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TRUE PRACTICE AS EXPRESSION OF BUDDHA-NATURE
Sesshin Lecture No. 2
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In Japan, a terrible fire broke out, and some hotel was burned down, and many sightseeing people killed in the fire. And recently in Japan, they had many sightseeing people even to Eihei-ji, where monk—only monks practice our way. Uchiyama-rōshi¹—Uchiyama-rōshi said in his book²—if you open the book, he says recently, "Everything is going like that" [laughs]. Because we have so many sightseeing people, [laughs], so many years of hotels is built as one building after another. So the building is very complicated. So once something happens [laughs], they don't—it is difficult to figure out which is entrance and which is fire escape [laughs]. [Coughs heavily.] Excuse me.

I am very much interested in Uchiyama-rōshi's remark, and it—it is something like that happening to us too [laughs]. Zen Center become bigger and bigger [laughs], and people—students who come here will find it very difficult which is entrance and which is fire escape [laughs]. I, you know, I thought maybe he is teasing me [laughs]. But what he said is very true, I think. The world situation is something like that.

But we should know, you know, the right entrance for zendō. Dōgen-zenji says in *Shōbōgenzō*, right entrance for the Buddha hall is zazen. Zazen practice is right entrance. So everyone should, you know, enter the big right—from the big wide entrance. Because no—no Buddhist—there is no Buddhist who does not practice zazen. So all the teaching comes out from zazen, and what we obtain by practice of zazen is transmitted mind from Buddha to us. So when we practice zazen, all the treasures transmitted to us will come out from our transmitted mind. And how to open up our transmitted mind is practice of zazen.

So to talk about—to discuss about transmitted mind or true mind, or to express our true buddha-nature is through our practice. That is "Sesshin sesshō,"³ about which I talked last night. Why, you know, streetcars and bus and airplane is so crowded is there are too many people who seek for, you know, some special sightseeing place. Why we—our way is mixed up or confused is because we are practicing sightseeing zazen [laughs].

There is actually—this is not word I made up—"sightseeing practice."

¹ Kōshō Uchiyama-rōshi: (c. 1912–1998): Disciple of "Homeless" Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi and sixth abbot of Antai-ji Zen temple in Japan.

² Possibly *Modern Civilization and Zen*, Administrative Office of Sōtō Zen, 1967.

³ "Sesshin sesshō": "Expounding the Mind and Expounding the Essential Nature," a fascicle of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*.

Some Chinese people say "sightseeing practice" [laughs]. Or Dōgen-zenji says, "Why do you give up your own seat and wandering about various countries?"

So we should not be involved in a hasty idea of attainment. We should not practice to achieve something—to attain something. Step by step, appreciating, you know, our everyday life—day by day, step by step is our way. When we cannot see what we are doing, where we are, it is useless, you know, to put ourselves in hard practice.

If you, you know, if you invite, you know, some *kabuki* player [laughs]—*kabuki*—how do you say?—*kabuki* dancer or player from Japan, it costs a lot of money [laughs]. If you—even though you invite a first-class monk, you know, or even you can invite archbishop from Japan [for] the same amount of money [laughs].

So many people, you know, go to Japan and to study something about Zen, but it is rather difficult, you know, to study Zen in Japan. Many people ask me, "Could you introduce me to some monastery?" But I have no idea, you know. So I may say, "Maybe why don't you stay at Zen Center?" [Laughs.] And almost all the people say that, "I thought that will be your answer." [Laughs, laughter.] He knows very well. They know very well but, you know, why they go to Japan is to encourage [raise?] hotel, you know, money [laughs] to build some more new buildings.

They may be very happy to see you, but it is the waste of time and money for you. And you will be very much discouraged because, you know, you couldn't see any good Zen master. It is almost impossible to—even though there is—there are good Zen masters, but it is difficult to meet him. And it is difficult to understand- [partial word]—study under him. You may figure out why it is so quite easily.

