

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
AFTERNOON *SESSHIN* LECTURE
Friday, December 1, 1967
Zen Mountain Center
Lecture A

In this *sesshin*, as I said this morning, our practice will be concentrated on putting power in your *hara*¹ or *tanden*.² This is not just a technique of practice, but the underlying idea is very deep. Our practice—zazen practice should not be compared with any other practice or training. It does not mean, even [if] I say so, Zen is something special or Zen is superior to any other teaching. But there is a reason why we should not compare our practice to other—many kinds of practice.

As Dōgen-zenji said, in his *Fukan Zazen-gi—Recommending Zen Practice to Every One of Us—Fukan Zazen-gi*—he recommends this practice [to] every one of us. And he said, first of all, whatever you do, that is zazen. There is not something—some special training or some special way of practice.

Whatever you do, it is Zen, actually. At least when you are doing, that is Zen. But your understanding of your everyday activity is not right because of misunderstanding your practice or misunderstanding or discrimination of the practice or attachment to your activity. Your activity is not Zen any more to you [laughs]—only to you [laughs]. But actually it is Zen. Whatever you do, that is Zen.

But for you, only for you who do something for others or for yourself, is not Zen because of your—because you spoil your practice with your attachment, with your dualistic idea, with your discrimination, by comparing your practice to some other practice which you do or which someone else will do.

But when you practice, when you do something, at least at that time that is Zen practice. So actually, as he [Dōgen] said, there is no particular enlightenment you will attain by means of some practice, because whatever you do, that is zazen. If so, you know, the mean[s] to attain enlightenment is also true practice.

So we should know why we spoil our practice, and we should know how we—how we are able to practice our way without spoiling it. So, as he says, verbal interpretation of zazen or any kind of teaching—written teaching by means of those literature or talk or instruction—

¹ *hara*: region of the body below the navel, regarded as the physical core or center of one's being. It is equivalent to *tanden*.

² *tanden*: abdomen or *hara*.

only by means of those instructions you cannot attain enlightenment. Only way is to practice your way without spoiling it.

You may think my talk—if I talk in this way, there is no connection between the instruction I gave you this morning, but actually how we—you practice this kind of practice is quite simple: to put your strength or power in your tummy, because actually if you have enough strength in your *tanden*, you will have big broad mind in which you can accept things. Whatever it is, you can accept things. And your mind is so broad and so big—great that nothing can increase it, or nothing can disturb it.

If it is, you know, small—if it is the water in the cup [?], you can disturb it. But if it is ocean you cannot disturb it, even though you throw stone in it. It doesn't make any sound. When you see the—even the Pacific Ocean above the sky on the airplane, it is just, you know, calm water. You cannot do anything with it. This kind of mind you will have if you put strength in your tummy. That [laughs] is why I advise you to, you know, put strength in your tummy or *tanden*.

When you have some pain in your legs, you will wonder what will happen to you if you sit more—ten minutes more, or twenty minutes more. You will wonder what will happen to you. Nothing will happen [laughs]. Because you limit your mind, you know, the pain will do something with your practice. But if you have big, great power in your tummy, nothing can do with it [laughs]. And nothing will happen to you.

Some people who sit for the first time in the calm place, I think you will—he will be afraid of the calmness of the sitting [laughs]. Your mind is so calm and surrounding is so calm. The experience you have is quite unusual experience you have—you have had, so someone will become afraid of it. But nothing will happen.

Originally, even [though] we die in our practice [laughs], we are going [to] our original home [laughs]. After death, where you will go? You will return to your home from where you come out [laughing]. That's all. Nothing will happen to you. That's all right. Quite all right.

But why you become afraid of it is because you do not possess the big mind. Even though you become afraid of it, nothing will happen to you [laughing]. You will become afraid of it just for [?]- You know, everything will laugh at you [it?]. "Why you are afraid of it? Why you—why you think you have gone? You are there, right here." Everyone may say, you know, at—for a time [laughs]—they will say, "Oh, I am sorry. [Laughs.]" But that's all [?].

