

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**SANDŌKAI LECTURE XII: "It Is Not Always So"**  
**Saturday, July 4, 1970**  
**Tassajara**

[This lecture is concerned with the following lines of the *Sandōkai*:

*Koto wo uke te wa subekaraku shū wo esu beshi.*  
*Mizukara kiku wo rissuru koto nakare.*  
*Sokumoku dō wo ese zumba,*  
*ashi wo hakobu mo izukunzo michi wo shiran.*

(Transliteration by Kazuaki Tanahashi.)

If you listen to the words, you should understand the source of the teaching.

Don't establish your own rules.

If you don't practice in your everyday life as you walk, how can you know the way?

(Translation by Suzuki-rōshi.)]

Tonight and tonight lecture and one more lecture will be the last concluding lecture for *Sandōkai*.

And here it says *Koto wo uke te wa subekaraku shū wo esu beshi*. *Koto* means "the first character." We read from this side, you know: *Koto wo— Koto? Koto wo uke te wa*. *Koto* means "words." *Uke te wa*: "to receive" or "to listen to"; "to receive," you know. This is something like "hand," you know. The same type [?] character—"to receive." If you receive words, it means that if you receive teaching, you should—*subekaraku*—you should—*subekaraku*—should—you should.

*Shū wo—shū* is "source of the teaching"—*shū*—source of the teaching which is beyond our words. *Esu beshi* is "to have actual understanding of it." So if you listen to the words, you should understand—*e*—understand—*shū*—source of the teaching. Usually we, you know, stick to words, and it is difficult, because we stick to words, it is difficult to see the true meaning of the teaching. So we say, "words or teaching is finger pointing at the moon." If you stick to the finger pointing at the moon, you cannot see the moon. So words is just—to suggest the real meaning of the truth is the words. So we shouldn't stick to words, but we should know actually what the words mean.

At his time, you know, at Sekitō's time, many people stick to words—or each one's, each Zen masters [taught] personal characteristic of Zen. Each masters had, at that time, their own way of introducing the

real teaching to the disciples. And they stick to some special teachers —some particular way, so Zen was divided in many schools, and it was very hard to the student [to know], "Which is the true way?" And actually, to wonder which is the true way is already, you know, wrong. Each was, you know— Each teachers is suggesting the true teaching by his own way, so each teachers, you know, true— Each teachers is suggesting same truth—same source of the teaching which was transmitted from Buddha. Without knowing the source of the teaching, to stick to words was wrong, and actually that was what the teachers at his [Sekitō's] time was doing, or students' way of studying Zen.

So he [Sekitō] said—he says, "If you receive words, you should understand the source of the teaching." Source of the teaching is the teaching which is transmitted from Buddha and which is beyond each one's own way of expressing the teaching or suggesting the teaching. Do you— Oh.

**Student:** Rōshi, can't see.

Okay. They cannot see. All right.

Words. Words. *Koto*. [Someone writing on blackboard.] We go this way. You know, this is Chinese character, and we read—Japanese people read from here to here [laughs]—opposite way. This is "words." This is words. *Koto wo uke te wa subekaraku shū wo esu beshi*.

And next sentence is, *Mizukara kiku wo rissuru koto nakare*. *Mizukara kiku wo rissuru koto nakare*. "You" is understood. "You should not": *nakare* is "not," "should not." Rules: *kiku* means "rules." *Rissuru* is "to establish." *Mizukara*: "by yourself." "You should not establish rules for yourselves." It means that you should not establish, you know, some rules for yourself, and you should not stick to it or you should not [be] bound by it. [Laughs.] That is most people—what most people does. You say, "This is right" and "This is wrong." And [laughs] you say so—when you say so you establish some rules for yourself [laughs]. And because you say so [laughs], naturally you will stick to it and you will be bound by it.

