

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**Nansen's "Everyday Mind Is *Dao*"**  
**Monday Morning, March 10, 1969**

... it was very, very cold. It was November? I don't remember exactly. November or—he said [?]-I told you [him], you know:

"Don't wear so—so much clothing. Even though we wear many clothing, you will not be so warm. And if your practice is sincere enough, even though you do not wear so much, you will not be so cold. If you are involved in intense practice, you know, actually you don't feel so cold."

And so he appeared in zendō [with] only one thin shirt [laughs, laughter]. And he practiced. I said to him, "It may be too thin. You have to wear little bit more " [laughs, laughter].

But he say, "It's all right." And he sits [with] just one shirt on his body. Why I, you know, talk about his experience is because I want to talk—talk about one kōan: the famous kōan of Nansen<sup>1</sup>—between Nansen and Jōshū,<sup>2</sup> Nansen's disciple. "Everyday—Everyday Mind Is *Dao*."<sup>3</sup> I think you may know that kōan.

Kōan is not something to—something to explain. Why we talk about is to give some suggestion, you know, about how you practice zazen. It is suggestion. We don't talk about what kōan means directly. We give you just suggestion, and you, according to the introduction or suggestion, you work on kōan. That is how we explain kōan and how you listen to kōan.

So you don't—you must not think—if I, you know—if you remember what I said or if I—if you understand what I said, you—that is—there is no need for you to solve the kōan, you know. So I am not trying to explain what is everyday mind or what is *dao*, but through this kōan—by this kōan, I want you to—I want to give you some suggestion how you practice *shikantaza*.

Actually, *shikantaza* and kōan practice [are] not exactly the same, but there is not much difference. *Shikantaza* is more condensed practice, more essential practice, or fundamental practice than kōan practice. The purpose of kōan is same as *shikantaza*. Anyway, I want to—I want you to understand how you practice our way by explaining this kōan of "Everyday Mind Is *Dao*. Everyday Mind Is *Dao*."

<sup>1</sup> Nanquan Puyuan (Nansen Fugan): 748–835. Disciple of Baso Dōitsu.

<sup>2</sup> Zhaozhou Congshen (Jōshū Jūshin): 778–897.

<sup>3</sup> Case 19 of the *Wu-Men Kuan* (Jap. *Mumonkan*, Eng. *Gateless Gate*) kōan collection.

You may think, you know, that if you practice good enough then you have power which could be extended in your everyday life. It—it is so—actually it is so, but how—then how you, you know, acquire this kind of power is different matter. When you have power, you know, then you can extend that power to everyday life. But the next question will be how you can obtain that power will be the next question. But—and you may wonder what kind of experience you have when you have acquired the power [laughs]. That kind of—this kind of question will continue endlessly. How—how you will acquire that kind of power, or how to extend the power to everyday life.

So anyway I will explain, first of all, this kōan:

Jōshū, you know, asked his teacher Nansen, "What is *dao*?"  
What is *dao*?

And his teacher Nansen answered, "Everyday mind is *dao*."

And Nansen asked his teacher again, "How—how to accord with the *dao*?" or "How to follow the *dao*? Tell me how to accord with the *dao*." That was, you know, Jōshū's question.

And Nansen said, "If you try to follow the *dao*," you know, or "The more you try to follow the *dao*, the more you will lose the *dao*." [Laughs.] That was his [answer]. And he continued, "The true power does not belong to the matter of attaining it," or "matter—matter [of] aware of it or not aware of it, or attaining it or not attaining it. If you," you know, "if your practice goes beyond the matter of attaining it or not to attaining it, your mind will be boundless blue sky—like a boundless blue sky. And you will have no problem in your everyday life." That was his answer.

Now I want to come back to the discussion between one of you student and me. He said he want to—to have vacation or to go to see someone, and he want to leave Tassajara for one week, he said. And, you know, I—I wanted to know why, you know, why he was—he feels in that way. And at—at last I found how is that. He wanted to—before he rigid—rigidly, you know, strictly attached to or strictly observed Tassajara way. But now he feels to—to observe his way, you know, strictly with the idea to observe Tassajara way is right and not to observe—not to practice even for one day is not good.

