

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
HOW TO HAVE SINCERE PRACTICE
Tuesday, April 28, 1970
San Francisco

Since Tatsugami-rōshi¹ came, you must have heard Dōgen-zenji's name so many times. But Dōgen-zenji may not like to hear his name so many times [laughs]. But unfortunately he had a name like Dōgen, so [laughs] there is no other way to address him. So we call him Dōgen-zenji or Dōgen.

As you know, he didn't like to say "Zen" even, or Zen—in China they called monks who sit in zazen, called [them] "Zen monks," but he didn't like to call "Zen" even. And he said if necessary you should call us "Buddha's disciple." Shamon, you know, he called himself Shamon Dōgen—"A Monk Dōgen."

In China, there were many various schools like Rinzai, Sōtō, Ummon, Hōgen, Igyō. But Nyojō-zenji's—Nyojō-zenji,² who was Dōgen's teacher then, was not, according to Dōgen, [from] one of the five schools of Zen or seven³ schools of Zen. His Zen is just to practice zazen, to realize—to actually realize by his body Buddha's mind, Buddha's spirit. That was his Zen. That was why Dōgen accepted him as his teacher.

Before he—Dōgen went to China, he studied Hiezan [Onjō-ji?]-Tendai—main temple of Tendai school. And after Tendai, he went to Eisei—Eisai-zenji⁴—Yoshin-ji [Kennin-ji?], and then he went to China because Eisai-zenji passed away when he was very young. So he went to China to continue his practice with good teacher.

He may have—according to *Kenzei-ki*,⁵ he already attained enlightenment under Eisai, but he wanted to continue his practice with right teacher. So he went to China with Myōzen, who was also one of the—Eisai's outstanding teacher—no, disciple. But he couldn't accept—although he visited many temples and saw many Zen teachers, but he couldn't accept them as his teacher until he met with Nyojō-zenji. And when he saw Nyojō-zenji, without studying under him, when he saw for the first time,

¹ Tatsugami Sōtan Ryosen-rōshi: Sōtō Zen master and *ino-rōshi* at Eihei-ji monastery in Japan for many years. A teacher or master of Jean Ross, Graham Petchey, and Philip Wilson (all students of Suzuki-rōshi) while they attended Eihei-ji. He visited Tassajara to help establish monastic forms and practices. He was head of training at Tassajara for the Spring and Fall 1970 practice periods.

² Chan master Tiantong Rujing (Tendō Nyojō): 1163-1228.

³ The five schools Suzuki-rōshi mentioned plus the two schools into which Rinzai split: Yōgi and Oryō.

⁴ Also Yōsai-zenji.

⁵ Biography of Dōgen written in Japanese by Kenzei, 14th abbot of Eihei-ji.

he accepted him, Nyojō-zenji, as his teacher. And Nyojō-zenji also thought, "This is my disciple. This is my disciple who will carry my practice."

And when he was practicing with Nyojō-zenji he attained—he—someone—Nyojō-zenji was scolded someone who was sleeping in his practice. And at that time—the feeling or experience he had at that time was submitted by Dōgen to his teacher. And he became a completely—he transmitted—he received the transmission from Nyojō-zenji and came back to Japan.

The first thing we should notice here is Dōgen was a monk who wanted to be sincere—one of the sincere good monks of Buddha or disciple—disciple of Buddha. That's all. And he has nothing in his mind when he went to—he saw Nyojō—Eisai-zenji, he already gave up scholarly study of Buddhism which he was—he had been involved in for long long time.

But his problem is how to be a good disciple from the bottom of his heart and mind. So for him to have this spirit it was the most important point. He was so sincere student that he couldn't accept teachers who is not so sincere as he was. Already he gave up scholarly study, so he couldn't accept someone who is talking about Buddhism. Already he experienced what is Zen, so he couldn't accept someone who is just talking about what is Zen. But what he wanted to see is a man who [is] really practicing Zen in its true sense. So when he saw Nyojō-zenji, who is practicing his way, he accepted him as his teacher. And when Nyojō-zenji saw him, he could acknowledge his sincerity—his sincere practice. And—the next question will be what is sincere practice? What is the way-seeking mind?

