

LECTURE by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

The following lecture was given at Zen Mountain Center in July 1968.

I want to explain *shikan taza*, what it means *just to sit*. Some monk said to a Zen master, "It is very hot. How is it possible to sit somewhere where there is no hot or no cold weather?" The master answered, "When it is hot you should be hot Buddha. When it is cold you should be cold Buddha." This is Dogen Zenji's understanding of the story. Actually the master said, "When it is hot you should kill hot. When it is cold you should kill cold." But if you say *kill*, the *kill* is extra. If you say to *attain* enlightenment, the *attain* is extra. Dogen was very direct when he said, "When it is hot you should be hot Buddha. When it is cold you should be cold Buddha." That is what *shikan taza, just to sit*, means.

When your practice is not good, you are poor Buddha. When your practice is good, you are good Buddha. And *poor* and *good* are Buddhas themselves. *Poor is* Buddha and *good is* Buddha and *you* are Buddha also. Whatever you think or say every word becomes Buddha. *I am* Buddha. *I* is Buddha and *am* is Buddha and *Buddha* is Buddha. Buddha. Buddha. Buddha. Buddha. Whatever you say. Then there are no problems. BuddhaBuddhaBuddhaBuddha. There is no need to translate it into English, no need to be bothered with fancy explanations of Buddhism. Everything is Buddha: sitting is Buddha, lying down is Buddha, each word is Buddha. If you say BuddhaBuddhaBuddhaBuddha, that is our way, that is *shikan taza*. When you practice zazen with this understanding, that is true zazen.

Even though we say *just to sit*, to understand this is rather difficult and that may be why Dogen Zenji left us so many teachings. But this does not mean that his teachings are difficult. When you sit you know what he means without thinking or without expecting anything, and when you accept yourself as a Buddha, or understand everything as an unfolding of the absolute teaching, the

truth, the first principle, or as a part of the great being. when you reach this understanding, whatever you think or see is the actual teaching of Buddha and whatever you do is the actual practice of Buddha. Problems arise because you are trying to do something. or because you think that nothing will result from doing something, or because you feel that you can rely on something.

Before you attain enlightenment, enlightenment is there. It is not because one attains enlightenment that enlightenment appears. Enlightenment is always there and if you realize this, that is enlightenment. If you think, however, that enlightenment is some particular thing you can reach, which you can attain sometime, you will be discouraged because you are seeking for it. But if you feel that it is not possible to attain enlightenment, you will also be discouraged, give up your practice or try to find some other teaching which is more worthwhile and can be strived for. In this way you will change from one teaching to another and have no time to realize your true nature which is the same in everyone.

So whether or not you realize your true nature, or attain enlightenment, is a minor problem and not the big one. It is all the better if you do, but even if you don't there is no need to seek for some other special teaching, because the teaching is always right here. This kind of understanding may be difficult to accept. You may give up if you don't think you have made some progress after practicing one or two months. But true religion cannot be obtained by seeking for some good. This is the way to attain something in a material sense. The way to work on spiritual things is quite different. Even to talk about spiritual things is not actually spiritual but a kind of substitute.

That you are here means that you will vanish. Things which exist are bound to vanish and things which you attain cannot be perpetually retained. Only something which exists before everything else appears, exists forever. As long as you seek for something, you will get the shadow of reality and not reality itself. Only when you do not seek for anything will you find it and only when you do

not strive for enlightenment will you have it. Because you try to attain something you lose it.

Because A tries to be C or D there are problems. A is just A and A is bound to disappear and that is renunciation. To have renunciation is to be beyond various forms and colors. We have full appreciation of forms and colors but they are bound to disappear and we should not be caught by that. We do not give them up but accept that they go away; that is renunciation. If A always tries to remain A, that is attachment, which does not exist, is delusion and not renunciation. A should just be A and should vanish in the form of C or D. But C or D should not try to be something different from C or D.

When I was young the other students and I used to discuss about what the goal of practice was. The reality cannot be the idea, but is practice the bridge from the reality to the idea? We had this kind of discussion. But according to Dogen, practice is just practice-Buddha, bridge is just bridge-Buddha, reality is just reality-Buddha, idea is just idea-Buddha. There is no problem. When you say, "I am a human being," that is just another name for Buddha. Human being-Buddha.

So there is no need to have a bridge to the other shore. Other shore is the other shore-Buddha. This shore is this shore-Buddha. Everything is Buddha himself—just the names are different. How renunciation is attained is by this shore being this shore and the other shore being the other shore. Only when A is A, only when we satisfy ourselves as A, as *I*, is there a chance to have renunciation, a chance to vanish. If A could be something else, then A might be a perpetual being, but no such perpetual being exists. Only when A is just A is it possible for A to vanish. Something which exists must vanish. Is there something which does not? If you don't vanish you are a ghost!