So he—he was—his practice, in other word, involved in right or wrong—right practice or wrong practice. And found out that our practice should beyond, you know, go beyond right or wrong. "If so," you know, "what is wrong in my idea of going—leaving Tassajara for one

week? [Laughs.] Before I saw in that way, but right now I don't understand our way in that way—in that way. So I don't understand our way so rigidly. So sometime we can take—we can leave Tassajara. What is wrong with you to leave Tassajara when I want to leave?" That was his—that is why he now want to leave Tassajara.

Before, you know, as you see in the question and answer between Nansen and Jōshū, Jōshū said—Jōshū asked him, you know, "If I do not try to observe the way, how—how will—can I follow the way—don't—if we—if I don't try to observe it?" It—or in other words, "Is it possible for me," you know, "to observe our way without trying to observe our way?" But Nansen said, "If you try to observe our way, that way is not true way." [Laughs.] How you will understand this point? It means that, you know, unless you have s- [partial word]—until you have some power or some experience of real practice, you will not understand what is true way.

Even though I ex- [partial word]—I explain what is true way, and even though you understand what I say, that is not true way. Only when you have actually you have that power to extend your experience to everyday life. Then, and without trying to observe our way, naturally, intuitively, when you are able to observe our way, that is true. You understand?

So to—to follow our way rigidly, you know, to—to attain some power or some enlightenment or experience is not, you know—may not be true way. But while you are doing so, unexpectedly [laughs] your enlightenment will come to you. And that enlightenment is not the enlightenment you expected [laughs, laughter]. That will [be] how, you know, you will experience our true way.

So Dōgen-zenji says—always says, "Don't try—try not to attain enlightenment. Just [laughs, laughter] practice it, even though," you know, "you—you have some idea of enlightenment—like a picture," you know, "like a beautiful picture." To attain, to realize, to actualize that idea, you practice zazen. What you get is quite different thing. It will not be the paintings, you know, [of] rice cake. What you will get is something quite different. That is true.

So in kōan practice, you know, you try hard to attain enlightenment. In *shikantaza*, you know, we do not try to attain enlightenment. Or in *shikantaza* we have no time, you know [laughs], to expect something. We have—we have, you know, pain in our—on—in our legs, and sometime it may be very cold [laughs]. So to remain in right posture is difficult, you know. And if you [are] involved in our practice with right posture, with good breathing, you—you have no time even to, you know, try to—even to have beautiful picture of enlightenment,

[laughs]. It is already hard enough to sit, and you have no other idea of—to have some imagination.

So actually, what will—we do in the same, and what we will attain is same. But, you know, what you attain is something completely different [than] you expected.

So he says, you know, if you try to—if you try to follow the way, you will be far away from it. That is what Nansen said. But what, you know—after what you will attain is something quite different. It is not something to describe. Maybe like it [?], so we call it emptiness. Or sometime toilet paper. [Laughs, laughter.] Sometime cats. Sometime fox. Whatever it is, you know, it is another name of something which cannot be described. That is true enlightenment. When—only when you have it, you know, then you may say, "everyday life is true way." Even toilet paper is true way [laughs]. Whatever you do, that is another name of the true way you attain—you have.

This morning I didn't, you know, explain so—so far [?], but even though I say it may be—I agreed with his idea not to—to go—to leave, you know, for one week or two, it does not mean that is the true way [laughs]. True way is not something like that. You know, to—sometime to observe our way, sometime we don't. That is not true way. But even so, I don't mean that you should, you know, stay here. You sh- [partial word]—if you—some day he will realize the true way, then he may understand why I said you should—why I—I agreed with his idea of leaving Tassajara for a while. Or sometime don't wear so—so much clothing. Or you should practice rigidly and strictly enough.

To be completely involved in our practice, some day he may understand but I meant. But at least, you know, right now I don't think he understood what I said. I didn't agree with his idea. Or I didn't agree with his rigid practice—what is the true practice. True practice is not in the realm of, you know, "This is true practice and this is not true practice." True practice is beyond right—the idea right and wrong, and beyond experience, beyond human [?] suggestion.