But practice of zazen and watching our step—steps, one after another, this practice is actually true zazen practice. We say our practice should be like, you know, a cow, you know [laughs]. Our practice should not be—our steps should not be like a horse. You—you cannot gallop, you know. You should walk slowly, like an elephant or like a cow. And if you, you know, if you can walk slowly, without not much, you know, gaining idea, then you are already a good Zen student. There is no other way to follow our way.

At the end of Sung dynasty,⁴ we have many Zen masters. And most Zen masters encourage people to attain—to have enlightenment experience. You know, that is, you know, why they encourage, you know, people to attain sudden enlightenment, with some psychological, you know, way, is to meet the people's—student's desire—to satisfy

⁴ Sung dynasty: 960-1279.

student's, you know, desires. They provided that kind of technique or trick [laughs]. It may not be trick—I shall be scolded if I say "trick." [Laughs, laughter.] But I—I feel—my feeling about, you know, that kind of practice is, you know, something like a trick, you know.

So Zen masters will be a good friend of psychologist [laughs]. And they will help with each other [laughs] how to, you know, explain—or how to explain enlightenment experience. And psychologist will explore some new field in psychology, but Zen or—Zen is, you know, originally Zen is completely different from that kind of practice.

Actually Dōgen-zenji, you know, point up—point out this point very sharply. In "Sesshin sesshō," in *Shōbōgenzō*—in chapter of "Sesshin sesshō," he referred to another story. Tōzan-daishi,⁵ the founder of—actual founder of Sōtō school—oh, no—I [already] told you about the story between Tōzan-daishi and Mitsu Shihaku.⁶

He referred to another story about First Patriarch of China and the Second Patriarch in China. The First Patriarch, Bodhidharma, told the Second Patriarch, Eka⁷—he said: "If you—if you want to enter our practice, you should stop—or you should cut off your self from outward objects. And you should stop your emotional and thinking activity within yourself. And when you become like a brick or stone wall, you will be—you will enter. That is how you enter our way."

That was what, you know, Bodhidharma said to the—to his disciple Eka. But it was actually—for him, it was very difficult practice, as you must have experienced [laughs]. Even to stop your mind is [laughs] difficult enough. It is so for the Second Patriarch. So he, you know, tried very hard, but he couldn't, you know, understand what he meant actually.

So the Second Patriarch, after trying very hard, he thought, you know, he could, you know—he could understand what he meant, at last. So he said to him, "Perhaps I understood what you meant." When he said so, Bodhidharma thought, "Oh, this student must have understood what I meant." So he did not ask any questions. "Okay, you must have understood." [Laughs, laughter.] That is what—all what Bodhidharma said to him.

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But he said, "Is it," you know, "Is it—is there cessation in your," you know, "way? Is—is there a break," you know, "in your *sesshin*?"

⁵ Dongshan Liangjie (Tōzan Ryōkai): 807-869. Ch'an master of the T'ang period and co-founder of the Sōtō school of Zen (with his disciple Sōzan). "Daishi" means "great master."

⁶ Mitsu Shihaku (Shinzan Sōmitsu): dharma brother of Tōzan. "Mitsu" is the last character of his name; "Shihaku" means "uncle teacher." Tōzan and Mitsu traveled together for twenty years.

⁷ Dazu Huike (Taiso Eko): 487-593. Dharma successor of Bodhidharma.

[laughing]—twenty minutes' break or thirty minutes' break. "Is there some break in your practice—in your *sesshin*?" he said—Bodhidharma said.

And Eka said, "No break, no cessation in our practice." Bodhidharma said, "Then who are you? [Laughs.] Who has," you know, "constant practice? Who are you?"—just, he said—"Who are you?"

Eka said, "Because I know myself very well, so it is difficult to say who I am. [Laughs.] Because I understand myself so well, so I cannot say who I am." And Bodhidharma said, "That's right. You are my disciple." Do you understand? [Laughs, laughter.]

Our zazen practice is not—is not to attain enlightenment actually—rather to express our true nature. Even though, you know, you don't feel you are expressing your true nature, but actually you are expressing your true nature when you practice zazen. And that something is, you know, according to the Tōzan-daishi, it is someone in front—back of the building [laughs]. Someone is talking something—backyard of the across the street. What are they talking about, you know?

