

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Evening Sesshin Lecture
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Tassajara
Lecture B

We say everything has buddha-nature, so we have to treat as a buddha. To say "everything has buddha-nature" is not appropriate, because if I say—to say—if I say everything has buddha-nature, then [?] buddha-nature and everything is dualistic. Actually, everything itself is buddha. "Buddha-nature," we say, but this word is not so appropriate. Buddha-nature, you know—if I say "buddha-nature," it looks like we have many nature: human nature, buddha-nature, and nature of animal. But buddha—by—what we mean by buddha-nature is some special nature in comparison to other nature, or human nature—human nature itself, buddha-nature. So there is nothing but buddha-nature.

So, when we say "buddha-nature"—"everything has buddha-nature," this is already wrong. But tentatively, we must say everything has buddha-nature. In Japanese, for an instance, I have, you know, two eyes. You say I have two eyes. But we do not say I have two eyes. We say, "There is two eyes." The meaning is different, and in Chinese character, "I have"—the word "have" means "skin," you know, which is part of our body. So when we say "I have two eyes," it means our eyes is a part of ours. Or we do not say even "I." "There is two eyes," we say. So I is—we do not say I, you know: *Mega futatsu arimas. Mimiga futatsu arimas. Kuchiga hitotsu arimas.*¹ "There is one mouth." "There are two eyes." And, "There are two ears." It means, you know: "I have two eyes." And, "I have one mouth." And "I have one nose."² And that "have" is—means a part of us. It means "flesh" or "skin." So when we say "I have—everything has buddha-nature," what we mean is not so dualistic.

Everything has buddha-nature, but tentatively because there is no other way to say it, we should say there is—we have—everything has buddha-nature, even though it sound very dualistic. And according to Dōgen-zenji, to say a part of it is not perfect enough. Buddha include everything. Whatever there is in this world, that is a part of buddha-nature. If there is something outside of it—outside of buddha, that is buddha too [laughs]. So it include everything. Because it include everything, it is independent being in its absolute sense. Even though

¹ "There are (*ari*) two (*futatsu*) eyes (*me*). There are (*ari*) two (*fusatsu*) ears (*mimi*). There is (*ari*) one (*hitotsu*) mouth (*kuchi*)." Suzuki-rōshi also discussed this topic in a *Sandōkai* lecture (SR-70-06-20). Japanese phrases were graciously translated by Yōkō Hanabusa.

² Suzuki-rōshi probably meant to say "mouth."



hada,
Japanese
character
for "skin"
or "body"

you accumulate things one by one, it will not result [in] buddha. If you divide buddha in various way, that is everything we see.

But according to Dōgen-zenji, a part of it is not perfect enough, because if I say—if we say "part of it," the relationship between things is ignored already, you know. Part of—"I am part of," you know—"I am a member of our family." If you say [so], the relationship between you and your brother is not expressed well. It is ignored. So Dōgen-zenji said everyone is not member of. Everyone is family itself because if there is—if someone is missing, you know, that is not perfect family anymore. So relationship between our member of families is more than the member.

So that is why I must say "everything has buddha-nature" is not perfect expression of the teaching. So Dōgen-zenji says, if you—to treat—if you treat you—you must treat everything, or he says you must—you must treat a grain of rice as if it is your own eyes.³ Eyes is part of you, and so is the grain of rice.

As you know there is famous story.⁴ If you go to Eihei-ji, there is Half-Dipper water bridge: **Hanshaku-kyo** [so named] because Dōgen-zenji used to bring back the leftover water to the river. After he use, you know, half of the dipper of water, he took it back to the river again [laughs]. At Eihei-ji we never wash our face with, you know, [the basin] full of water. We use just seventy percent of water in our washing basin. And when we empty it, we do not empty water this way [away from the body]. We dip it—we empty it this way [toward the body], you know [laughs]. If you empty it this way, you must be very careful [laughs]. If you are [1 word], we know what will happen to us. So we must—anyway, we will have to empty it very carefully. We treat things very carefully. And we respect things very much.

