

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
WAY-SEEKING MIND:
SATURDAY LECTURE OF MARCH SESSHIN
Saturday, March 28, 1970
San Francisco

[First 1-2 sentences of lecture may be missing.] Way-seeking mind is the most important. This kind of chance is—usually in some difficult situation—when you have some difficulty in your everyday life, I think you will have, you know—there you will have chance to arise way-seeking mind. Once you arise the way-seeking mind, your practice is on the track.

Watanabe—Watanabe Genshu-zenji,¹ who passed away several years ago, arise way-seeking mind when famous Arai-zenji² came to his temple. He [Watanabe] was—he was a chest-maker or what do you call?—he was making, you know—he is—he is not a carpenter—was not a carpenter, but he was—hmm?—[comments from students]—oh, cabinetmaker. He was cabinetmaker. And he—when he went to his temple, you know, to hear Arai-zenji's lecture or to—to see him, maybe [laughs], to see the zenji—famous zenji, he arosed way-seeking mind. And he made up his mind to follow him, and asked his family to let him go. And he joined Arai-zenji's order.

He [Watanabe] had—when he was young, he had a very difficult time at his home always. But he didn't complain about it. He rather enjoy his—to make cabinets. But Arai-zenji was so great Zen master that he, you know, made up his mind to follow him. And so, you know, he doesn't forget his—his life in his—when he was young.

When he became archbishop of Sōji-ji temple, he still had a big saw, you know, and tools on *tokonoma*.³ And he—he didn't forget, you know, his difficult time when he was young. And he was very grateful for, you know, having difficulties in his early days. Because, you know—because of that he could join the order, and study our way, and practice zazen until he become archbishop of Sōji-ji temple. He was unique archbishop.

Of course, when he became Arai-zenji's disciple he went—he has some more schooling. He graduate a college called Toyo Daigaku,⁴ but that was maybe—I don't know exactly when, but maybe when he was pretty old.

The most Zen masters, you know—great Zen masters are the monks who had difficult time in his early life. In Meiji period, or, yeah, late Meiji period,

¹ Watanabe Genshu-zenji (1869-1963): 17th *dokuju* (successive) abbot of Sōji-ji.

² Arai Sekizen-zenji (1864-1927): 5th *dokuju* (successive) abbot of Sōji-ji.

³ *tokonoma* (Jap.): alcove.

⁴ Toyo University, Tōkyō.

our most famous *zenji*—Zen master is—are Nishiari-zenji⁵ and Morita—Morita-zenji, Morita Goyū.⁶ Nishiari-zenji became a archbishop of Sōji-ji Temple. Morita-zenji became a—became archbishop of Eihei-ji temple. They were the monks who had very difficult time when they were young.

Morita-zenji joined—or went to Eihei-ji Monastery to practice when he was very young. And his—when he was leaving his temple, his father was very ill, but knowing that his boy—he cannot take care of his boy, he persuaded his boy to go to Eihei-ji monastery. As you know, Eihei-ji—life in Eihei-ji Monastery is not so easy, especially for a little boy maybe thirteen or fourteen. His father must be a very good—must have been very good teacher to know how important it is to continue his practice. But he had not much money for the boy, so only way is to send him to Eihei-ji Monastery. When he was going, he said:

The first duty you will have at Eihei-ji Monastery will be to, you know, collect rubbishes or garbage, and to—or to hit, you know, big bell. You—you should know to collect garbage is the most important duty in the monastery. The older students will sweep the garden and collect the leaves and garbages at certain time—certain place. So young priest or monks should, you know, collect it.

We are told, you know, that even though you sweep the garden, if you don't, you know, collect the garbage in—or take it to the garbage can, you know—in Japan we had no garbage can but we had some place to burn the papers and—or leaves. If we don't take it to the place—to some certain place, you did, you know, half job, not complete job. Fifty percent [laughs]. Another fifty percent is to take it to the place where they burn it. So his father told them—told him to—"If you take the garbage to some certain place, you—that means you—you are doing half of the work, even though you are just one or three people. If you do it, you are doing half of the work, and many—rest of the monks with many heads [laughs] and hands will do half of it. So you must be proud of your duty," he said to him.