That someone is actually not a particular—not any particular person. That someone means, you know, our true nature. So always, you know, true nature within ourselves is talking about Buddhism—discussing about Buddhism. And whatever we do actually [is] expression of buddha-nature.

So at last, you know, the—Eka—the Second Patriarch, understood, came to this point. So he said, you know, "I think I understood what you meant—what you meant by to become a stone wall [laughs] or brick [wall]. I understand. The stone wall itself is buddha-nature, and brick are also—bricks are also buddha-nature. Everything is expression of buddha-nature, so now I understand what is buddha-nature. Before, I thought after attaining—after I attain enlightenment, we will know who is in backyard of the—of a—of the house. But there is no special person who is talking some special teaching. There is no special person," you know, "but all things we see, all what we hear about, is expression of buddha-nature."⁸

When we say buddha-nature, so buddha-nature is everything. We say buddha-nature is our innate true nature which is universal to every one of us, or even to various being: sentient beings or animate or inanimate being. [*Sentence finished. Tape turned over.*]

... special nature which you can understand. How you understand the universal nature is through everything. There is only one way to—to

⁸ It is not clear to the transcriber where Suzuki-rōshi intended the quote of Eka to end.

have approach to the universal, so to say universal nature. So only way, you know, to—to realize our true nature is to know who I am—who is doing constantly something.

So he said, when Bodhidharma asked him, "Is there cessation in your true practice, after you enter or even before you enter, or before you join our true practice—is there any cessation?"

He said: "No," you know, "even before Buddha there is no cessation in the prac- [partial word]—in our practice, because our practice is Buddha's practice, which has no beginning and no end." So he says "no cessation."

"Then who is practicing that kind of practice, or who are you? Which is," you know, "which join this kind of practice?"

You know, he—he may be—he may be Eka—personally he may be Eka, but actually what he—he is doing is constant, permanent, ever-lasting practice which was started beginningless time to—and end in endless time. So, you know, it is difficult to say who—who is practicing [laughs] our way.

So Bodhidharma said, "Various—every patriarchs practicing same way as you do. I am practicing that way, and you are practicing that way." First of all, you know, when we practice zazen—when you practice zazen, you should know this point clearly. So you cannot waste your time. Even though your zazen is not so good, but it's—but that is zazen. Even though you will not—you may not understand what it is even, someday, sometime, you know—someday and someone will, you know, accept your practice. Only when you practice, you know, right here without wandering about, without being involved in sightseeing zazen, so I say why don't you sit here, you know.

It—it does not mean, you know—what I mean is, if you don't give up sightseeing zazen [laughs], you have no chance to join our practice. If you understand this point, you know, even though make a—make a big, big trip, that is not sightseeing zazen. That is real practice for you.

So point is to have—to have good start and to join the real practice which is always true and which has—which has no danger in your practice. So our practice, you know, not—is not necessary be hard one, you know, or good one. Good or bad doesn't matter [laughs]. If you sit with this understanding, and if you do not waste your time, or if you have conviction in your buddha-nature, then sooner or later you will find yourself in—in amidst of great Zen masters.

When you read, you know—especially young ambitious people read Zen books, you know, or when you listen to various Zen masters talk, they

will talk about—about their masters who is very strict with him, or hardship he had in their—in his young age. And, you know, and he may say it is very difficult to be a good Zen master [laughs]. And we haven't so—so many good Zen masters so far, and maybe more difficult to have Zen masters—good Zen master in future.

So, you know, you will be very discouraged, you know. It means that you cannot be a Zen master [laughs]. But when you understand real practice—what it is, you know, this is—you will never be involved in such a foolish, you know, problem like Sengai.⁹ When—maybe 6–7 [years ago?]⁹—2–3 years after I came to America, I went to Fields Bookstore, and I saw Sengai's picture, you know. And, you know, it was something like calendar [laughs]. And frog was on the calendar. And Sengai said, "If frog," you know, "if someone can be a buddha, I—maybe I can be a buddha too."¹⁰ [Laughing.]

