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SESSHIN LECTURE
Shikantaza, Tenryū's One Finger
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I want to explain our way—our way of zazen. Do you know—you know the famous story of Gutei?¹ When Tenryū² pointed up one finger, Gutei attained enlightenment. And do you—what do you think [about] this one finger? He [Gutei] attained enlightenment, you know, and said: "I received Tenryū's one finger, and—which I have been using for—for my lifetime," when he became pretty old he said. "What do you think this is?" [Laughs.]

There is another—I will tell you another story. Yakusan—Yakusan Igen,³ the disciple of Sekitō, one day as he was asked to give lectures to the monks, he just appeared on the altar [took the abbot's seat],⁴ and while—while he was sitting, and came back to his room.

The director of the temple went to his room and asked him, "You didn't give me—give us lecture for a long time, so I asked you to give us lecture [laughs]. But as soon as you appeared on the altar, you came back to [laughs]— to your room. Why is that?"

Yakusan said, "There are many teachers. Some of them are teaching Buddhist precepts, and some of them are giving lectures on sūtras, and I am a Zen master."

That was his answer. What do you think that is?

If, you know—in other word, then I may ask you, "What have you been doing today?" [Laughs.] I think you have—some of you must have been very sleepy, and some of you must have had pain, terrible pain on your legs, and some of you must find it difficult to stop your monkey mind [laughs]. So I suspect quite few people, or maybe three or four people who are sitting, and rest of the people [laughs] couldn't practice zazen in

¹ Jinhua Juzhi (Jap. Kinka Gutei): n.d. (c. 9th century) Disciple of Hangzhou Tianlong, who taught him the practice of holding up one finger. This story is Case 3 of the *Wu-Men Kuan* (Jap. *Mumonkan*, *Gateless Gate*) collection of kōans. See also A. Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage*, Boston: Wisdom, 2000, p. 177.

² Hangzhou Tianlong (Jap. Kōshū Tenryū): n.d. Disciple of Damei Fachang.

³ Yaoshan Weiyān (Jap. Yakusan Igen): 751-834. Disciple of Sekitō Kisen. Master of Ungan, Sensus, and Dōgo. This story is Case 7 of the *Ts'ung-jung lu* (Jap. *Shoyoroku*, *Book of Serenity*) collection of kōans. Another version is reproduced in A. Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 109. See also SR-71-08-08 and SR-69-06-00.

⁴ Text in brackets is from the original transcript. Not on tape.

its true sense—in its usual sense. You may understand in that way.

Today we have not much time to have *dokusan*, but suppose we have *dokusan*, I think I will have many questions about this—about breathing, about pain, or about your monkey mind [laughs]. "What should I do with it?" [Laughs, laughter.] As today we have no *dokusan* so, may be a good idea to give you some instruction about zazen.

Last Wednesday and Sunday too, I talked about to be a obstacle—obstacle of—in your zazen you should be a obstacle of buddha-nature—buddha-light. The one finger Tenryū pointed out is not actually—does not mean "one." It is actually—what he meant is our practice, our *shikantaza*. What Yakusan, you know, demonstrated is also *shikantaza*, in which you have no gaining idea. You just sit. Because you have some—you practice zazen to—to have complete calmness in your mind, then various problems you have become really obstacle of—really a problem or disturbance. But when you have no gaining idea, then all the things which happens in your zazen is—will become one finger. At that time, your zazen become so-called-it "painful [?] zazen" [laughs].

You know, when some monk ask a master, "What should I do when cold weather come?" The master said, "Cold? Be a cold buddha. And when summer come, be a hot buddha."⁵ When you have no gaining idea, you know, you become various buddha moment after moment. Cold buddha, hot buddha, painful buddha, monkey-minded buddha [laughs].

Monkey—monkey mind is same, you know. But when you have gaining idea, monkey mind is, you know—when—when you want to—to have—when you want to have calm serene mind, the monkey mind you have—you will be discouraged by [laughs] your monkey mind. But when you have no gaining idea, when you just sit and accept it, then monkey mind is one finger—Tenryū's one finger. So moment after moment, various buddha will appear in your practice. Monkey mind is, in that case, monkey-minded buddha: not just ordinal [ordinary] monkey mind, that is monkey-mind buddha. When it is hot, it is hot buddha.

Yakusan demonstrated, you know, his practice without word, without saying anything. He just sit. Tenryū, you know, pointed out one finger. But this one finger pointed out without any gaining idea—without trying to teach them what it is. He just [laughs]—instead of doing so, he just did it like this [probably held up one finger].

So it is not necessary be always one finger. This is all right [laughs, laughter]. This is all right, too [laughs] [raising two, three, four fingers,

⁵ Case 43 of *Hekiganroku (The Blue Cliff Record)*, "Tōzan's 'No Cold or Heat.'" It is also found in *Shōbōgenzō "Shunju,"* in a translation that is more similar to Suzuki-rōshi's usage.

etc.].⁶ But people may [get] confused [laughs], so he just, you know, always pointed out one finger. So, you know, if he is tired out—tired of sitting, he may [laughs, laughter] do like this. That is also, you know, one finger. If, you know, this one finger means something, it is—may be two fingers, or three fingers, or many fingers, not one finger. Because this one finger can be various thing, according to the situation, we call it true one finger.

Like Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva's body, he—he is supposed to have thirty-three bodies. According to the people who want to—according to the people he tried to save, he takes various figure, sometime ladies, sometime *asuras*,⁷ or sometime human body, and he takes 33 bodies. So even though he has many figures, you know, but his true body is one. That is true one.

So we say "just to sit." Just to sit doesn't—does not mean to—to have same pattern of practice. When we are ready to be many figures, when we are ready to practice [in] various way[s], that is *shikantaza*. So it is the foundation of—maybe you may call it foundation of various practice.