"And to hit a bell means to hit—to, you know—to give a birth to Buddha. So each time you hit the bell, you know, Buddha will appear. So when you, you know, at Eihei-ji—if you go to Eihei-ji you should—monks bow each time they hit big bell. So with that spirit you should hit the bell."

And he give him—give the boy various instructions like that. And knowing—without knowing his father was almost dying, he went to Eihei-ji monastery and he started monastic life. The first morning, he hit the great bell, Ekido-

⁵ Nishiari Bokusan (1821-1910): the most prominent Meiji scholar of the *Shōbōgenzō*. He was a teacher of Oka Sotan-zenji and Ian Kishizawa-zenji, eventually becoming abbot of Sōji-ji Temple and head of the Sōtō-shu.

⁶ Juko Morita Goyū (1834-1915): 64th abbot of Eihei-ji. Called the "Double Founder" because of his work in restoring Eihei-ji.

zenji,⁷ who was at that time the abbot of—or archbishop of Eihei-ji monastery, asked his *jisha* find out who hit the bell this morning.

I don't know how old Ekido-zenji was at that time. Maybe he was more than 80.⁸ Maybe almost 90. And he was sitting in his room and hearing the b- [partial word]—unusual bell, he asked his *jisha* to find out who it was. And there came the small boy. Ekido-zenji rather amazed to see such a small boy. He thought some good well-trained monk will appear [laughs], but small boy appear.

So he wondered how he could hit such a—hit a nice good sound, so he asked him, you know, the boy—how did you hit it, and with what kind of, you know, feeling did he hit the bell? And he told him, "To hit one bell means to give a birth to a buddha. That was what my father told me when I was leaving my home for Eihei-ji monastery." Of course, Eikido-zenji was very much impressed by the boy, and he took care of—he took good care of the boy until he became a famous Zen master.

Nishiari-zenji is famous for his study of *Shōbōgenzō*, and Morita-zenji is very famous for his zazen practice. There are many stories about his zazen practice. For an instance, when he was crossing the narrow[s] between Hokkaidō and Honshū Island, they met a big tornado or typhoon. The ship was almost wrecked. All the seamen, all the passengers, and even seamen including the, you know, captain of the boat was—became seasick, but Morita-zenji in the corner of the room was sitting zazen [laughs, laughter]. He didn't become seasick, and the captain was very much amazed, you know, to see him. And he could eat, you know, and after eating he went to his cabin—and practicing zazen [laughs]. Since then, captain became a very good, you know, student of Morita-zenji [laughs]. But all those—wonderful practice is a result of his difficult practice in his early age at Eihei-ji Monastery.

Our life in monastery, you know, is very simple and monotonous, you know. We are repeating same thing [laughing] every day, over and over. There is nothing to enjoy. So sometime we do something very foolish, you know, to enjoy—how foolish we are! If we find ourselves very foolish, you know, we, you know, we enjoy [laughs] our foolishness, to, you know—to eat radish, you know, without cooking [laughs, laughter]. Just, you know, when we are carrying radish, you know, without washing, without even washing. Bring out the radish and scratch the dirt out [laughs, laughter]. Sometime that is not interesting enough for us [laughs, laughter], so late at night when there are, you know, when they are fast asleep, you know, we, you know, cook it by bucket or something [laughing] outside of the monastery.

⁷ Morotake (Sengai) Ekido-zenji (1805-1879): 1st *dokuju* (successive) abbot of Sōji-ji. According to *Zengaki Daijiten* (*The Great Dictionary of Zen Studies*), Ekido was abbot of Ryukai-in, not Eihei-ji, when Morita Goyū would have been a novice. But Ekido and Goyū may also have studied at Eihei-ji for some period of time.

⁸ Ekido died at age 74.

But once you cook radish, smell is awful! Whole monastery will, you know, [be] filled with the smell of the radish.

