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NOT VERBATIM

It is not so easy to say what actual practice is, what Zen is. But anyway, I want to try. First of all, why we practice Zen may be the question most of you have. As you know, Buddha's first teaching is the Four Noble Truths. According to him, our life is a life of suffering. And if you know the cause of suffering, you will know how to go through our suffering, and you will attain Nirvana or enlightenment.

Tonight maybe it is better to explain why we suffer. Suffering includes various kinds of confusion or fears we may have because of our lack of understanding of our life. The reason we suffer, according to the Buddha, is because we have desire. Desire cannot be broken, because we have too much desire-there is no limit to our desire. That is why we suffer-because we have interest in strong desire. So our suffering will be limitless, deep and long. The suffering you feel is as deep as a night when you cannot sleep is long. When you cannot sleep, the night maybe very very long for you. That is why we suffer. The root of desire is so-called "ignorance" or "darkness." Ignorance means ignorance of our life, ignorance of human nature. If we know human nature and how we live in this world as a human being, then we will know why we suffer and how to go through suffering. I don't say that you will go beyond it, or that you eliminate suffering. But if you know the cause of suffering, which is ignorance of our life, then maybe this knowledge will be a great relief for you. Moreover, you will find out how to cope with our suffering. For instance, if you sit in a cross-legged position like this, at first you will have pain in your legs, as some of you must have experienced already. It is not so easy to deal with the pain you have in your legs as you sit. If some of you sit thirty or forty minutes, without any instruction, you will know how you can deal with suffering. The way to deal with, or to overcome your suffering is actually the precepts which the Buddhists observe. But the precepts still will not be good enough, because you don't know how to limit your original ignorance. So to work on the source of suffering and also to hunt the many big branchings of suffering is the true way to cope with the suffering you have. That is actually zazen practice. Through the practice of zazen you can cope with original sin, original ignorance, or darkness, and with the weaker branchings of suffering. I think the everyday lives of all of us are actually involved in this kind of suffering which originates from the source of ignorance.

Maybe I should explain more about ignorance. Ignorance means the dualistic thinking-mind and feeling-mind, or discrimination. That is the root of ignorance. Thinking mind is the first step of ignorance. It may seem strange, but according to Buddhism, it is so.

The other day I read Sasaki-rōshi's lecture with questions and answers which you have. He pointed out that dualistic thinking mind does not catch reality. It will catch the shadow of reality, but it is not possible for dualistic thinking mind to have actual reality. For instance, when you say it is 8 o'clock now, it may not actually be exactly 8 o'clock-it may be a few seconds after 8 o'clock. Then you may say a few seconds after 8 o'clock, but then it may be one minute after 8. You know it is not possible for our thinking mind to follow reality. Our thinking mind is always behind reality. The characteristic of our thinking mind is that it will result in contradictions because the viewpoints we take. For instance, the idea of time is the idea of continuity-time is continuous. But at the same time, the idea of time is discontinuity. When you say it is 8 o'clock you take the idea of time as discontinuity. But on the other hand, time is continuous, so which is right-continuity or discontinuity? Both are right. But you will be confused. The reason we become confused is that we want some definite answer for our questions. But your thinking mind will not have any definite answer for your questions. If you want to have some definite answers, you must take some other approach. The approach you may take is to have direct experience of time. But time is an idea, so it is not possible to have a definite experience of time, then you should appeal to direct experience of things which change, always, as time goes.

That is actually how we have a final answer for our life. Again, this is our practice. Here I must explain our practice a little bit more. When you sit, at first it is almost impossible to stop your thinking mind. You can do it, but you cannot stop it completely. One after another, various images come. Or if you work on a koan, as long as you are working on it, your thinking mind will be concentrated on one thing only. If your mind is occupied with only one thing, it is as if you have stopped your mind. You have a chance to have direct experience of your life at that time.