Frog was sitting like this [probably gestures] [laughs, laughter]. "If people can be a buddha by practice of sitting, then I can be [laughs]—soon I will be a buddha" [laughs]. For the people who knows what is actual practice, you know, even though they don't experience enlightenment experience, if he sees someone who, you know, who is sitting to attain enlightenment [laughs], we think he is like a frog sitting [laughs].

Actually their sitting is much better than [laughs, laughter] our zazen. I always admire, you know, their practice—much better than my practice. They never get—they never be sleepy, you know. Their eyes is always open. [Laughs, laughter.] Tatsugami-rōshi¹¹ will admire him very much, I think. "Open your eyes!"—you know. But there is no need, you know, for him to say so if we are like a frog [laughs, laughter]. And they do something very, you know, appropriate intuitively and [in an] appropriate way. You know, when something—when something come, they go like this—*chomp!* [Laughs, laughter.] [Sounds like he is snapping at something with his mouth, like a frog catching a fly.] Never—they never miss anything, but they, you know, are always calm, you know [laughs, laughter], and still.

I always think "I wish I could be a frog." So Sengai says, you know: *Moshimo—Zazen shite moshimo hotoke ni naru naraba,*¹² you know: "If by practice," you know—"If by practice we can be a buddha—" you know.

⁹ Sengai Gibon (1751–1837): Japanese Rinzai master.

¹⁰ Literally, "If a man becomes a Buddha by practicing zazen—" (Sengai Gibon, "The Meditating Frog," in D. T. Suzuki, *Sengai the Zen Master*, Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1971). The frog is pictured on p. 94.

¹¹ Sōtan Ryosen Tatsugami-rōshi: Sōtō Zen master and *ino-rōshi* at Eihei-ji for many years. He was head of training at Tassajara for several practice periods.

¹² Suzuki-rōshi is quoting Sengai's one-line verse: *Zazen shite moshimo hotoke ni naru naraba—*.

He doesn't say anything more [laughs], and he draw a frog [laughing]—sitting frog.

This kind of, you know—if you understand what Sengai is feeling when, you know, you see a picture of a frog, you are already, you know, Zen—you have already understood what is Zen. There [is a] lot of humor in it, and there is good understanding of our practice. Even though our practice is—is not better than frog, you know, we will continue to sit. And we can accept a frog as our good example of practice.

I think that is a kind of enlightenment, but if—you should know how you, you know, actually understand a frog. Sengai, you know, drew—after, you know, practicing pretty long time [laughs], you will, you know, partly laugh—laugh at someone who is involved in wrong idea of practice, and partly you will, you know, laugh at yourself [laughs] who is sitting always [laughs] without doing anything—without making not much progress. You will laugh at yourself. When you can laugh, you know, at yourself, humorously, then there is, you know, enlightenment. But still, your zazen is beginner's zazen or sometimes worse than beginner's zazen [laughs].

Sometime I [am] ashamed of myself when I see someone—some student's practice which is very good. "Oh, he is very good." You know, I think—I wish I could be as young as—as he is once more. But it too late.

But anyway, our practice cannot be better than sitting of a frog. So it is okay. But to see someone who is practicing good zazen is very impressive, not only to me but also for everyone. I think that is—if your zazen is good enough to give good impression to others, your zazen is pretty good. Even though you don't think so, it is actually very good zazen. But even though you think your zazen is very good, and you think you [are] proud of your enlightenment experience like this, you know, if he doesn't impress anyone [laughs], his zazen may not be—wrong practice.

I think, you know, there are several important points or factor in our practice. One is to—not to—we should not [be] involved in hasty gaining idea in our practice. We say, you know, we should not practice zazen for sake of others or sake of yourself. Just practice—just practice zazen for zazen. It means you should just sit. You should not sit for fame or profit. Just practice zazen.