Perhaps, you know, you want to know what is sincerity in your practice. First of all, when you become very sincere you cannot accept which is superficial. But bef- [partial word]—when you are not so sincere, it is difficult to know what is sincerity, who is sincere student. It is difficult and almost impossible. Only when you become very sincere, you can—you will know what is sincerity.

It is like to know—to appreciate art. You know, when you see—first of all, if you want to appreciate good art, the most important thing is to see the good work. If you, you know, if your eye—if you see a good work always, if you—in case you see something which is not good enough, you will immediately know this is not so good because your eyes is already sharp enough to know what is bad, you know, what is good work. And when you know what is good work, you will know what is bad, you know—what is not-so-good work.

That is why Dōgen-zenji always put emphasis on the teacher. If you want to know what is sincerity, you should have good teacher. Only when you have good teacher you will know—by him you will know—by seeing him you will know who is good teacher—what is good teacher. When you see

sincere person, you will know what is sincerity. That is not something which I can describe. That is something you will feel by your intuition. That kind of intuition will be gained by seeing good teachers always.

And next thing which is important is to give up or to be ready to give up everything, including your understanding of teaching or your knowledge about, you know, Buddhism. Most of you may think, you know—may accept some teacher who say—whose knowledge—whose knowledge is understandable—acceptable for you. You will say he is good teacher [laughs], you know.

But the standard is—you cannot judge your teacher by your low, you know, standard. Only when you have well-polished-ups, you know, eyes or standard of judgment, you will understand—you will see—you can tell which is good and which is bad. To have—but as long as you have some standard, that standard may be your own, you know, standard which cannot be perfect.

So best thing is, you know, to give up everything. Many teachers, you know, give up—burned all the *sūtra* they study and practiced zazen only. In that case, he had—he did not rely on anything, but he just practiced zazen to purify his mind. To accept true teaching—teaching can be—any teaching can be your good teaching for you, but because of your foolish judgment, you know, teaching does not make much sense. You—you are spoiling good teaching by your own judgment. But when you have no judgment, and when you see or accept teaching as it is, that is, in other word, good teaching.

What he—what Dōgen transmitted from his teacher is this acceptance—giving up everything. Great spirit—to—to be ready to give up everything. Especially when he is practiced zazen, he has nothing in his mind. He was just practicing zazen. That, you know, purity of practice struck [struck?] him.

When you are, you know, trying to give up everything, you don't—you haven't give up everything yet. When you become tired of foolish, you know, discussion or foolish study of, you know, foolish mind—to seek for something which is called truth or true teaching, you will be completely involved in pure practice, giving up everything.

My teacher, Kishizawa Ian, he was a—actually a great scholar. But his study was started after when he give up everything [laughs]. He didn't care for position or fame or, you know, reputation. Whatever people may say about him he doesn't care. And he continued his study and his practice just to meet some ancient teachers who devoted themselves to the—to our teaching. When we, you know, realize this point, there is no Sōtō or no Rinzai, you know. Before you give up everything, you have Sōtō or Rinzai. When you give up everything, there is no Sōtō or Rinzai.

In Dōgen-zenji describing various teachers' ways of practice, among them there are Rinzaï teachers, Sōtō teachers, and some other schools—teachers of many schools. He just, you know, wanted to see him through books. That was also true with my teacher. Whenever he meets some student or some scholar, what he ask is—give me some record you have. Whatever record it may be, he was very much interested in to see it, to read it. He was seeking for his friend always, his teacher always. Whether he is famous or not, it doesn't matter for him. Only when you give up everything, you can see true teacher.