That is, you know, why Zen school—Zen teachers, you know, divided in many ways: Sōtō, Rinzai, Obaku, Ummon, Hōgen, Igyō, you know. There are many schools. But originally it is one teaching. But they establish, you know, or their disciple establish one school and stick to their "family way" and bound by their family way. That is how Zen school is divided in many schools. Why Zen school is divided in many branches is because they stick to words. When they understand

Buddha's teaching, they understand the Buddha's original teaching in their own way [laughs] and stick to their understanding. And they think that is Buddha's teaching. In other words, they stick to, you know, fingers pointing at the moon. And if three people are pointing at the same moon, you know, three people have [laughs]—each person has his own fingers and if this is teaching there are already three schools. But the moon is one [laughs, laughter]. So he [Sekito] says, "Don't," you know, "establish his own rules for yourself."

*Nakare* means "do not." *Mizukara* is "for yourself" or "for himself." *Kiku* is "rules." This is very important in our practice. We are liable to establish our rules. "This is," you know, "rule of Tassajara," you may say [laughs]. But rules is the finger to, you know, to have good practice in Tassajara according to the situation. So actually rules are important, but you should not think this is the only, you know, way, this is the true teaching, or—and that rules, you know, they have is wrong. You shouldn't understand in that way. In everyday life, it is true, you know. You shouldn't stick to your own understanding of things. Something which is good for someone is not always good for someone else, so you should not, you know, make special rules for everyone. But even so, rules are important. It is important, but when you stick to it and when you force the rules to others too much, it is, you know, to establish rules and to force the rule for others.

So when you, you know, enter monastery, anyway, once you enter some monastery you shouldn't say, "This is my way" [laughs]. If you come to Tassajara, you should obey Tassajara's rules. You should not establish your own rules for yourself. What you should do at Tassajara through Tassajara rules to see the actual moon is, you know, how you practice zazen at Tassajara. Rules is not the point. The actual teaching the rules will catch is the point. So observing rules naturally you will understand what is the real teaching.

So this is, you know— From the beginning, this point is maybe missing in almost all of us. Most of the people, you know, start to study Zen to know what is Zen. This is already wrong. It is the first step to, you know, to— It means that he is always trying to provide some understanding or rules for himself.

The way you study Zen is like—you should be— The way you study Zen should be the way a fish, you know, pick up its food [laughs], you know [laughs]. They do not try to catch anything, you know. They are just swimming around. And [laughs] if something good come— *snap!* [Bites teeth together.] [Laughs, laughter.] While you are following Tassajara rules, you know, even though it is so hot, anyway you are observing Tassajara rules [laughs], eating in hot zendō [laughs], like a fish, you know, swimming around, and, you know, as

you are doing so, you will get something. I don't know whether you realize it or not. Anyway, as long as you are following rules, you will have something. Even though you don't have anything or you don't study anything, actually you are studying, like a fish, you know, like a fish doesn't know what they are eating. That's all [laughs]. In that way we should study Zen. To understand does not mean to, you know, to understand something by hear [or "here," pointing to head?].

For Zen student, if you ask question, you know, "What is good?" to Zen student, Zen student may answer, "Something you should—something you do is good, and something you don't is bad." [Laughs.] That is answer. Something you do is good, and something you don't is bad. [Laughs.] That's all. You don't think so much about good or bad.

So Dogen-zenji says, "The power of 'do not' is good." Power of "do not." That is something intuitive—very inmost function of ourselves: innate nature. Our innate nature have some function before you say [said?] "good" or "bad." That function is something—is sometime good and sometime bad. We understand in that way. But that innate nature is beyond the idea of good or bad. So when you start to wonder why we practice zazen in such a hot weather [laughs, laughter], then, you know, that is the first step to the confusion [laughs, laughter]. We should be like a fish, always swimming around in the river. That is Zen student [laughs]. Don't, you know— So Dogen-zenji said, "There is no bird that fly after knowing what is sky or where is the limit of the sky." They just fly in the big sky. That is how we practice zazen.

So you should not make some rules for yourself. Or you should not try to make rules for yourself. These is very strict words, you know. It looks like very— It looks like it doesn't mean much, but actually when he say so, he is waiting with big stick [laughs]. If you say something [Sekitō says], "Don't make rules for yourself! Don't try to understand by your head." He is waiting like this [laughs] [Suzuki-rōshi holds up the pointer or stick as if ready to strike].<sup>1</sup> So when he say so, we cannot say anything. *Hai. Hai.* [Laughs.] [The *Hai/Hai* exchange was said as if two people were talking to each other.] That's all. You shouldn't say even "*Hai*." You should do things like a mule or ass [laughs].