Of course, we know, you know, we will be easily found out, but, you know, to do it is most important part. And if we are scolded that is another, you know [laughing]—something, you know—we have something more. They may scold us. "Okay, let's do it!" [Said in a mock conspiratorial voice.] [Laughs.]

Our life in the monastery is so simple and so monotonous, we cannot work fast, you know. We should always work slowly without making noise. We cannot talk loudly. If you enter someone's room, the head of the room will see your—you from your feet to your—up to your head [laughs]. He will check you, you know. If you have some reason it is very difficult to stay. Maybe recently, you know, their masters want—want them to be a priest—good priest. So even though they don't want—they themselves don't want to stay at Eihei-ji, because their teacher, you know, or their master want them to stay at Eihei-ji, so that is maybe why they stay there for one year or so. But no more—not more than that [laughs]. Most people feel in that way.

So I think we have so many students here, but I don't know how many of you will stay with—with us. I don't know how many. If you have good reason to stay here, you will stay. But if you haven't not much reason, I don't know. What I am saying right now is when you have—when you want to be a Buddhist, it is necessary for you to see your—our everyday life more carefully. *[Sentence finished. Tape turned over.]*

This—this is something—we say ordinary life but it is not ordinary life. It is very, you know, very dangerous and precarious life. We cannot trust people in city so much. Nothing is permanent or reliable in our society. If so, you know, someone should be—should become reliable person, you know—trustworthy person. Or else, you know, whole society will be lost. If it is—if it is hot, when it is hot we need big tree under which we have cool wind. When it rain, we need someone who has umbrella. When you see our human life carefully, you will find out how important it is to become trustworthy person. It is not necessary to be a great man, but we should be good enough to help our neighbors.

So purpose of Buddhism, we say, [is] to help themselves and to help others. Why it is so is—it is actually our neighbor wants some help in some way. I said to carry—to collect the garbage to the garbage can is half of the job, whole job, you know, but we are liable to, you know, ignore to carry the garbage to the garbage can. We are liable to ignore something which is some duty which is dirty, which is not pleasant. We are liable to ignore cleaning the corner of the room. If everyone ignore to clean the corners of the room, the room will be filthy pretty soon. Because someone do it, our room is always clean, and we feel very good in a clean

room. There is many, you know, liable to [laughs] tend to in our human life, you know, we are liable to do this, to be like this, to be like that. Many liable to [laughs]. Many apt to. Someone must work hard so that we—all of us can enjoy our life.

Maybe our zazen practice is the practice which most people do not like so much [laughs]. We shouldn't try to attain even enlightenment. You should be there on the black cushion for two days [laughing] without any reason why. There is no "liable to." Just to be there, that is why you practice zazen. When you can do this kind of practice—if you can do *shikantaza* without expecting anything, I think you can do almost everything which is necessary.

With this spirit—when you have this spirit, you will attain enlightenment, but without this spirit the enlightenment you will have is one of the "liable to." [Laughs.] You will expose your weakness, that's all. There is no true, you know, human nature appear. What you will have is just, you know, false—superficial attainment which is not true.

So final strength will be attained by just sitting. After experiencing—started—starting from various difficulties, the difficulties we have is not actually difficult enough. Just to sit on the cushion is the most difficult thing, as you experience [laughs]. I think you know how difficult it is just to sit on the black cushion. Without true spirit you cannot do that.

So if you, you know, have a chance to arise real way-seeking mind, we should start *shikantaza*. So for people who has no way-seeking mind, who want some encouragement, who want some candy, we have to give some candy [laughs]. But it is, you know—we should be ashamed of being fooled by candy, you know. Our world is not so easy, you know, and we are foolish enough to be fooled by candy. We are critical with others, and mostly with ourselves very critical. We cannot accept ourselves so easily. That is why we practice zazen.

This time I started some—I started *dokusan*, but maybe, you know, better to be concentrated on just practice of zazen. Anyway I don't think I can finish *dokusan* for all the students in two days, so I almost gave up! [Laughs.] I think it's much better to—to just sit with you.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997.
Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Bill Redican (10/19/00).
Miyagawa Keishi-san kindly provided assistance with the translation of Japanese terms.