We, you know, we say many things—not to do this, you know—or we talk about precepts, but the point of practice—observing precepts is there is no need not to do something bad. There is no need to try not to do something bad, but if you do good thing like zazen, you cannot do bad thing at the same time [laughs, laughter].

So if you, you know, continue, you know, positively something—continue to do something good, that is how you observe our precepts. So the point is just to sit, forgetting all about fame or profit. Just to sit for sake of zazen. That is one point. And that—that kind of attitude is also the attitude to—to have real way-seeking mind. Way-seeking mind means, you know, to find out inmost desire.

At first, you know, maybe you will—first step will be, you know, to know what is good and what is bad. Like when you go to shopping, you know, you will—it may be difficult to know what—which material you choose. For an instance, if you go to draper's shop, you know, all the materials—there are various color—there are various quality of material in various color, and it is rather difficult to choose, you know.

Starting from that kind of practice, you know, you should brush up your intuition. How to buy or get something good is, you know—if you try to compare one to the other [laughs], you will—even though you spend two–three days, you will not get something appropriate for you. And after trying two–three days [laughs], what you will get will be something which is not at all appropriate to you, and you should visit the same store again. If they change it for someone or something else, you are lucky [laughs].

Don't say this kind of practice is useless. It is actually first step to our way. But how you, you know, get—how you practice good practice and how you buy something appropriate to you is same. When you are not involved in it, you know, shopping too much, you can get something appropriate.

So what—after you know the secret of intuitive, you know, activity which is free from various restriction, you will, you know, find our way in your everyday activity. Until, you know, you, you know, you understand why we practice zazen and what is actually true activity, intuitive activity, free from various desires and restrictions, it is difficult to figure out, you know, what is good practice, what is, you know, what kind of—how you practice zazen. But it is okay. If you continue it, eventually, little by little, without knowing how you acquired that kind of intuition—intuitive activity, you will—anyway you will get it.

So it is rather foolish, you know, to—to be involved in some particular hard special practice. Our practice is hard enough [laughs], so don't, you know, seek for some special enlightenment, and don't seek for some special practice—way of special practice. Dōgen-zenji said there is no Buddha who attained enlightenment—real enlightenment, who gave up our zazen practice. Only through our zazen practice various teachers attained—there is no other word, so I say "attained enlightenment" [laughs]—became Buddhist, real Buddhist. *[Sentence finished. Tape*

changed to Tape 2.]

By the same way as you do something else, our pra- [partial word]—the —our practice is very different from usual practice. You know, you have book *Zen and Archery*,¹³ you know, but when you understand our practice, you know—because the author understand real practice, archery can be, you know, Zen, but only for him it is Zen [laughs]. If you don't understand how [to] practice archery in its true sense, even though you practice very hard, that is—that—what technique you acquire is just technique. It doesn't help—help you through and through. You will be—you can hit a mark without fail, but without bow and arrow you cannot do anything. If you understand the author's point, when archery is—could be Zen, then maybe, you know, without bow and arrow the archery will help you. How you get that kind of, maybe, power or ability is only through right practice.

So, you know, we should make, you know, right practice—we should have right understanding of practice so you should have—to have right understanding of practice you should have right teacher who has right understanding of practice. So you should not have any gaining idea in our practice. And follow your teacher. And you should understand completely what is right practice. So Dōgen-zenji says, you know, right practice and *sanshi monbō*. *Sanshi monbō* is "to have good teacher" and, you know, "to receive right guidance in your practice."¹⁴ Or else you will not understand, you know, what is Zen.