You may say, "This is absolute surrender." It is not so. It is, you know, the way to understand what is the source of the teaching. When we say, "source of the teaching," we liable to, you know, wonder what it is. But source of the teaching is not something which you can understand by words, but something which you will—which you have

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<sup>1</sup> The description in brackets is from the original typescript.

when you do things quite naturally and intuitively without saying "good" or "bad."

Time is always going on and on. We have not much time to say "good" or "bad" [laughs]. You know, moment after moment we should follow the flow of the time. You should go with the time goes. We don't have time to say "this way" or "that way." When we become tired of, you know, doing something, you may say, "this way" or "that way" just to kill time. But [laughs] actually when you see the vegetables in the garden which is almost, you know, dry up in the hot weather, you have not much time to [laughs] say what will be the appropriate thing to do for us, you know, for today [laughs]. While we are discussing we are becoming more and more hungry. So kitchen people should go to the kitchen and prepare some food for next meal [laughs]. That is the most important thing.

But it does not mean there is, you know, it is waste of time to think about. It is good thing to think about, but we should not stick to words or stick to rules too much. This is very delicate point. Without ignoring rules, without sticking to the rules, we should continue our Tassajara practice. This is the way Sekitō is suggesting.

And he says, *Sokumoku dō wo ese zumba. Sokumoku dō wo ese zumba, ashi wo hakobu mo izukunzo michi wo shiran. Sokumoku: Soku* is to, you know—excuse me? [Laughs.] *Soku* is, you know, the antenna of the, you know, insects; *moku* is "eyes." So it means that to use our eyes and our five senses. *Sokumoku: moku* is "eyes"; *soku* is "sense organs."

*Dō wo ese zumba: dō* is "dao" [someone is writing on the blackboard]. *E* means "understand not," you know. "If you don't understand *dao* with eyes and sense organs."

*Ashi wo hakobu: ashi* means "foot." *Hakobu* means "to carry on," "to go," you know, "to carry on."

*Izukunzo: "how."* "How could you do that," it means this words. *Izukunzo.*

*Michi wo: michi* is "way"; *shiran*, "to know."

"If you don't understand *dao*, way, you don't understand way, how could you—even though you move or you operate your foot—operate"—(*uma* is "operate")—"your foot—your feet—how could you know the—could you know—*shiran*—could you know—*michi*—way—(*michi* is 'way')—how could you know the way?"

So it means that only way is using your five senses—sense organs—eyes and many sense organs—wherever you go, using your sense organs like eyes and nose, and at that time simultaneously understanding the source of the teaching. If you don't do that, even though you prac- [incomplete word]— *ashi wo hakobu*—"to operate your feet" means to practice. So even though you practice, you cannot know the true way: *michi wo*. *Michi*—true way. *Michi wo shiran*.

So, you know, the way is—the more important thing is not rules but to, you know, find out the true mean [partial word] source of the teaching with your eyes, with your ears, wherever you are, you know—is how you understand the source of the teaching. That is more direct way to know the source of the teaching without trying to establish some particular way for yourselves. So if you stick to words, and if you do not see true way by your eyes, by your nose, ears, or tongue—sticking to some rules and, you know, ignoring actually direct experience of everyday life, even though you practice zazen, it doesn't work, he [Sekitō] says. So without, you know, saying this way—"Rinzai" or "Sōtō," or "this way" or "that way"—to have direct experience of everyday life is more important thing, and that is how we understand the true source of the teaching transmitted from Buddha. That is the conclusion of the *Sandōkai*.

So true way could be, you know, could be a stick. True way— The original way of Buddha could be a stone. Like Ummon said, "It may be a toilet paper" [laughs]. What is true way? Or what is Buddha? Buddha is something which is beyond our understanding. So Buddha could be everything. It is, you know, just— Instead of "Buddha," we say, you know, "toilet paper" [laughs]. Anyway, even though you say "Buddha," it doesn't make much sense [laughs]. So it may be much better to say "toilet paper" or "three pounds of hemp," as Tōzan said [laughs].

