

Rev. Suzuki's talk
July 22, 1965

We are studying now the sutra of the sixth patriarch, in the evening lecture, and PRAJNA (this is of course Sanskrit word) we mean, wisdom, but this wisdom is not intellect, or knowledge. This wisdom is so-called our inmost nature, which is always in incessant activity. Zazen practice is—wisdom seeking for wisdom is zazen practice, if I use technical term. Wisdom seeks wisdom is zazen practice, and our everyday life is wisdom. Realization of our precepts is our everyday life. When our everyday life is based on wisdom we call it precepts. When we sit, we do not do anything; we just sit. There's no activity of our mind. We just sit and all that we do is inhaling and exhaling. Sometimes you will hear some birds singing, but that is not actually...you are not hearing. Your ears will hear it. You are not hearing it. Just, sound come, and you will make some response to it, that is all. This kind of practice is called “wisdom seeks for wisdom”.

We have true nature. Whatever you do, even though you not do anything, your true nature is in incessant work—activity. Even though you are sleeping, it is quite active. Your thinking, your sensation are superficial activities of yourself, but your inmost nature is always working. Even though you die, it is working. I don't mean some soul, but something—not soul, but something is always in incessant work. Whatever you call it, spirit or soul, I don't mind. You can put many names to it, or you will give various interpretations to it, but that interpretation belongs to your intellectuality. That is intellect. So whatever you call it, inmost nature itself doesn't mind. Someone may call it soul.

Someone may call it spirit. Someone may say, “Oh, no, no, that is just material. Some kind of function of material is soul.” Maybe. According to the people, they will put many names to it, but our inmost nature is our inmost nature. It is quite little to do with our inmost nature.

When we sit we call it inmost—let inmost nature in its self, or activity work. This is what we call self-use of inmost nature. Let it work. You don’t do anything, but let our true nature work by itself. This is zen practice. Of course, even though you do not do anything, you have pain on your legs, or some difficulty to keep your mind calm. And sometimes you may think, “Oh, my zazen practice is not so good.” What are you thinking for? Stop thinking. O.K. This is zen, you know. When you do something, it is a kind of morality is in it because you do something by your choice. But when you make decision to do something, your inmost nature will tell you, “That will not be so good. Why don’t you do it this way.” That is precepts.

When we have some choice in our activity we are responsible. In zazen we have no choice. We just sit, and whatever inmost nature say, let it do it. I don’t mind. This is zazen. But when you make some plan you are responsible for it too.

And at that time you would listen to what your inmost nature will say. That is morality or precepts. Our inmost nature will tell you what to do. So if you understand this way, this is morality, or this is precepts. So the precepts actually is not only two or two hundred or five hundred. For female we have five hundred precepts. For males, two hundred. That is not so fair, but anyway, five hundred, or three hundred—it doesn’t matter. Whatever we do is precepts, because we have some choice. We have to make some decision.

I am responsible for what I should do, and when we make some decision we listen to the Buddha Nature, “Should I do that?” Here you have, in your everyday life, precepts, and you have freedom too. Whatever you do that is up to you. As long as you have freedom you will make some decision, so you should be responsible for that. You should not say, “Buddha should be responsible for it. I don’t mind. I am not responsible for it.” You cannot say that in your everyday life. So, in our everyday life, we should have precepts, we should observe the precepts, instead of leaving responsibility for Buddha. We should be responsible for that, but at the same time you have freedom. There is no need for you to be bound by precepts. Precepts is formulated by you own choice. As long as you take conscious activity, there is freedom, and at the same time, you should be responsible for that. This is freedom—true freedom. To leave all the responsibility to Buddha is not freedom. I don’t mind.

Someone may say whatever you do that is Buddha Nature. It doesn’t matter whatever you do. This is misunderstanding. But the morality without Buddha Nature is just moral code and you will be enslaved by moral code. That is rigid moral code in which you be enslaved, by which you will be enslaved. But if you become aware of Buddha Nature (innate nature) that is freedom, that is not rigid precepts. You will do it by your own choice, and you will do it by your true nature, according to your true nature. So, that is complete freedom. And that is also morality. So in this sense you have freedom. You are not enslaved by Buddha Nature, by moral code. And moral code is not always the same. It is not permanent. Strictly speaking, there is moral code whatever you do.

So we say, zen and precepts is one. In everyday life we call it precepts, and in practice of zazen we call it zen. So zen and everyday life should be the self use of our true nature. So in this sense, precepts and zen is not different—is one. This is very important point.

And we bow this morning nine times. Why we bow to Buddha—it is actually a kind of practice to get rid of our self-centered idea, to give ourselves completely to Buddha. Here I mean to give myself, or ourselves, means our physical functions and our intellectual functions, or life—physical and intellectual life—to Buddha because it is based on Buddha Nature. So even though we forget all about it, still we have Buddha Nature here, so Buddha bows to Buddha. That is bow. This is one meaning.

Another meaning is: As long as we live, we have body and we have to think something. So Buddha practiced zen. And we practice zen. So everyone, when he practice zen, they are called Buddha, and Buddha Mind or Bodhisattva Mind is our spirit. To attain oneness in our duality is our spirit. Because we are not so good we try to improve ourselves. That is our true nature. And we are aware of it. We have some intention to improve ourselves. This intention is limited to human being. Flowers come out in spring without fail, but they do not make any effort; they automatically come out. That's all. We try to open our flower in spring. We try to do the right thing at the right time. We find it very difficult. In this sense we are very stupid. Even though we try to do it, we cannot make it, but this is our human nature. We always try to do something. We have always some difficulty to do something.

This point is very important for us. That is why we have pleasure of human being, because it is difficult, and we are always making some effort. That effort result our human pleasure of life, our pleasure of human life. This pleasure is limited to human being and this is called our true nature.

If you understand this true nature you will find out the true nature within yourself and in every existence. Flower has this nature. They are preparing for spring, even though they do not know they are making good effort to come up in spring. So when we become aware of it, we will know that this nature we have is universal nature to every existence. But our awareness of true nature is limited to human being. So this awareness is very important and this awareness is, in short, to try to do something good is our spirit. We don't know why we should try to improve ourselves. No one knows. There is no reason for it, or it is beyond discussion. Even though you cannot discuss why it is the nature—our true nature is so big, it is out of comparison, out of our intellect—intellectual understanding—so it makes no sense even though you discuss it. “What are you talking about?” Those who are aware of it will laugh at you if you discuss about why it is so big problem to discuss. This is why we bow to Buddha.

ZMBMms box transcript. Exact copy entered into disc by GM and emailed to D. Chadwick 05-30-08.
Handwritten note top right of 1st page of transcript reads 'original'
End of last page of transcript has approx 11 words too faded to copy. May have been erased.
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