In your framework of economic world, you know, to consume things will be—will encourage the [1 word: producing?] things [laughs]. So to use many things will be the—will help, you know, circulation of money. In this reason—in this economic reason, you do not, you know, treat things so well. Nevertheless, you know, I found your cup is very thick, you know, because you will break it [laughs]. If it is thin—as thin as we have in Japan, you will [laughs]—one dozen of cup will be destroyed every day [laughs, laughter] in your kitchen. So yours are very thick, but ours is so thin, you know. It is easier to handle if it is thin. But you have to treat it very carefully, or because we treat it very carefully, there is no need for—for us—cup to be so thick.

³ In *Tenzo Kyōkun*, quoting Baoning Renyong (Honei Ninyū)—c. 11th century Linji (Rinzai) master.

⁴ Hanshaku-kyo: a bridge beyond the entrance gate of Eihei-ji. See also *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*: "Nirvana, the Waterfall," p. 92, and SR-69-08-01.

And usually we treat things with both hand. Sometime some beginners will carry their eating bowl like this [laughs]—in one hand like this. It looks very strange [laughs], like pumpkin [laughs, laughter]. We always carry things, if possible, [with] both hand. And you carry things—many—you carry many things in one hand or at once, you know. We carry—we do not carry so many. And we will carry one by one, going back and forth [laughs]. This is more-or-less Japanese way.

Why we do that is out of a question. It is not just to save money, or it not just to—to be economic. It is—right now it is a kind of Japanese habit, but this kind of idea originated from Dōgen-zenji's way. And we appreciate—when we appreciate a smaller things rather than big things—big one. Our mind is directed always [toward] trivial matters rather than something great. And we do it without asking why. We just do it because we respect it. That is even more than respect. To respect things is something dualistic. "To be one with it," we say. When we become one with it, there is no idea of big or small. Smaller things is easier to be one with it, and simpler things is easier to practice one of the duality. We do not even figure out why we do this.

So this is the matter of sense, you know. This kind of thing is created with—with our way in our practice in a long time. So it is rather difficult for you to observe our way, I think. Nowadays young people come and practice Zen in Zen temple in summer vacation. If we told—if I told them to observe our way, they ask me why [laughs]—like you do, you know. And it is rather difficult to explain why [laughs], because we do not do it with some reason. This is just habit. Habit is very important. So to observe way until you—it become habit of you is very important.

Sometime I, you know, I am amused myself [laughs] to observe Japanese way in America. When I go to grocery store—grocery store, I usually buy worst fruits or old—oldest [laughs] vegetables. If I see something good I, you know, I take off the something good to find something bad. And why I buy something—the worst one, because I feel very sorry [laughing, laughter throughout story] for the worst one. This is habit, you know, and I pay same amount of money. So at the store they are interested in my way of buying. "Why don't you take this one? This one is better," they say. "No, I want to buy this one." And they say, "Why? Why?" I will say, "I don't know why." And I—I amuse myself, you know, [with] my habit. I have very funny habit. But I couldn't get rid of my forgetfulness. I tried pretty hard, but I still forget.

But to repeat something is not so difficult. If you repeat it, it will be a part of you, and this is, you know, how we observe our way. Here at

Tassajara you do not pass big pickle dish, you know. You divide mine and put it in front of me. But if you pass, you know, our pickles in one big dish starting for me, I always eat [laughs]—I shall always eat the worst part [laughs], and in the monastery, the last one will eat the best part.

This is, you know, our—our way and our habit. No one ask us why. But sometime, or when I was young, some people explained why. He said, "You should cultivate your virtue. You should accumulate your merit. If you do not eat, if you give others good part of the pickle, that much you will accumulate your virtue—merit. That is why you should take worst part of the pickle." And I thought, you know, it was, you know—then I would rather take the best part [laughs, laughter] to save others—to let them [laughs, laughter]—to let them accumulate more merit. I don't want to accumulate merit for myself. But I didn't try, but I thought so. Really I thought so.

So there is no reason, actually, if there is some reason, as already said, you will be punished [laughs] by it—by it. But punishment, you know—but we cannot believe punishment either. The reason why is everything has buddha-nature. That will be the final answer. In this way, and the best way to understand what is buddha-nature is just to practice our way and treat things very carefully. Because even though everything has buddha-nature, it does not mean you can mix up everything.