Even if you haven't attained enlightenment, as long as you sit in some certain form, with various instruction about your breathing and posture, then your mind and body is open to the various things which come to you. You are open to everything, and your mind follows. At that time, you actually have direct experience of your own being and the outside world, your surroundings. When your practice is good enough, mature enough, then you practice zazen with your whole body and mind. For instance, you must take care of your mudra, because this mudra includes everything, just as our practice includes everything. The reason we say this mudra, or our practice includes everything, is that when you practice, you are taking care of everything, your whole body and mind. And this kind of feeling will be extended to whatever you do, whatever you see. You will see a thing

not as an object, but as one part of something much bigger. So to take care e confused is that we want some definite answer for our questions. But your thinking mind will not have any definite answer for your questions. If you want to have some definite answers, you must take some other approach. The approach you may take is to have direct experience of time. But time is an idea, so it is not possible to have a definite experience of time, then you should appeal to direct experience of things which change, always, as time goes.

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If you attain enlightenment, you can work on the root of ignorance, the root of duality. Even if you don't attain enlightenment, you will have this practice of not fighting with things. Then you can be with the suffering without cutting off the chain of suffering. At that time, it is not suffering anymore. When you attain this kind of practice, you will be called a Bodhisattva. Bodhisattva mind is the mind which becomes one with everything, helping others as one takes care of oneself. Actually, for Bodhisattva mind, there is no self, or this is only one self which includes everything. Anyway, it is not dualistic. When we say "I help you," that is dualistic. Without having any feeling of me or you, practicing zazen with you is Bodhisattva practice. For instance, if my hands take hold of a cup, this cup is already practicing zazen with me. Instead of saying, "I have a cup," my practice includes this cup. In this way, your practice will include everything.

The Bodhisattva way is many ways, but the most important point is to become one with others, to be kind and to have a warm feeling for others, with your mouth or with your life, to give teaching or to give materials things without any idea of giving or receiving, just giving with a warm heart. To help people in various ways, making tea or scrubbing the floor, or cleaning the restroom, without any idea of, "This restroom is dirty," is the Bodhisattva way. Just with a warm, good feeling you clean the restroom. In that way you can help people, and you have no confusion or suffering. This is how you extend zazen

practice to your everyday life.

I think most people practice zazen when they don't have many problems, when they feel very good. But actually, you should practice zazen when you don't feel so good. The you will know how to live with your problems, how to take care of your problems without escaping from them, without fighting. You should practice zazen when you have problems, when you have bad feelings—anxiety, confusion or hatred. And when you have good feelings, you may think it is not necessary to practice zazen, but that is also a mistake. The reason you have good feelings is because of your dualistic mind. A very good feeling is very dangerous because it is the other side of the bad feeling. So when you have good feelings, you must also practice zazen. When you have neutral feelings, it may not be so dualistic, so it may not be necessary to practice zazen. Sometimes we practice zazen with neutral feelings, but that is not real zazen.

All of us right now are wearing everyday clothing, but if someone gives you new clothing, then you will give up your old clothing. Even though you say you have neutral feeling, it is not so. We always have latent desires sleeping in our pocket and waiting for a chance to come out. When some new clothing is given to you, then all at once the black snake of discrimination will come out. The way you can tell a Zen student is well trained is that their mind is always warm and kind, always calm, and not dualistic. But even for a good student there is some chance for the black snake of discrimination to come out.

In China we have an old, old interesting story. An old Chinese lady was having to take care of a Zen Master. While she was taking care of him, her daughter came. Her daughter was very beautiful and 18 years old. So the old lady maybe to test the Zen monk, told her daughter to give him a big hug and see his reaction. The daughter did as she was told, but he was like a wall or stone. His mind did not move. The old lady became very angry with the monk. She expelled him and burned down the house he was staying in. What do you think about that? There are various answers for that. Maybe a true Zen Master should not be like a wall or tree or stone. He should be human even though he practices zazen. Maybe that is why she burned down his home. She experimented with him. But Dogen Zenji's understanding or answer for this story is that the Zen monk did not lose his calmness of mind, which was very good, and the old woman who banished him, who experimented, was also good. And Dogen Zenji says, "Full of tears, the old lady must have experimented." That was the second test. The first test was agreeable, and the second was the opposite—she experimented and burned his home. And still he practiced. She wanted to know his reaction. Without complaint, he went away. So according to Dogen Zenji, the monk was great, the daughter was great, and the old lady was also great. They are three

great teachers.

