Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
RULES
Sunday, January 18, 1970
San Francisco

In Japan now it is a season of typhoon. And recently, on the 16th, a typhoon arrived at San Francisco from Japan [laughs, laughter]. And now typhoon has left San Francisco to Tassajara [laughs, laughter]. Now it is the time when we have clear, blue sky again. Typhoon was so strong that I stayed in bed for two, three days [laughs, laughter]. I think you are also stayed in bed [laughs, laughter].

Each time some—at first, I came to America alone. And two years after, my wife came. And I had to share some difficulty we had—I had when I arrived San Francisco and culturally where I experienced cultural shock, you know [laughs]. And I had to share the same experience with my wife again, two years after. Whenever someone come from Japan, I have to share, you know, the excitement and difficulties they have, you know. That is not so easy [laughs]—always to have same experience and renew the difficulties and excitement again.

When Dōgen-zenji went to China as a Japanese priest—when you read *Hōkyō-ki,*[1] I think you will have some different understanding [that] I have now—which we have now—I have now. When he went Tendō monastery, which was a famous big monastery, he was given a seat in monastery. Maybe, as he was a Japanese, he—his seat was last seat of the zendō. And he immediately, you know, express the complaint [laughs] to the monastery, you know: "I am a quite old Zen Buddhist." And in Japan and in China and everywhere, the rule is to decide the seat by the age—by the age as a Buddhist—as he joined our order. "So I cannot be the last one. I am a quite old Buddhist. I was ordained when I was thirteen year old. So I cannot be the last one."

And he also, you know, wrote a letter to the emperor [laughs, laughter]: "I understand Tendō monastery, you know, is the—one of the largest monastery in your country. So I understand the rules, you know, in that monastery should be universal or should be international. And I understand our—one of our rules to decide our seat in zendō by the seniority as a Buddhist, not by age or difference of the countries. But in Tendō monastery, when I arrived at this monastery, I was put the last seat. I cannot understand why." [Laughs.] "If you have some suggestion about it, please give me some suggestion or give the monastery," you know [laughs, laughter]. He was quite stubborn, I think. So they changed his seat to the proper one.

[1] The journal kept by Eihei Dōgen during his stay in Sung China. A collection of instructions by his Chan master Tiantong Rujing (T'ien-t'ung Ju-ching, Tendō Nyojō, 1163-1228). It was recopied by Dōgen's student Ejō in 1253.

And in our—I am studying now a little bit about the rules of monasteries, which I didn't in- [partial word]—I was not interested in so much. But there must be some rules if we want to study our way or so that we can eliminate egoistic, you know, practice. Without rules, our practice tend to be egoistic, you know. The rules—by "rules" I don't mean some, you know, rules to give some advantage to the people who are responsible for the—in the position to manage zendō, but to give advantage to the student who practice in that zendō. And actually, even though you want to find out some rules in—some rules of monasteries in the written-up rules, you know, of Eihei-ji or Soji-ji or many Japanese and Chinese temple, it is difficult to find out the rules—some particular rules. But we will—we find out that the activity they do—the way they put—the way they decorate or set up altar or seat. There is underlying, unstated rules, which is not written up. That kind of rules is something which we must understand or else it is difficult to understand why we have—why we observe our rituals, why we set up our altar in some certain way. It is very difficult. And underlying rules—and there must be some underlying rules.

I want to explain little by little this kind of, you know, un- [partial word]—rules—not rules but idea or feeling Buddhists have in our practice: like what do we mean right legs or left legs, left hand/right hand, or left side and right side. Usually, you know, left side—left hand or left side is more important than, you know, right side. That is obviously Chinese and Japanese, you know, way of thinking or understanding.

Left—for an instance, here is Shākyamuni Buddha. And the left side there is Monjushiri.[2] And right side there is Fugen-bosatsu.[3] And Monju-bosatsu symbolize wisdom, and Fugen-bosatsu symbolize activity—action. So action—so wisdom is more important. Without, you know—maybe wisdom is eyes to see things. Without eyes, we cannot do anything, you know, even Fugen-bosatsu cannot do anything without eyes of Monjushiri. So left side is, you know—the rules is, you know, the way they decorate—put Monjushiri and Fugen-bosatsu is to—we just know Monju-bosatsu should be left-hand side of Buddha, you know. So Monjushiri should be this side. Fugen-bosatsu should be on this side.