Nothing will happen. Even though—even if you are a great hero, after

you pass away, nothing will happen. You may think, "After my death, what will happen to this world?" [Laughing.] But nothing will happen to this world. The sun rise from the east and set in east—west. Nothing will happen. Even though, you know, our earth is gone by atomic bomb, nothing will happen [laughs]. Nothing whatsoever happen to this cosmic scale.

If I say so, my talk is nothing to do with our practice, or with our life, you may say. But it is not so. Because you do not possess this kind of big mind, whatever you do, the activity do not make any sense. If you want to do something—something pure and great, you should fix your mind—unperturbable mind which does not move back and forth, or right or left, or successful or unsuccessful. Only with this conviction you can do something in its true sense.

So we say we practice our way not for ourselves or not for others. Our [we] practice our way for sake of the way. There is no other reason why we practice our way. We just want to go back to our home like a dragon will resume in its activity in water, like a tiger who came back and lie down in his own den.³ With this idea we practice our way. And as we do something, we do it just for sake of the activity, without any gaining idea, or without limiting the meaning of the activity. This is why we practice zazen. To think about what is zazen is already blasphemous. If you j- [partial word]—the only way is just to sit. So if it is so, there is no other way to understand what is zazen than just to sit.

When you read something, you read something. But that is—that kind of activity which you do with some plan or idea cannot be compared with the true practice of zazen. The true meaning or reason why you practice was lost because, you know, zazen practice give you various advantage or power to you. If you practice our way, you will become more and more—you will—your mind will become calm, and you will become healthy. So for that reason, they practiced—many people are practicing zazen. But that is not [laughs], you know, true zazen. The form they take is zazen, but the way they practice or reason why they practice is not right. But if you know this point, you can practice our way with various idea too. But this point should not be forgotten, because it means you started to wandering about, you know—going round and round [laughs], seeking for something. Because you do not know the meaning of everyday activity, so you start to seeking for something better. And you are going round and round, same place, seeking for something special.

Here is the translation of *Fukan Zazen-gi*.⁴ Dōgen-zenji worked on [it]

³ An allusion to a line from *Fukan Zazen-gi*: "To grasp this meaning is to be like a dragon that has found water, or like a tiger in its mountain stronghold."

⁴ This translation of *Fukan Zazen-gi* is based on Reiho Masunaga's (*The Sōtō*

for twenty years after—right after he came back from China. He wrote this *Fukan Zazen-gi: Recommending the Rules for Sitting*.

The true way is universal, so why are training and enlightenment different? The supreme teaching is everywhere, so why study the means to get it? Even truth as a whole is clearly apart from the dust. Why adhere to the means of wiping away? The truth is not apart from here, so the means of training are useless.

But if there is even a slightest gap between, separation is as heaven and earth. (The separation is as far as heaven and earth, it means.) If the opposite arise—(dualistic idea arise)—if the opposites arise, you lose the buddha-mind. Even though you are proud of your understanding and have enough enlightenment, even though you gain some wisdom and supernatural power, and find the way, and illuminate your mind, even though you have power to touch heavens, even though you enter into the area of enlightenment, you have almost lost the living way to salvation—living way to enlightenment.

Look at the Buddha. Though born with great wisdom, he had to sit for six years. Look at Buddha—Bodhidharma, who transmitted the buddha-mind. We can still hear the echo of his nine-year wall-gazing. We can still hear the echo of his nine-years' wall-gazing sitting. (Wall-gazing means "sitting," so it may be easier to understand to say "sitting.") We can still hear echoes of his nine-years' wall-gazing sitting. The old sages were very diligent. There is no reason why modern man cannot understand.

You should quite—you should quit follow words and letters. You should withdraw and reflect on yourself. If you can cast off body and mind naturally the buddha-mind emerges. If you wish to gain quickly, you must start quickly.