Even name of Buddhism is already dirty spot on our practice. It is not teaching but the stu- [partial word]—but their character or their effort. When you seek for even enlightenment, his mind is not big enough. He is not sincere enough because he, you know—he has some purpose in his study. To, you know—for us I think everyone want to see a great man. That is not, you know—that is not a selfish desire. It is the desire which everyone has. But desire to accomplish something or even to propagate Buddhism is not pure enough. Just to—just to see someone who is holy and great and pure is our purpose of studying Zen or Buddhism. *[Gap in tape: Recorder stopped for unknown period and restarted on same side.]*

... on what point your teacher could be strict. First of all, when you are lazy [laughs] he will be very angry. If, you know, good, intelligent student, you know, always involved in something which is not pure enough, he may be angry. He is wasting his time.

As much as possible, we should follow our inner voice, rejecting useless things and how—sometime, you know, we will think something is necessary to support yourself. But Dōgen says if you study hard—pure—if your practice is pure enough, you will be anyway supported by Buddha. You should[n't] worry who will support you or what will happen to you. You shouldn't worry about this kind of thing. Moment after moment, you should completely devote yourself which you—listening to your inner voice. That is to see someone who is great in its true sense. To see someone who can accept—who you can accept—that is the most important point for Zen student.

So if you cannot accept a teacher as your teacher, you should seek for someone—someone else as your teacher. Without this kind of spirit, it is almost impossible to study our way.

With this spirit, or to polish up our way-seeking mind, we practice zazen, you know. How you practice zazen is, you know, to have right posture. He s- [partial word]—Tatsugami-rōshi said [laughs] very interesting remark, you know, "How about your *mudrā*?" "Hai." [Laughs.] That was very good!

"How about your eyes?" "Hai." [Laughs, laughter.] In short, zazen is, you know, "Hai." That is a [laughter]— "How about your," you know, "spine?" "Hai." [Laughs.] "How about your chin?" "Hai." [Laughs.]

It is, you know—actually you are not checking your posture. You are, you know, just, you know, accepting your posture: "Hai." [Laughs.] That is zazen. There is no more activity in your practice, and that spirit is the greatest of all the spirit you may have [laughs]. Even though, you know, you are like this, you know [probably gesturing], "How is the posture?" [Laughs, laughter.] "How is your breathing?" "Okay" [said in a humorous, laboring voice] [laughs, laughter].

There is no other secret in our practice. If you have something more than that, that is heresy [laughs, laughter]. You have some extra. When you have some extra fancy practice, you know, your practice will not reach to the point. I think everything is—may be the same.

Today I was mending someone's broken cup, you know. If I fix it—*Chht*— [laughs], that is okay, you know. If I—after fixing it, if I do like this [probably gesturing] [laughing], you will, you know, break it. So the work you do will not be so good. If you—if you just do it [laughs], that is zazen. But usually, you know, you do like this [probably gesturing] [laughs, laughter]. That is extra, you know, and waste of time, and you are spoiling yourself by doing this. "Hai." [Laughs.]

"Don't kill," you know. It is same thing with precepts. "Don't kill," you know. You may s- [partial word]—you may think, "No, I cannot survive [laughs] if I don't kill anything. No, that is not possible." That is you are doing this way [probably gestures]. "Don't kill." "Hai." Whether it is possible, or not is it out of the question. "Don't kill"—we don't want to kill. So someone—if someone said, "Don't kill," "Mmm. [As in "yes.]" That's right." [Laughs.] "I will not kill." Then you have perfect buddha-nature at that time.

Because you say, you know, "that is not possible," or "impossible," "right" or "wrong," and because you compare Buddhist precepts to, you know, Christian commandment, so you lose the point. When you say "okay," whether it is commandment or our precepts, it doesn't matter. There we have buddha-mind or perfect mercy of God—of the god.

