

Shunryu Suzuki Lecture from the November, 1964 Wind Bell

An edited summary of a lecture. Corrected by Gordon Geist using the Shaw translation.

MODEL SUBJECT NO. 73 FROM THE BLUE CLIFF RECORDS

BASO'S FOUR PROPOSITIONS, ONE HUNDRED NEGATIONS

Engo's Introductory Word

Introducing, he said: The true preaching of Dharma goes beyond preaching or not preaching (true preaching is not preaching). True listening to Dharma is not only a matter of listening or not (true listening is no listening). If the true word is beyond perception (true preaching is no preaching), it may be better not to speak. If true listening is something other than listening or not (true listening is not listening), it may be better not to speak.

However, to speak of Dharma without saying anything about it, and to listen to it without ideas about it are perfect ways to transmit right Dharma. This no-preaching and no-listening is all that is needed.

Well, you are in my monastery and listening to my words. But how can you avoid the difficulties to have perfect understanding of right Dharma by words?

If you have the wisdom to get through these difficulties, I will introduce you to an example to ponder.

Notes by Reverend Suzuki on the above translation.

1. I gave a free but faithful rendering of the original text according to the instruction of my Master, Kishizawa Ian, Roshi.

Usually *no* is negative, but *no* at the same time is a stronger affirmative than *yes*. It means emancipation from yes and no. *No word* means right word under some circumstances, and at the same time, under other circumstances, it means that the connotation of the word should be denied. Saying *no form*, *no color*, should be understood in the same way.

2. Sentences in the parentheses are important parts which I translated literally.

3. At the same time, this *no* gives new life to dead Buddhist ivory-tower philosophy, and to rigid moral concepts and formal rituals. The constant practice of this *no* has been the history of Buddhism.

Main Subject

Attention! A monk asked the great teacher Baso, "I am not asking you about the Four (negative) Propositions, and the One Hundred Negations (of Nagarjuna). But please point out the intention of Bodhidharma's coming to the West (China)."

Baso said, "Today I am very tired and I cannot explain it to you. Go get an answer from Chizo." The monk went to Chizo and asked him the same thing. Chizo said, "Why did you not ask the Great teacher?" The monk said, "I did, but he told me to come to you." Chizo said, "Today I have a headache and cannot explain the matter to you. Go ask E-kai (Hyakujo)." So the monk asked E-kai who said, "I do not have anything to answer in this realm." The monk went back to Baso and told him the whole story. Baso said, "Chizo had a white head, and Hyakujo a black head."

Notes by Reverend Suzuki on the above.

The Four Propositions and One Hundred Negations of Nargajuna are as follows:

1. Everything that is, does not come out from itself. (singularity)
2. Everything that is, does not come from something else. (plurality)
3. Everything that is, does not result from adding one thing to another. (existence)
4. Everything that is, does not come out from nothing. (non-existence)

About these propositions, four types of statements can be made: affirmative, negative, affirmative and negative, and the negation of both affirmative and negative. ($4 \times 4 = 16$)

About these sixteen, three kinds of statements can be made: past, present, future. ($16 \times 3 = 48$)

And about these forty-eight, there can be two aspects: the actual (the real), and the potential (the ideal). ($2 \times 48 = 96$)

Together with the original four propositions there are 100 negative propositions. ($96 + 4 = 100$)

After all these efforts, still we cannot identify either ontological or phenomenal existence, and we cannot find any reason to be attached to some special metaphysical entity or to the phenomenal world.

However, in Note 1 of the Introductory Word, I have explained the true meaning of Buddhist negation. Negation after negation, we turn over and renew our perception and pre-conceived ideas: in other words, wiping our mirror-like mind in each moment, we can observe everything as-it-is.

Here everything as-it-is means everything as-it-should-be, because everything as-it-is-in-the-usual-sense always should be negated, one thing after another—even though we are concentrated on one thing. The result of the practice of negating everything-as-it-is-in-the-usual-sense is what we mean by everything-as-it-is. The-way-everything-should-be should be accepted as the-way-everything-is. This acceptance should be the most important point in Nagarjuna's Middle Way.

When we practice zazen in the right way, this acceptance takes place. In the realm of Zen-mind, transmitted from Buddha to Buddha, from patriarch to patriarch, there is no noumena or phenomena, no subjectivity or objectivity, no object to be criticized or subject to be critical. Here we come to the true understanding of the so-called non-attachment or oneness-of-duality. In its true sense the Middle Way, which is beyond

the Four Negative Propositions and One Hundred Negations, is not different from the transmitted way of zazen. This is the so-called 'Intention of Bodhidharma's coming to the West' or Shobogenzo Nehanmyoshin.

But Engo presents us—his students—with a problem of whether this monk did understand the true meaning of the One Hundred Negations, when the monk asked his question. If he had had a true understanding of Nagarjuna's One Hundred Negations and had asked about our traditional way of practice, his questions should have been at the same time an answer to his own problem. So Engo says, "If I had been the monk, I would have bowed three times, as soon as Baso said something."

Taking up again the thread of the subject, the monk who thought he knew what the One Hundred Negations were, did not have a true understanding of them at all. And he asked, "What is Bodhidharma's zazen?" Baso who knew that this monk was not prepared to listen to the right Dharma, did not answer the question. He only said, "Today I am very tired so I cannot explain it to you. Go ask Chizo."

True expounding of Dharma is not done only by preaching. In everything we do at the monastery we should express the true Dharma. The true study of Buddhism is not studied by mouth and ears. To stay at a monastery without knowing one is always amidst the Dharma is quite useless. To seek for Dharma without knowing one is always exposed to the voiceless voice of Dharma was what the monk was doing. Baso and his two disciples Chizo and Hyakujo wanted him to stay out of this kind of delusive study of Zen. This is why Baso said, "I don't feel well, go get an answer from Chizo."

When Chizo found the monk coming from Baso, in spite of Baso's kind instruction, he must have felt helpless and said, "Today I have a headache and cannot explain it to you. Go ask Hyakujo."

So the monk went back to Hyakujo who, not liking to expose the true way in useless discussion, said, "No understanding is my understanding in the realm of reality."

The monk then went back to Baso, the Great Teacher, and told him the whole story. Baso said, "Chizo the white-headed, and Hyakujo the black-headed."

I visited the Cambridge Buddhist Association. In Cambridge there is a Cambridge Buddhist Association; in San Francisco there is Zen Center. There is one and yet two, two and yet one, as they should be, as everything is under some particular situation.

Bodhidharma's intention in coming to the West cannot be understood by people who seek Buddhism without knowing Buddhism is everywhere. Salt is a white chemical, nearly the same as sugar in appearance. If we do not know which is which, we try a little on some food. We do not take the salt alone, but always with food, as something other than a white chemical, as maybe the most important seasoning in our actual life. It is in oceans, rivers, plants, trees—in everything. It is in every food we take. Without salt nothing exists. We say a pickle is salty and that cake is sweet, but in cake there is salt. It makes the cake more sweet.

This is why Baso said, "Chizo the white head-gear, and Hyakujo the black head-gear."

Without the spirit transmitted from Bodhidharma, there is no black-hatted Chizo or white-hatted Hyakujo. Chizo should be Chizo and Hyakujo should be Hyakujo.

Our traditional way of understanding is not different from being concentrated on the actual fact which we face on each moment.