As Dōgen-zenji said in his *Instruction for Cook*,⁵ "Something which should be put [in a] higher place, should be put higher place. Something which should be lower place, should be lower place." Everything has its own function and virtue. So according to the virtue, we should treat them. If we treat them according to its virtue—only when we treat them according to its virtue, true value or same value—everything will have same value. Because water cannot be exchanged for fire, fire has its own virtue and water has its own virtue. So water should be in the kettle and fire should be under the kettle, you know. If everything is its own place, everything has same value, he says. So we should not mix up everything.

In same value is in the different—the absolute value—everything has absolute value because of its differentiation from each other—because it is different from others. If everything is same, they will lose the value. It should be different. Because it is different, it is value. So to mix—mix up everything is to kill buddha-nature. There is no more buddha-nature. So when one is teacher, he should be teacher. When one is student, he should be a student. But it does not mean student cannot be a teacher. So we rather put emphasis on validity than universality. We acknowledge the differentiation, or we appreciate the

⁵ *Tenzo Kyōkun*.

differentiation rather than universality. The valid—validity is—will be acknowledged when universality or when the absolute value reveal itself on some special thing which is—is different from others—other being. When you put emphasis on the universality, you know, everything lose its own value. When you mix, you know, male and female and divide in two [laughs], you will lose your life. Man should be a man, and woman should be a woman because, you know, man and woman is different. There is value and there is life [?].

So we rather put emphasis on the difference between each being. Although we put emphasis on difference, we do not acknowledge—we do not discriminate which is better. It is different, but both is same value or absolute value because it is different. When you put emphasis on universality, it means you are killing things. At least the value of things will be ignored. True value of each existence will be ignored. If you see—if it—it is like to see many mountains in one view. You can see many mountains, you know—you will enjoy to see many mountains, but if you are interested—when you are interested in the sight of the mountains you see, the value of each mountain will be ignored. To call you, you know—if I call you by name of human being—"Hi, human being!" [laughs, laughter], your character will be ignored. Everyone is human being, you know. We don't know whether [laughs] you—you are man or woman or young lady or old lady: any human being [laughs]. It doesn't make any sense. If you are called by your name, you know, you will be happy.

So universal value is something very vague [?], and not distinctive, and not interesting at all. So when—only when you see—you appreciate many kinds of things which is different from each other, you will have happy life. You will enjoy our life. This kind of thing is quite obvious. It is—there is no need [for] any interpretation or philosophical discussion about it. It is actual truth. But there are various way of life, and there are misunderstanding with your life, so there must be some philosophy as a background of this kind of teaching. That is why we find our teaching pretty difficult, especially when you studied intellectually. The best way is just to practice until you understand it. This method is completely different method: to force some way on us.

In our practice we do not like to be caught by some rules. Nevertheless, we make best effort to observe our way. When we make best effort to observe our way, there is no more rules. The rules are part of us. Whether the rules are part of you or not will be checked out by your teacher [laughter]. Even though you are observing our way, you know, if the rules is not a part of you, you know, he will see it. The point is your sincerity, not form. We rather put emphasis on each one's own way.

In Tassajara—here in Tassajara, I think you have difficult time in observing our way, which is not familiar to you. But I want you to observe it first of all, and then you can discuss about our way. So observation is first and discussion is next. Now if you discuss, you know, I think the conclusion [laughs] will still—will not be—will not—your discussion will not result [in] same idea we have had. So if you practice it, and if you have—if you find some problem, you know, about that problem I want you to discuss. This kind of discussion is very important, I think. Especially this kind of idea is quite new to me. By discussion you will have chance to explain why you observe our way. So others will be interested in our way.

So without experience of observing it, to discuss our rules is not right, because we put emphasis on our experience, not, you know, discussion itself—intellectual discussion, whether this is Japanese way [laughs] or American way. We have not much idea of Japanese or American way. Whatever way may be good ways [laughs]. American way, I think, or our way. So we should find out. We should try to improve our way, and we should develop our way. This is bodhisattva's mind or spirit.

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Adam Tinkham and Bill Redican (4/4/01).