So, you know, the best way is if you, you know, if someone ask you, "Who is Buddha?" the answer may be, "You are Buddha too" [laughs]. That will be the answer. If you, you know— Then, if someone ask, "What is mountain?" "The mountain is also Buddha" [laughs]. That will be the answer. So in Japanese, *mo mata*. *Mo mata* is "also." If you say, you know— You shouldn't say, "This is Buddha." Rather— If you say, "This is Buddha," that statement will lead you [to] some misunderstanding. So, "This is also Buddha." If you say so, it is okay. It does not mean you don't stick to lamp. But lamp is Buddha, you know. If someone ask, "Where is Buddha?" you may say, "Here is Buddha too." If you say "too" it is okay. It is not so definite. "Too," you know. So somewhere else—Buddha may be somewhere else too [laughs]. [*Tape turned over.*]

[So the secret of the perfect Zen statement is, "It is not always so." ]<sup>2</sup>  
... [under]standing. This is Tassajara rules, but it is not always so.  
This is— As long as you are at Tassajara, you know, this is our rule.  
But it is not always so. You should not forget this point. So this is also  
Buddha's way—Buddha's rule. If you say so, there is no danger.  
There is no—You will not invite any misunderstanding.

And this is how you get rid of selfish practice. Even though you think  
you are practicing Buddha's way, you are liable to be involved in selfish  
practice when you say, "This is— The way should be like this," you  
know. If you— If that statement is strict enough to accept this kind of  
teaching, it is okay. If, you know— Even though you say, "This is our  
way—our Tassajara way." You should definitely say so. But you  
should be ready to accept some other's way.

This is rather difficult, you know: to have very strict—having very  
strict, strong confidence in your actual practice and flexible enough to  
accept other's way too is rather difficult. For you, you know, to be  
ready to accept someone's teaching is not strict way. But unless you  
are ready to accept other's practice, you cannot be so strict with your  
own way. Only when you are, you know, ready to accept someone's  
opinion you could say, "Definitely you should do so." And you may  
say, "As long as I'm here you should do so" [laughs]. Even though,  
you know, you say so, it does not mean— It means that if someone  
else come, I will observe his way. Or else you cannot, you know, you  
cannot be so strict with yourself. Do you understand this point?

So usually strictness means to become rigid, to be caught by your own  
understanding and no or—do not provide any room for others. That is  
usual way, you know. That is not our way.

So my master always said—if someone ask his opinion about  
something, about some matter, he always said, "If you asked me," you  
know, "my opinion is *this!*" [hits the table with stick at "this"] [laughs,  
laughter]. When he say so, he is very strong [laughs]. Why he could  
be so strong is because he says, "If you ask me" [hits table with stick]  
[laughs]. You know, that is our way. So to be just, you know,  
yourself is to be—to have—to be ready to accept other's opinion too.  
That is very important point. Each moment you should intuitively  
know what you should do. But it does not mean to reject someone  
else['s] opinion.

In some translation, it says, *Koto wo uke te wa* . *Koto* means  
"forementioned," you know, "things" or "words." How many words I  
don't know, but, you know, but it is not so. This is more wider

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<sup>2</sup> Sentence in brackets from original transcript. Not on tape.

meaning: *Koto* is, maybe, "words." "Words," maybe—not only words in *Sandōkai*, but also various words we mean, we use, and it may include various idea which we have or we may have, or things we see or things we hear. So *koto* include everything. And *ashi wo hakobu* means "practice." *Sokumoku* means "our everyday affairs," "our everyday life."

"In everyday life there is *dao*, and if you do not practice our way in everyday activity, there is no way to—no approach to the true way." That is what he [Sekito] means. Don't stick to words. Don't, you know, make your own rules and force the rules to others. It is not possible to force any rules for others, because each one has his own way, and each one should have his own way.

That is the conclusion of *Sandōkai*.

Ah. Just right time, maybe [laughs, laughter]. Hmm? I am sorry we have no time [laughs] for you to ask question.

Thank you very much.



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Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997.  
Transcript checked against tape by Bill Redican 6/1/00.