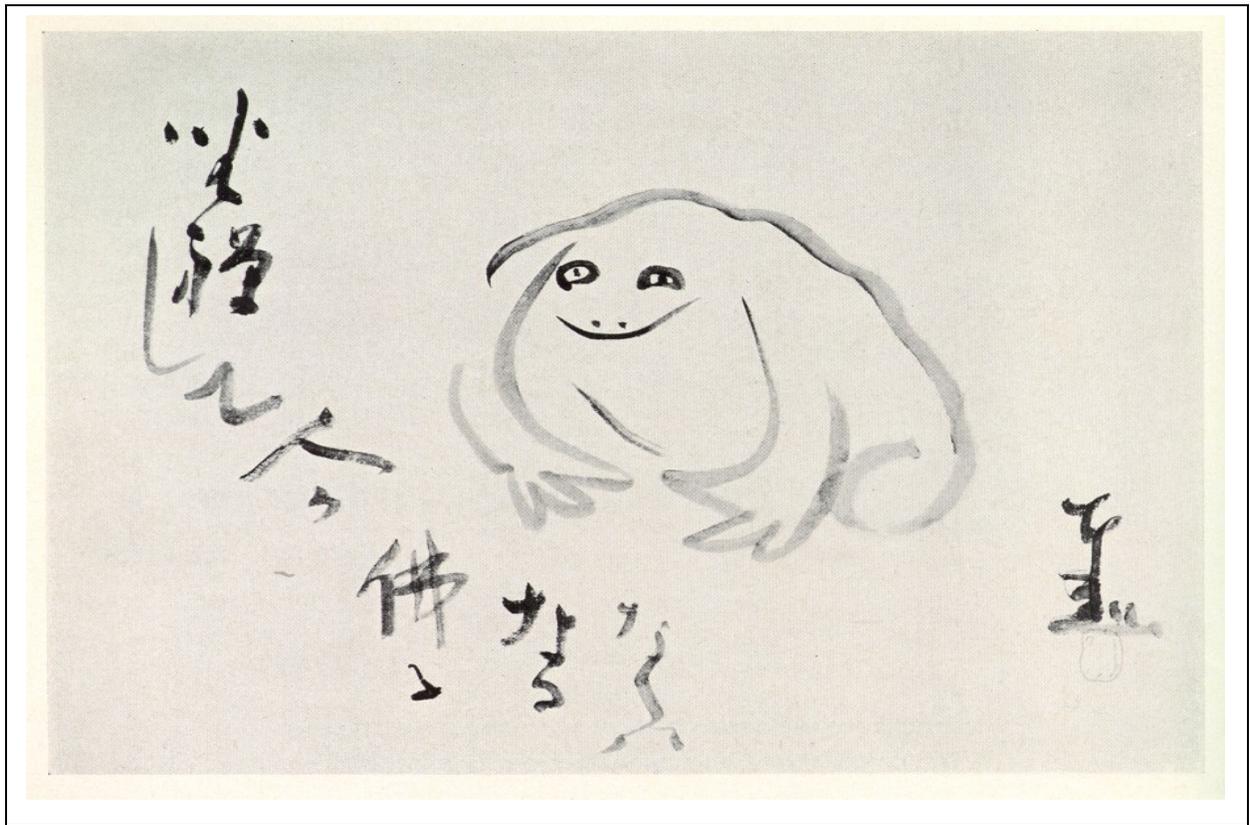
And one more thing is, you know, maybe, we say *Sōzoku ya tai nan*.¹⁵ *Sōzoku* is—"to continue our practice is very difficult thing," maybe the most difficult thing. If you continue it, having right understanding by good teacher, and if you practice it without any gaining idea, and continue right practice or fundamental practice—the only one practice, which is fundamental to various practice is the most important thing.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar (1997).
Translation of Japanese terms kindly provided by Shōhaku Okumura-sensei.
Checked against tape by Bill Redican (11/28/01).

¹³ Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1953.

¹⁴ Literally: *sanshi* = "visiting teachers"; *monbō* (also *monpō*) = "hearing the dharma" (Jap.).

¹⁵ Literally: "continuity is very difficult" (Suzuki-rōshi is quoting Tōzan Ryōkai).



Zazen shite moshimo hotoke ni naru naraba ...

If a human becomes a Buddha by practicing *zazen* ...

Sengai Gibon, "The Meditating Frog"

In D. T. Suzuki, *Sengai the Zen Master*, Greenwich, CT:
New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1971, p. 94

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

From the collection of Sazo Idemitsu
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