessary to take care of it. So I think our way is nearly the same as making your own garden, or raising some vegetables or flowers.

Each seed, or each plant, has its own character and its own color. If it is a stone garden, each stone has its own character. A long stone has a solemn, profound feeling; a round one expresses perfection; a square one expresses some rigidness or feeling of austerity. If it has moss on it, it has some deep, profound, mystical spirit to it. Those are the characters of each material you use in your garden.

People may say, "Whatever we do, that is Zen," or, "I am seeing 'things as it is.'" They usually see things one by one, but that is not enough. You may say you see "things as it is," but you are just seeing each material and each material's character.

It is necessary for a gardener to make his garden beautiful. If possible, the gardener should express some meaning, or some particular beauty, according to what has been ordered. If someone wants him to build a calm garden, he must make the garden accordingly. If he wants a solemn or austere feeling, he makes the garden austere. He has to choose the material and make it more austere by contrast, or by association, or by harmony.

There should be some rules. The way to create harmony is have a

rule. We have many colors, and two colors may clash, or may be in harmony, or may be in contrast. If you arrange the six colors in order, starting from red, and going to orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet, that is the color order. But if you use red and yellow together, that is harmony. And if you use red and green, that is contrast. By using those rules, you will accomplish your purpose, and you will have a beautiful garden.

So just living however you like is not the way to live. If you want to live, you should follow some rules. If there is a sharp, straight, narrow stone, it expresses some mystical feeling. If the stone is this way [presumably making a shape with his hands], it expresses calmness or peacefulness. And these two shapes are in contrast. But a round stone will be harmonious with every stone. It goes perfectly with any kind of form. A stone which has a wide base expresses a stable feeling. This stone is in contrast with a massive stone, and a long, upright stone and a massive stone are in order. You cannot make a beautiful garden if you just arrange the stones in order. So you should also use some stones which are in contrast with the other stones you're using. There must be some rules.

So, if you want to live, in the true sense of the word, in relationship with others, and in relationship with the "you" which has been living in the past, and which will live tomorrow, there must be some rules. Although it looks like there are no rules, actually there are strict rules. To live day by day, in the true sense, means to live by some perfect rules. This point is also emphasized in Zen. Zen is not just personal practice, and our enlightenment is not just personal attainment. When we attain enlightenment, everything should be enlightened. That is the rule of enlightenment. When we find our position in this moment, we say we attain enlightenment. And when we live with other beings, we say we attain enlightenment.

So if you think enlightenment is just a personal experience, this idea of enlightenment is like collecting only square stones or only round stones. If someone likes beautiful stones, in which you can see something blue and something white, if that is his enlightenment, he will keep collecting the same stones. But with so many of the same stones, you cannot build an interesting garden. You should use various stones. Enlightenment is the same. If you attach to some particular enlightenment, that is not true enlightenment. You should have various enlightenments. And you should experience various experiences, and you should put more emphasis on relationships between one person and another. In this way, we should practice back and forth, according to the position in which we find ourselves.

This is the outline of our practice and how you attain it. If enlightenment is just collecting, or just being proud of a kind of

experience, that kind of experience will not help you at all. And if that were enlightenment, there would have been no need for Buddha to strive hard to save people after he attained enlightenment. What is the purpose of wandering about the dusty road of illusion? If attaining enlightenment is the purpose of zazen, why did Bodhidharma come to China from India and sit for nine years on Shaolin Mountain? The point is to find our position moment after moment, and to live with people moment after moment according to the place. That is the purpose of our practice.

I wonder if I was able to express myself, and if you understood what I said. But I think we have some more time. Will you ask me questions?

Student A: Can you put too many stones in your garden?

Suzuki-rōshi: We should forget them, one after another. At the same time, it may be better to give them away after we enjoy them.

Q: Could you please try to summarize, again, the idea of the true teaching?

Suzuki-rōshi: Samurai?

Q: No, summarize.

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh, summarize. Zen?

Q: No, just the point you were making tonight. About the true teaching.

Suzuki-rōshi: The true teaching is to accept "things as it is" and to raise it, or to let it grow, as it goes. I understand the purpose of our practice in this way. We do it by living on each moment in the right position, by giving things some nourishment, day by day, when they want it. And to understand what they want, you should be able to talk with them. That is Zen. Did you understand?

Q: Thank you, I think I understand now.

Suzuki-rōshi: I should not talk too much. I should summarize. All right?

Q: Thank you.

Suzuki-rōshi: And at the same time, I wanted to correct the misunderstanding of Zen. Just doing whatever you like is not Zen, and

is not Buddhism. We call it *jinen ken gedo*.³ *Jinen ken gedo* means the view of life of naturalism, such as Rousseau had.

Q: You said that after you plant the seed, then you have to wait for the seed to come up. Does the gardener do anything while the seed is coming up but before it sprouts?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes, the gardener gives it some water and works it every day. He or she is very busy, day by day.

Q: Should the gardener build his garden the way he wants it, or the way other people would like it to be built?

Suzuki-rōshi: Some gardeners should build according to what has been ordered. But he may build a garden just for himself.

Q: Why did you choose a garden as an example?

Suzuki-rōshi: Because I like them; I understand them.

Q: What happens if you don't follow the rules of order?

Suzuki-rōshi: Actually, it is not possible to not follow order or rules. But if you do not know how to follow the order, you will not be successful in your work--you cannot do anything, actually. It will be a waste of labor and time. The more you work on it, the more you will have intuition to help you follow the rules. Actually, it is not possible for us not to follow any rules. Even though you may look like you're not following any rules, in fact, you are following rules.

Q: You said that even though it doesn't look like it, we're always following rules whether we know it or not. Through practice, do we get to a point where we can pick which rules we are following more than we can now?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes. That is practice, you know. So that is why we should practice our way back and forth. My practice should not be just giving lectures to you. I should sometimes listen to you. We have to change our position in our practice. That is very important.

Q: If a lot of insects come in and start eating up the garden, or if there's a hailstorm or a frost, what do you do then?

Suzuki-rōshi: There it is necessary for you to follow some rules. And you should have some purpose. We say *gan* [*pranidhana*, vows to some particular end]. *Gan* means to have some purpose. For

³ Literally: *jinen* = spontaneity; *ken* = *darsana*, *dçiti*, view; *gedo* = non-Buddhist religion or philosophy.

Buddhists, to save all sentient beings, even though it is not possible to save them all, is our final desire. Our effort should be pointed in that direction. So if the purpose of growing your garden is to help hungry people, you should protect the plants from hail and insects.

There should be some purpose, or else we cannot live. To live means to have some purpose. And that purpose sometimes is not complete, or not wide enough. Everyone works for someone. Even a thief will be kind to his wife, or at least to himself. But he is not kind enough to his neighbors. That is why he steals things from them. So we should have some ultimate desire for which we strive.

We say, "Even though the truth is incomprehensible, we have to study it completely." That is not possible, you know. One after another, we'll find some new theories, or new truths, even in science or physics. So it is not possible to reach the final, ultimate truth. Even so, we continue our effort. Even though being friendly with each other will not be possible, we should strive to be friendly with each other. Even though our evil desires are limitless, even though, one after another, we have evil desires, we should strive for realization from them.

Those are a Buddhist's ultimate desires. Before you practice our way, knowing this truth, knowing reality, whatever you see looks absurd. But once you start something with those four noble desires, you will understand that everything is practicing our way. Even insects, and animals, and gophers are one, are striving to attain our way.

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