I think old [all?] student may have very difficult time with me [?] because I do not say anything definitely [laughter]. "Yeah, that is all right. That may be all right. Do whatever you like." And, you know, sometime I don't feel so good, you know, so—so old—old student will wonder, you know, why he is not—he doesn't feel so good when he said, "Oh, whatever you like. Do whatever you like." Or without saying, "Do this. Do that." [*Sentence finished. Tape turned over.*]

... "I don't feel so good." So, you know, he may understand, you know, his—he doesn't feel so good. Why is—the true way, you know,

is not something you can achieve in term of good or—right or wrong, or successful or not successful. But the important point [is] to have always composure within ourselves whether we are successful or not. To have deep mind, to include everything within ourselves—that is, you know, true way or *dao*.

So everyday—when you have—when you accept even toilet-paper buddha, you know, you have to true way. So anyway, the point is to—that you can accept things as it is, as you accept Buddha as your teacher. That is true way. And as our patriarch and buddhas did it, it is possible for us to attain that kind of true way.

So there is no difference in everyday problem and true—and kōan. There is no difference between bird's or fish's way and Buddha's way. And to attain that there is many ways and various ways to attain that kind of true way—true way experience which is your own, which could be your own, and which will be different from each other's way, and which is quite independent way from other's way—at the same time which is universal way to everyone. That is true way. If so, you know, how can I explain [laughs] what is true way?

But—only way to, you know—although Nansen and his—great teacher Nansen and his disciple Jōshū have this kind of discussion, it does not mean anything [1 word unclear] who do not understand the true way. But it will give us some suggestion, and it will give you some encouragement to practice our way even though here is—he—here may be some Rinzai student or Sōtō student.

You may think that—for—it is nonsense for Rinzai student [laughs] to come to Tassajara and practice *shikantaza*, but it isn't so. Kōan practice could be *shikantaza*. *Shikantaza* could be, you know, kōan practice. Actually if you really practice kōan practice with right understanding—with right—under right instruction, that is *shikantaza*. If you practice *shikantaza* under the right teacher it will be kōan practice. There could not be—if you understand our practice—what is our practice, there is no two practice. Your practice is pointing one way. It looks like various way because you understand it in term of "Rinzai or Sōtō," "*shikantaza* or kōan practice." That is your fault [laughs], not, you know, teacher's fault. Or he is—you may say I am Sōtō priest, Sōtō teacher, but actually, you know, you may be—my lineage is Sōtō lineage, but actually our—or way directly came from Buddha. They are set off [?] in two ways.

[Brief whispered exchange with Suzuki-rōshi off-mike.]

Did you understand? [Laughs, laughter.] Actually, you know, what I meant is—anyway, you should practice zazen [laughs, laughter]. That is what I wanted to say. But you should practice it. You should—

should be completely involved in your practice. That is what I meant in short. Then everyone will attain enlightenment. That is what I said in short. You cannot waste your time. It is not possible to waste your time. But you th- [partial word]—you think I am wasting time, that's all [laughs]. But you are not wasting your time.

So anyway, if you trust in words, you know, it's better to practice zazen [laughs, laughter] without any doubt. And it's better to be completely involved in your practice, forgetting—putting everything aside. That is what I mean.

And we shouldn't be fooled by Nansen and Jōshū, even though he said, "Everyday life is [laughs] true way." So if you are fooled by them, you will say, "Whatever you—we do, that is true way." [Laughs.] "There will not be no need to practice zazen. What is wrong not to practice zazen? Even though we do not sit in cross-legged position, that is true way." [Laughs.] It means that when you understand in this way, you are trying to understand kōan literally without knowing what they really meant by those discussion.

I am so glad to see that you have experienced here in last time period [?]. So after you did it, you understand what you have done [laughs]. Before you do it or when you—is [?] coming back to Tassajara, or it doesn't mean anything to sit with a teacher, but after you did it, you—you must have experienced what you have done.

Thank you very much.

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Source: Original City Center tape transcribed by Dana Velden (6/26/00).  
Checked by Bill Redican (11/1/00).