

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Sunday Lecture
Sunday, April 20, 1969

This lecture was the source for the chapter of *Not Always So* called "Jumping Off the 100-Foot Pole" on p. 16.

It is pretty difficult, but I will try to speak about the purpose of our practice.

Before I try to explain our practice, I think I should explain why we practice—why we should practice Zen when we have buddha-nature. This is the great problem Dōgen-zenji had. And he worked for this question before he went to China and met with Nyojō-zenji.¹

This is not, of course, so easy problem, but if you understand what do we mean when we say everyone has buddha-nature, and everything has buddha-nature. What does it mean? And he explained very carefully in *Shōbōgenzō*, in the first chapter.

When we say "buddha-nature," you may think buddha-nature is some innate nature, because we say nature. In Japanese we use the same words—nature—buddha-nature. But actually it is not nature like nature of human being or nature of plant—or nature of cats or dogs. It is not, strictly speaking, it is not that kind of nature.

"Nature" means something which is there whatever you do. Whatever you do, there is nature. Nature is not something which is there before you do something. When you do something, at the same time, nature appears. That is nature. What he meant.

You think we have buddha-nature within ourselves as innate nature. And because of this nature, you do something. That is the usual understanding of nature [laughs]. But that is not his understanding. Or it is not like some seed, which is there before plant comes out. "That is not the nature which I mean," Dōgen-zenji said. That kind of understanding of nature is heretic understanding of nature [laughs]. It is not correct understanding of nature.

That kind of nature is some idea you have in your mind. "Here is a plant. So before this plant appears, there must be something—a seed or something within the plant, there must be some nature which promotes its activity. Because of that nature, some flower is red and some flower is yellow." Most people understand in that way.

¹ Tendō Nyojō (Tiantong Rujing): 1163-1228. Chan master; teacher of Eihei Dōgen.

So why we practice—when we think why we practice zazen—is because we have nature—buddha-nature.

"So after practicing—after training—after eliminating various selfish desires, that buddha-nature will appear." That kind of understanding is based on unclear observing—unclearness of your understanding of observing things—according to Dōgen-zenji. He worked on this problem for a long time, so his understanding is very clear.

Only when something appears, there there is nature. So nature or outlook of things is two names of one thing, one reality. Sometime we say buddha-nature. Sometime we say enlightenment or bodhi or buddha or attainment. But those are the two sides of one reality. So not only we call it from those two sides, but also we call it, sometimes, "evil desire."

"Evil desires," we say [laughs], but it is another name of buddha-nature [laughs]. You say, "evil desires," but for Buddha, that is buddha-nature. There is of course, layman and priest [laughs], but usually you understand in that way, but actually there is no particular person to be a priest. Each one of you can be a priest and I could be a layman. Just because I wear a robe I am priest. Because I behave like a priest, maybe I am a priest. That's all. There is no special person for priest or for layman.

So whatever you call it, that is another name of one reality. Even though you call it mountain or river, that is another name of one reality. So we should not be fooled by words of "nature" or "result" or "buddhahood." We should see thing itself with clear mind. In this way, we understand buddha-nature.

Then why we have evil desires at the same time is, as I explained, that is another name of buddha-nature. Then why we practice zazen—from where that evil desire [laughs], comes up—there is actually no place for evil desires. But actually, we have so-called-it buddha-nature—evil desires which should be annihilated. Why is that? After you eliminate buddha-nature—evil desires from us, like this—here is evil desire [probably gesturing]. Where do you throw this away [laughs, laughter]?

When we start to think in this way, we are already [laughs] starting to understand things in heretic way [laughs]. That is just a name. Just the name of one thing. There is no such thing to pull out, like this, and to throw away.

You may feel as if you are fooled by me, but it is not so [laughs, laughter]. It is not a laughing matter. You know, we are seriously confronting our selfish desires, and we are always observing things in

the wrong way. When we come to this point, it is necessary for us to understand our practice—our practice of *shikantaza*.

I said, where should I throw evil desire? There is very famous kōan. A man climbs up to the top of a pole.² If he stays here [tapping on stick, probably held to represent the pole], he is not enlightened one. When he jumps off from the top of the pole, he may be an enlightened one. This is a kōan.

How we understand this kōan is how we understand our practice. Why we have something which should be taken out from us is because we stay here [probably tapping the top of his stick]. Because you stay at the top of a pole, you have a problem. But actually there is no top of a pole—for the actual pole is continued, endlessly forever. So you cannot stop here, actually.

But you think when you have some experience of enlightenment or something, you think we can rest here, observing various sights at the top of a pole, forgetting all about to continue climbing up a pole. We say—because this is kōan, we say "usually," but "usually" people think on the top of the pole. Usually we think in that way. But actually there is no top for anything. Things are continuously growing or changing to something else. Nothing exists in its own form or color. So actually there is no top. But when we think, "Here is a top," that is already misunderstanding.

So accordingly, you have problem whether we should jump off from here [laughs]. Actually you cannot jump off [laughs]—it is not possible. And even though you try to stop on the top of the pole, you cannot stay here because it is growing continuously [laughs]. So you will be continuously higher and higher. You cannot stop here. But you think it is possible.

That is the problem. That is why you should practice and you should forget all about the top of the pole. If so, where should I forget or throw our misunderstanding is right here [taps three times on table with stick]. Not this way or that way or past or future. Right here. You should forget all about the misunderstanding in the place where you are right now. Do you understand? You should forget this moment, and you should grow to the next—you should extend yourself to the next one. That is the only way. I think you must have understood our practice.