This is the translation of the—his work who—he polished up, spending for it twenty years. And we can see his handwriting of this *Fukan Zazen-gi*—the one who [he] wrote when he was twenty-eight. To—to us it looks like almost same, but he changed, you know, many times. Although there were not—not much to change, but he was trying to improve it, and he polished it.⁵

Approach to Zen, 1958, pp. 101-102). Suzuki-rōshi modified certain phrases as he read it aloud. Comments in parentheses are by Suzuki-rōshi.

⁵ At least two versions of *Fukan Zazen-gi* are known: (1) the original edition written by Dōgen-zenji's own hand in 1227, shortly after returning from China, and (2) the revised popular edition completed years later. Suzuki-rōshi was translating the revised popular edition.

And this kind of—and his intention to write this *Fukan Zazen-gi* was to transmit true way of practice for his descendant. So he had big responsibility for his descendant and for his former patriarchs. So he studied and studied, even after he attained enlightenment. That is why the echo of this—his work is heard by everyone.

So you should not think you are sitting in the bottom of the valley of Tassajara [laughs] for seven days. How do you feel, you know, for an instance, if you came out—if you are told to quit your sitting and climb up to the top of the mountain to see something from there? What kind of feeling do you have [laughs]? And this morning Ed [Brown] made a very delicious cake [laughs]. When you eat it, what kind of feeling did you have [laughs]?

Some people, you know, may be envious of bird or cats or dogs who enjoy the warm winter sunshine [laughing] near hot spring. But "return to the nature" in its true sense does not mean to be like animal or bird. If you climb up on the top of the mountain, or, you know, if you come from Jamesburg,⁶ perhaps the place you like best will be when you see some of Tassajara Mountain. If it is April it is—they are covered with white snow.

If you want to go back to the nature, you should go back to the rocks on the top of the mountain [laughs]. That is much better than to be a bird, or cat, or even a lion. Be a rock. And sit forever, without being moved by rain, or snow, or storm. But weathered by rain and snow, rocks will tell us many stories. You may say that is just a rock. But buddha-nature, in its truest sense, reveal itself on weathered ancient rocks on the top of the mountain.

The reason why we wanted to practice zazen, putting strength in our *tanden*, is to realize what is true practice and what is not.

[Suzuki-rōshi resumes Dōgen-zenji's *Fukan Zazen-gi*:]

And even though you enter into the area of enlightenment, you have almost lost the living way to salvation.

Look at the Buddha. Though born with great wisdom, he had to sit for six years. Look at Bodhidharma, who transmitted the buddha-mind. We can still hear the echo of his nine-year wall-gazing practice. The old sages are very diligent. There is no reason why modern man cannot understand it.

You should quit following words and letters. You should withdraw and reflect on yourself. ("Withdraw" means to change

⁶ The small town nearest to Tassajara.

the direction of the effort—not outward but inward.) *You should with—withdraw and reflect on yourself. If you can cast off body and mind naturally the buddha-mind emerges—emerges. If you wish to gain quickly, you must start quickly.*

And he explains carefully how to sit.

In meditation, you should have a quiet room. You should eat and drink in moderation. You should forsake myriad relation—abstain relations—abstain from everything. Do not think of good and evil. Do not think of right and wrong. Stop the function of mind, of will, of consciousness. Keep from meaning, memory, perception, insight. Do not strive to become the Buddha. Do not cling to sit or lying down.

In the sitting place, spread a thick square cushion, and on top of it put a round cushion. Some meditate in paryāṅkam (sitting cross-leg), and others in half-paryāṅkam (half-lotus).⁷ You must prepare by wearing your robe and belt loosely—wearing—by wearing your robe and belt loosely.