If you do not have this secret of practice, you may be easily discouraged. But if you make some progress in your practice, you know, naturally you will stick to your old same way [laughs], you know, because you feel very good about your practice, and you feel you made some progress in your own way. But even so, if you attach to the same old way, you will [be] sure to have time to be discouraged about you—with your practice, and you will be very much confused. "What is zazen?" you may say.

It looks like very difficult to sit without any gaining idea. But actually, as you sit today, at least you should be completely involved in the atmosphere or feeling of zendō, and just practice our way. You should not bring in many ideas in zendō. You should—when you enter zendō, you should be a quite different person, forgetting all about what you have been doing, and you should just sit. Zazen practice is not continuation of your everyday life—everyday practice. In—in *Fukan Zazen-gi*, Dōgen-zenji says: "You should give up everything when you practice zazen. And you should put everything aside and should practice zazen." At least you have—you must have—you must realize that this point is very important.

We say it takes time before you know what is zazen. But actually, why we say so is without this kind of conviction, you cannot give up everything and practice *shikantaza*. If you think, "I'll sit two months more or three months more [laughs]," then your practice, you know, is not pure enough. You know—you know—you, you practice zazen as if you do—as if you study something else, you know.

⁶ Text in brackets from original transcript. Not on tape.

⁷ *asura* or *āsura* (Sanskrit): demons or evil spirits.

We should not mix up our practice with ordinal [ordinary] training or exercise. [*Sentence finished. Tape turned over.*] [Some lost, perhaps something like, "If you study"]⁸ ... this point more, you will find out why we have Tassajara or why old Zen masters had very difficult time in their practice. Only to put everything aside and practice our way without gaining idea—they made such a effort. To practice our way to attain enlightenment—even to attain enlightenment is not good, because this kind of gaining idea is—usually is not pure enough. Instead of, "You should attain enlightenment, forgetting everything else," we say, "Practice zazen without any gaining idea." This is more str- [partial word]—you know, stronger instruction, more strict instruction. Without, you know, trying to—even to attain enlightenment, you should practice zazen. That is actually what we mean. To practice zazen to attain enlightenment may be pretty good, but not good enough—not strict enough—not strict with your impetus of your practice.

Instead of useless effort after you started zazen, we make greater effort before we practice zazen when we enter zendō. After, you know, entering zendō, even though you make great effort, it doesn't work so well. Before you enter zendō, you should be fully prepared for zazen practice.

I think you are very sincere students, but, you know—but your conviction is not strong enough, is not pure enough. I think that is why many teachers expelled his disciples. "Go away!" [Laughs.] You know, if he is not ready to practice zazen, it is better to say, "Go away." It means, "Come again." [Laughs, laughter.] "Go away, and prepare for coming in again." That is real kindness. I think we have to repeat, you know, this—we have to—almost all of you should be expelled [laughs] from zendō, and we should start Zen Center again [laughs]. How about it [laughs, laughter]? Again and again [laughs]. "Go away!" Or, "Let's do it again." We must have this kind of spirit always, or else we cannot clean up our mind.

In Japan, once a year, we have general housecleaning [laughs]. We take out everything. We choose—we decide, you know, to have housecleaning, watching newspaper [for the date], you know. And when—sometime it—it may be windy, or cloudy, or rainy day. So we, you know, watch the newspaper, and we have housecleaning. On that day, we take everything out [laughs]. We expel everything [laughs], even Buddha shrine or Shintō shrine, you know. We take them out, and we clean completely our house. In the same way, I think, this kind of cleaning is necessary. Without this kind of effort, you pile up, you know, things one after another. Then you will be easily caught by some same old way of life, you know. So you cannot practice zazen in its true sense. When you have this kind of spirit, you can practice *shikantaza*.

⁸ The text in brackets is from the original transcript. Not on tape.

When I came to America for the first time, for pretty long time, as our old students knows—know, I put emphasis on way-seeking mind. When we have true way-seeking mind—pure true way seeking mind, we can practice our way without any problem. When you have questions or problems in your practice, it means that you are not practicing *shikantaza*. If you practice *shikantaza*, you know, you will be monkey-minded buddha in *shikantaza*. You will be pain-legged buddha in *shikantaza*. And your whole body will be obstacle buddha—obstacle of buddha—or to be obstacle itself is buddha. Is there any problem, you know, when whatever you do, that is buddha? That is *shikantaza*.

When our community—if—when our community is based on this idea, there is no problem. We will enjoy our problem even. To have various problem is to have many *mandala*. Without this *shikantaza*, all the teaching and *mandala* will cause you—will be a cause of trouble. If we become successful, if our community expand, we will have problem—big problem. You may say it's better not to have it [laughs]—you may say—I'm sure you will say so. Why you say so? When you say so—before you say so, you should think why [laughs]. Why we have this kind of problem? Why this is problem with me?

I—the more I think about this point, the more I find out why Dōgen-zenji put emphasis on *shikantaza*. "First of all, before we practice zazen," he says, "in delusion we should set up our pure way of practice. Before enlightenment, we should attain enlightenment."

Before you enter zendō, you should attain enlightenment [laughs]. Do you understand? "If you"—sometime he said, "If you enter zendō by mistake, you should go out." [Laughs.] By mistake [laughs]? You should go out. If you want to enter zendō, you should be really prepared for practicing pure practice. "By mistake" [laughs]—isn't it interesting [laughs]? "If you enter zendō by mistake." [Laughs.] I think almost all of you entered zendō by mistake [laughs, laughter]. So—if so, you know, take a rest in our Zen apartment [laughs] across the street, and come back again [laughs].

Ahhh. Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997.
Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Adam Tinkham and Bill Redican (1/24/01).