So we say *just to sit* or *just A should be A*, and this *just* directly points out liberation from A. You only lose your reality because you

try to be something else. Do you understand? I should be *just A*, *just I*. Then I have liberation, have enlightenment, am not caught, am not a ghost, I exist here. I am Buddha himself.

This is not some fancy teaching. No teaching could be more direct than *just to sit*. You cannot say anything about it, not even yes or no. But this is not something you should believe in because I say so or because Buddha says so. This is the truth which is waiting for you to find it and is the only way to attain renunciation without causing any problems for yourself or anyone. Just to be yourself is no problem whatsoever. This is what is meant by *just to sit*.

Masters who understand the Soto Way may give you the koan *Mu* instead of telling you *just to sit*. What is *Mu*? *Just to sit!* There is no difference and *just to sit* itself will be various kinds of koans for you. There may be thousands of koans for us and *just to sit* includes them all. This is the direct way to enlightenment, liberation, renunciation, nirvana, or whatever you say.

Thank you very much. Do you have some question?

Student 1: It seems that sometimes you emphasize the idea of non-attainment, that there is nothing to do except simply give up and sit and be whatever you are at each instant. And yet at other times it seems that you speak of exerting your best effort and when I think of exerting my best effort it is in order to attain something. Why bother speaking about effort at all? Why not stay to the teaching of not trying to do anything?

Roshi: That is a very good question. Even though I say "do whatever you want" you are doing something with some effort. Can you do it without any effort? No, you cannot. (Anyway, you have some problem and it is better to have a good problem than a bad one.) If you weren't making an effort, didn't sit, hadn't come to Tassajara, I don't know what you would be doing right now. But for you to know what you are doing moment after moment is very important. It is the same as having a clock. To know it is ten past

nine can be very important. But actually there is no such time. While I am doing this it will become eleven past nine. I am pointing to something which is non-verbal. We say *just to sit* but this *just to sit* is extra.

Your question is something like: If all the air is the same, if everything is one whole being, in what direction, in what way, is the air changing? If your purpose for doing zazen is *just to sit*, then it is possible for you to improve yourself, to find out what direction you are going in. But before you realize who you are, it is not possible for you to go your own direction; because you are bound by some idea, you cannot find your way for yourself. Only when you can *just sit* can you find out your way.

I am explaining this as if it were some good teaching, as if I knew some secret. It is not so. I am speaking about everyone's own way. Why we put emphasis on *just to sit* is because everyone does have his own way. There are myriads of ways or Dharmas and moment after moment you will find your own way when you *just sit*, when you are exactly you yourself.

Student 2: What about being *just* angry? Is there any connection between that and *just* sitting?

Roshi: There is a big distinction. That is why we sit. Then you cannot be angry. Anger only appears when you lose yourself, when you are enslaved by C or D.

Student 3: I think he means could someone be *just* angry and nothing else?

Roshi: If you could forget all about anger after you were angry, that would be good. But usually anger lasts for a long time because ideas like "he made me angry" or "I am no good" afterwards make you even more angry. Then you are not *just* you. That is why we say you cannot *just* sit when you are angry. Anger is something. Anger, greed and delusion appear when you are not *just* you.

Student 2: But is it possible to forget about everything, just become so foolish, greedy, or angry that you don't think of anything else?

Roshi: I don't think so. Animals may be able to but not human beings.

Student 4: What about *just* loving?

Roshi: Love is usually a very egocentric idea. We know that, but we make some excuse for it. We know pretty well why we love; there are many because's. You don't *just* love anyone. Love is a very mysterious thing. Don't laugh.

Student 5: What does *form is form* mean then?

Roshi: Before you can understand *form is form* in its true sense, you must understand *form is emptiness* and *emptiness is form*. Before then *form is form* just doesn't mean anything.

Student 5: But suppose a person understood what *form is form* means. Couldn't that include *just* anger?

Roshi: We don't say that anger is not good, anger that is *just* anger, that is. But if you find or have some excuse for being angry, for yourself or for some purpose, that is not *just* anger. And unless you practice our way and understand what *form is form* and *emptiness is emptiness* means, it is rather difficult to be *just* angry—like a thunderstorm. Kiiihhh! Next moment nothing. That is beautiful. Raaa! That's all. I wish I could do that.

Thank you very much.