Then rest your right hand on your left foot, your left hand in your right palm. Press your thumb together. Sit upright. Do not lean to the left or right, forward or backward. Place your ears in the same plane as your shoulders, your nose in line with your navel. Keep your tongue against the plate and close your lip and teeth firmly. Keep your eyes open. Inhale quietly.

Settle your body comfortably. Exhale sharply—exhale sharp—sharp—exhale—(mmm⁸—not "sharply," but—I don't know what to say). Exhale sharply. Move your body to the left and right. Then sit cross-legged, steady.

*"Think the unthinkable."
"How do you think the unthinkable?"
"Think beyond thinking and unthinking."⁹*

This is the important phase of cross-legs sitting.

"Think the unthinkable." Think unthinkable, you know—think unthinkable means think, you know—think not about something, you

⁷ From *paryāṅkam* (Sanskrit): seat.

⁸ Suzuki-rōshi was not satisfied with "sharply." "Completely" was used in another translation (Nishijima and Cross, "Fukan Zazengi," in *Shōbōgenzō*, 1994, Vol. 1, p. 281).

⁹ These three sentences are in quotation marks here because Dōgen-zenji is quoting from an exchange between Yakusan Igen and an unnamed monk (in, e.g., *Shōbōgenzō* "Zazenshin").

know. Usually when you think, you think about something. But thinking mind—if your thinking mind [is] directed [in the] opposite way, that is to think unthinkable. Your mind is still clear, but there is no object. The sun is not, you know, shining. Only the earth, you know. The earth—if the earth is happen to be here, the sun will [laughs] shine on—on our earth. Think unthinkable, you know, is—you mind is—must be like the sun. It is shining, but it is not shining [on] some particular thing. It is more than think about it [?]-something. In this way, your mind—your function of mind picked in your practice.

So he says: "Think unthinkable." "How do you think the unthinkable?" "How do you think the unthinkable?" This is very interesting word. "How do you think the unthinkable?" The sun is not shining [on] some particular thing. So the sun is just the sun. It is not trying to shine [on] anything. It is right there, just there. But [if] someone happen to appear near the sun, it will shine [on] some object [laughs]. That is, you know, how the sun shines [on] everything.

So how—how do you think the unthinkable? [Laughs.] There is no way how—how—is no way, because we don't know how [laughs]. You know, how. So there you can put anything, you know. How. "This way is how." "That way is how." "The all the way is how." "This is how." "This is how." [Laughs.] It is like a "what." Cat is what? Dog is what? What is there?"—you—you ask people. But what, you know? What may be a mouse, a cat, a dog. So how or what means—what it means is very deep.

"How do you think the unthinkable?"

This is not just, you know, question. It is [laughs] a strong statement. How do you think the unthinkable? This is not an interrogative. It is strong affirmative sentence. How do you think the unthinkable? Unthinkable thinking is how.

In what way you think? That is how. That is the unthinkable. But you have no notion of thinking about anything. That is our practice: How do you think the unthinkable? Think beyond thinking and unthinking. Think beyond thinking and unthinking. Your thinking should be beyond "I think" or "I don't think." It must be right there always.

This is the important phase of cross-leg sitting.

We sit in this way. This is how different it is—our practice. That is why we should practice zazen, and you should not neglect our zazen because you think something else is more important. Why something is important for you is because of this practice. So if you forget all about the practice, you lose your life. Whatever you do, it doesn't work. If you insist it works, you lose yourself. You are no more. You

vanish [laughs] from this world.

If the earth say, "I don't want the sun," [laughs] what will happen to it? There is no other way to vanish from the cosmic world. Because—because of this unthinkable thinking, we exist. We can think. We can live. Without this unthinkable, we cannot think. It change into delusion. If you insist on it, you—it means you are involved in dark, big, delusion.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript originally recorded by Brian Fikes. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. The segment beginning with the latter part of *Fukan Zazen-gi* (p. 5 onward) to the end of the lecture was transferred from SR-67-12-02, where it had been incorrectly entered. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Bill Redican (3/28/01).