So if we notice this point, there is no other secret. Rejecting everything, giving up everything. When you listen to your inner voice directly, without even trying to listen to it, whenever you chance—you have chance to hear it, there there is the way. There there is a voice of Buddha.⁶ [*Sentence finished. Tape turned over.*]

⁶ The rest of the lecture was not in the original transcript. It was entered here from Side B of the original tape.

So when—when you see or when you listen to your teacher, you will not think about his nationality or his sex or whether he is old or young—it doesn't matter. That is what Dōgen says. Even a—a—a girl of seven years old may be your teacher. If you know this point—secret of practice—that is pure practice which you can apply to your everyday life.

Our instruction of practice—pull in your chin, or keep your spine straight, or *mudrā*—about *mudrās*—are concentrated on this point. This is the front door to the various religion. There is no other doors. As Dōgen-zenji said, "Don't hang around"—hang around [laughs, laughter]—"hang around the gate. You should directly enter the gate." *Hai*. Okay. Then you are inside of the gate, you know. If you sit [probably gestures] [laughs, laughter]—and if you peek in the inside of the gate, wondering what—what is going [on] there, you have no chance to, you know, practice pure practice. It is quite easy if you have—if you say "Hai!" That's all. No other secret.

My teacher⁷ had many disciples [laughs]. Not so many, but pretty many. And he was always angry with us—always [laughs]—because we are lazy. We are always pretending, you know—we were always pretending to study, you know, Dōgen's way. But actually, we were not. So he was very angry with us.

But he cannot be always angry with us, so he start to speak something to the audience, you know—many people in lecture hall. He [laughs]—instead of angry with us, he was angry with people—all the audience. *Rrrr!* [Laughs, laughter.] *Ohh*.

So I was—we were listening to him, you know—we feel as if we are scolded. And, you know, when he was not, you know, scolding us, we realized, you know, what we are doing, and we become—became very sorry.

"The first precept—'Don't kill.'"

This is a precept transmitted from Buddha to us.

"Can you keep it or not?"

And he said, "Yes! I will keep it!"

This is the way you keep precepts, you know. He was almost screaming [laughs]:

Dai-ichi husesshō-kai, nanji yoku tamotsuya inaya?

⁷ Kishizawa Ian-rōshi.

*Yoku tamotsu!*⁸ [Laughs.]

"This is the way you keep precepts!" you know.

We have—we don't have that kind of spirit. When you say, "Yes I will!" there there is Buddha's voice. When you hesitate, you are always, you know [laughs], you are always saying nothing happened to you. Only when you say, "Yes I will!" and feel how you feel it when you said "Yes I will!"—when you fix your mind to do so, whatever happen. Without spirit—without this spirit, you cannot, you know, extend our way, especially in America, I think.

I may be difficult to accept Tatsugami-rōshi's way, you know. I know that [laughs]. I know very well. But, you know, you should try, and you should say, "I will do it!"—not because it, you know, Buddha's teaching or Japanese way or American way or appropriate to our society or not. You should say it—you should do it—and feel what it was.

[Laughs.] Did you see the movie *2000*? [Laughs, laughter.] That is what you are doing. *2001*—or what it?—*2001*—square, I am. All the monkeys, you know, hanging around [laughs, laughter]. [Probably gestures like a hominid.] That is, you know [laughs], what we are doing. If you feel it—if you, you know, seize it, nothing happen. It is yours. Maybe that is the key point of practice and way to save all sentient beings.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Sara Hunsaker and Bill Redican 9/26/00. Miyagawa Keishi-san kindly provided assistance with the translation of Japanese terms.

⁸ Suzuki-rōshi is speaking in a loud, ironic, and formal voice—probably imitating his teacher Kishizawa Ian-zenji—presenting a short dialog of two voices. *Dai* (great); *-ichi* (number one); *hu* (not); *sesshō* (kill); *-kai* (precept); *nanji* (thee [older form of Japanese]); *yoku* (well); *tamo* (keep); *-tsuya inaya* (or not [makes the sentence a question]). *Yoku tamotsu!* (I must keep it well!)