When you cross your legs, it is same. This legs supposed to be—left side supposed to be wisdom, and right side should be—supposed to be practice and, you know, activity. So when we cross our legs, as I always says, there is, you know—we cannot—we don't know which is which, you know, because left one is already on the right side and [laughs] right side is already on the left side. So you don't know. "Oh. Which is left and which is right?" That is our zazen practice, you know. When we practice zazen there is no, you know—we should not have any idea of—particular idea of wisdom or practice, because beyond our practice is beyond our wisdom or need of practice—

[2] Japanese for the bodhisattva Mañjushrī.
[3] Japanese for Samantabhadra, a Mahāyāna bodhisattva.

because when you practice zazen, there there is wisdom and practice. In this way, our zazen posture is a kind of symbolism, you know, like Tantric Buddhism put emphasis on it.

And in zendō, you know, left-hand side of-of Monjushiri is, you know—*jōkan*—we say *jōkan* is upper side,[4] and right-hand side is lower seat. So if there is altar, right-hand side of Buddha is—right hand side of the Buddha [is] someone who is—who has deep responsibility will sit. And on the left-hand side of the Buddha trainee or, you know, [someone] who is practicing zazen will sit—mostly students and trainees or head of the training who is *shuso* will sit or will stand [on the] right-hand side of Monjushiri in zendō.

So this side is for the *shuso* and students, and the other side is the seat for the someone one who has responsibility of actual, you know, some—not business, but—what do you call?—everyday—who are taking care of finance or kitchen or building or farming will sit [on] the left-hand side of Buddha.

But—so—for an instance, we put candle on the left-hand side of the Buddha, and flower on the right-hand side of Buddha when we have just a flower and candle. And the candle, you know, is more important offering to the Buddha than flowers. So candle should be left-hand side of the Buddha. Not left-hand side of you [laughs], but left-hand side of Buddha. This is rather confusing, but I'm talking about when I said "left-hand side," it mean left-hand side <u>of</u> Buddha. Don't mix up.

That is how we put—offer the candle and flowers in China and in Japan. I don't know Indian way, but so far as Chinese and Japanese, you know, rules goes, it is always so.

And this is, I think, very important for self—for the practice of self<u>less</u>ness. If you don't, you know—you may think you ha- [partial word]—you are quite free from idea of self, you know. But if there is no rules, for an instance, the way you hit *mokugyō,* you know, will be different according to the people [laughs]—to the person. It—it goes in that way. Someone will hit very slowly. Someone will hit very fast, you know. Those who hit *mokugyō* fast <u>always</u> hit fast. Someone, you know, who hit slowly always hit slowly. It goes in that way, and it means that without, you know, knowing or being aware of it, you know, his practice is involved in, you know, some—some idea of self already. And that, you know, a feeling will give big influence to the student who recite, you know. This is actual [laughs] fact, you know.

If there is some rules, and if every one of us, you know, practice our way—very well-set-up rules, very considerate setting of the rules—then we have no chance to be involved in selfish practice. All of us will, you know—can practice our way being quite free from the idea of self.

[4] Of a meditation hall.

I think that Dōgen, you know, express his complaint is not just, you know, for—for himself. If there is some rules, you know, which should be observed by Japanese, you know, and Chinese, something universal rules, you know, there is no confusion. And everyone will be treated in the same way. And when you practice our way, you will have good feeling. But if our monastery is involved in some, you know, selfish practice, then you will not feel so good.

I am not—I don't want to put emphasis on our rules, but our rules should be the rules which will help the unselfish practice. Because of the practice—because of the rules, we should get rid of our selfish idea. So fundamental idea of practice is to do things with people. The ru- [partial word]—when they get up, we should get up, you know. Or when they go to sleep, we should go to sleep. That is, you know, our fundamental idea of rules. In that way, we will get rid of—we will be free from selfish practice. So if you want to actualize the idea of non-self, you know, the way to be free from it is to do things with people. *[Sentence finished. Tape turned over.]*

There must be, you know, many questions about this point, so I want to discuss this point with you some other time, not right now. Especially why I talk about this point this morning is, you know, because Japanese typhoon came [laughs], and I felt something, you know.

If we have some rules, you know, in this zendō how to treat people, you know, regardless he is Japanese or American, you know, it might be a great help. I was quite busy, you know. In my room I had Japanese guests [laughing]. And here we have, you know, zendō students. I didn't know what to do [laughs]. You know, this is very silly to be involved in this kind of confusion. *Mmm*—no—so I thought it is necessary anyway to have some, you know, rules, you know, which—how we treat people, you know.

Of course, where there is rules there must be some exception, but we must work hard on this point so that we will have more international, you know, practice here in this zendō.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center tape transcribed by Sara Hunsaker (2/07/00). Transcript checked against tape by Bill Redican (2/12/01).