So it is rather difficult to know who is a well-trained teacher and who is not. If your teacher understands what real practice is, then, by talking to someone or by a glance at someone's face, the teacher can immediately see into that person's practice. A well-trained Zen Master expresses some feeling without anything being said. So there is no need to test--just to see him is enough. You can immediately feel his power of practice. At that time. True practice is right there.

You may say Zen is very difficult, but actually Zen is soft, because there is no limit to our practice, as there is no limit to our desire. If there is no limit to our desire, our practice has no limit. But even though there is no limit to our attainment, from the first step of our practice there is real complication. Real practice will help to keep you from suffering and keep suffering from arising. Again, Zen practice is not so hard. Our practice is everywhere. If you don't attain enlightenment, it is okay, as long as you do not lose these points--how to be kind to others and how to be one with others. When you have good practice, then without trying, without making so much effort, you can help others quite easily. At that time, someone who receives help will not realize that he was helped.

He is actually helping others. That is real alms-giving, and that is real teaching; to give some real teaching, not by words, but by just giving.

I prepared something (else) for this lecture, but I think it may be better for us to have some questions and answers.

Question: According to Zen theory of art, as I understand it, the painter when he paints a tree is to become a tree. Can you explain this?

Suzuki-roshi: I think you must have understood what I was talking about. To become one with it even though you don't have a picture of the tree in your mind is the way. The picture of the tree in your mind is already dead. If you are a good artist, without any picture, the tree will come out of you.

Question: Is that from feeling rather than visual?

Suzuki-roshi: Yes, it is more than visual. If you depend on the vision you have, then the vision is too strong. When you have no intention, no vision of the tree, what do you have?

Question: If you reach enlightenment, is it possible to again lose enlightenment?

Suzuki-roshi: Enlightenment is not some idea or dead experience. It is actual. So you may study various Zen stories, but the actual answer for you cannot be the same. You will have your own understanding of it. It cannot be the same. You might think you can visualize or experience the same enlightenment experience again, but that is not possible. You don't have to. That kind of experience is not Zen experience. That is more like scientific knowledge.

Question: Sitting is so good and necessary to our life, so why should we even do things like going to school? Why should not we just sit all the time?

Suzuki-roshi: Zen and school are two completely different things. You should go to school, but the point is that if you think that by going to school you will be almighty, that is wrong. It is necessary for you to practice zazen. If you don't, what you acquire will be dead, will not work, or most likely, it will create more problems.

Question: Should we make an effort in our culture, even though we know we cannot make the culture what it should be, or a perfect culture?

Suzuki-roshi: Yes, that is our way. Whether it is possible or not is out of the question. Because you see something, you should do it. When you see some problems, you should deal with them right now. It is not even a matter of you should or you shouldn't. We should be very honest and very straightforward in our way, to eliminate or confront the root of the problem if possible. It is a waste of time to confront the twigs and branches of the problem before the root-the should come second. First of all, it is necessary to confront the root of the problem. To resume the oneness of all being. To be part of everything and to let all things fall into our practice is the point. When we have this kind of feeling in our practice, then we can help others in its true sense. And if many people do so, it will be a great help. Something will happen. And I think we have come to the point where we should resume our original standpoint of the oneness of all being, to feel things as part of us, and to take care of things as a part of ourselves. If you do it through right practice, you are free from emotional discrimination or dualistic thinking mind, and you can help people. That is the only way to help people. If you want to help people, actually at that time you should not help people, because you want to. "You want to" is extra. You should just do it. And only through zazen practice is that possible. For instance, if you feel someone else's place with your heart, whether it is a man or woman, spiritual guardian or old lady, you can practice with the same feeling. That is how you help people without creating more problems. If you try to help them, you will create more problems for them. That is not our way. So we should work on the root of the

problem.

Thank you very much.

This transcript is a retyping of the existing City Center transcript. It is not verbatim. It is based on version 71-03-12.2. Another version, 71-03-12.1, is available with slightly different text and should be consulted. No tape is known to be available at City Center, but Reed College may have a tape. The City Center transcript was entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. It was reformatted by Bill Redican (10/22/01).