For instance, my wife [laughs]—every morning, when breakfast is

² From *Ts'ung-jung lu* (J. Shoyoroku, E. *Book of Serenity*), Case 79: "Changsha Advancing a Step": "Climb one step beyond the top of the hundred-foot pole. The whole world in the ten directions is revealed." See also SR-69-04-29 and SR-69-06-17.

ready, she hits—what do you call it?

Student: Clappers.

Suzuki-rōshi: Clappers? Yeah, clappers—like this. If I don't answer for it [laughs], she may continue to hit it [laughs, laughter] until I feel rather angry [laughs, laughter]. Why we have that kind of problem is quite simple. Because I don't answer. If I say "*Hai!*"—that's all [laughs, laughter]. Because I don't say "*Hai!*" she has to continue because she doesn't know whether I heard it or not [laughs].

Sometime she may think: "He knows but he doesn't answer." *Eei!* [Probably imitates a mock attack by Okusan.] [Laughs, laughter.] That is what will happen. When I don't answer, I am on the top of the pole [laughs]. I don't jump off from here. When I say "*Hai!*" I jump off from here. Because I stay at the top of the pole, I have something to do—something important to do [laughs, laughter]—something important at the top of the pole: "You shouldn't call me! You should wait!" So before I say something I determined to shut up—not to say anything. "This is very important! Don't you know that?" [S.R. and students laughing.] I am here [taps on stick], on the top of the pole! Don't you know that?" So she starts to—[probably gesturing.] That is how we create problem.

So the secret is just to say "*Hai!*" and jump up from here. Then there is no problem. It means, to be yourself—always yourself, without sticking to old self. When you say "*Hai!*" you forget all about yourself and are refreshed into some new self. And before new self becomes old self, you should say another "*Hai!*" or you should walk to the kitchen. So the point is on each moment, and to forget the point and to extend our practice, forgetting ourselves.

So, as Dōgen-zenji says, "To study Buddhism is to study ourselves. And to study ourselves is to forget ourselves on each moment." To forget ourselves means to be yourself on each moment. Then everything will come and help you, and everything will assure your enlightenment. That is enlightenment. When I say "*Hai!*" my wife will assure my enlightenment. "Oh, you are a good boy!" [Laughs, laughter.] But I stick to the "good boy"—"I am good boy." [Laughs, laughter.] I will create another problem. "Oh, you are good boy. Then you have to help yourself," she may say. So I shall not be good boy any more. I shall not be enlightened one.

So on each moment [laughs] you should be concentrated yourself, and you should be really yourself. At that moment, where is buddha-nature? Buddha-nature is actually when I said "*Hai!*" That "*Hai!*" is buddha-nature itself, in its true sense. Buddha-nature which you have proudly within yourself is not buddha-nature. Actual buddha-nature is

when you say "Hai!" or when you become you yourself, or when you forget all about yourself. There is another name—you will have another name of Buddha or buddha-nature.

So "nature" is not something which appears, or which will appear in the future. Buddha-nature—true, real buddha-nature should be something which is actually [taps on table with stick] here—there. If you cannot see actually what is buddha-nature [taps], it doesn't mean anything [laughs]. It is rice cake or painted rice cake. It is not actual one. If you want to see the actual rice cake, you should see it when it is there. So the purpose of our practice is just to be yourself. When you become yourself in that way, real enlightenment is there. The enlightenment you have in your mind, you attained long time ago, is not actual enlightenment.

Back and forth when you understand our practice, you will enjoy your practice, thinking about what kind of practice you had had before you attained actual enlightenment. Sometimes you will have pity on someone who is involved in wrong practice. And sometimes you will laugh at yourself, when you are involved in wrong practice. "Oh, what are you doing?" [Laughs.] You will laugh at yourself—you will tease yourself: "What are you doing?" You will have various feelings. All the real compassion or real love or true encouragement or true courage will arise from here. You will be not only a courageous person but also you are a very kind person when you understand yourself in that way.

So one practice includes various virtues, and one feeling of practice will result in various feelings like a wave on the sea. So we say, "One practice covers everything"—various virtues. And when you practice your practice in that way, you may be a piece of stone, you may be a tree, you may be a star, you may be an ocean. So you cover everything.

That is how we practice zazen before you attain enlightenment. Actually, enlightenment will be there only before you attain enlightenment, or just before [laughs]. If you say, "I attained enlightenment," it is too late to say [laughs, laughter]. You should say, before smallest particle of time imaginable, if you want to say [laughs]. But if you cannot say, maybe better to be silent. Better not to say anything.

So to talk about enlightenment is rather [laughs] foolish. But sometime we have to talk about it in this way until we lose our "eyebrow" [laughs]. You know, to talk about it is to lose our eyebrow—to lose ourselves.³ Instead of being ourselves. In this sense, we

³ "He is making reference to a lecture by Rev. Yashimuro [Yoshimura?] on a kōan." [Footnote is by original transcriber. Suzuki-rōshi may also be

say "be yourself," to be natural. If you say, "This is the way to be natural," that is not natural [taps table]. Only when you are you in its true sense, on this moment, at this place, that is "naturalness." So there will not be any particular way to be "natural."

For me, to be here right now is naturalness. And to wear a robe is naturalness. And to shave my head is naturalness, as a priest [laughs]. In this way, we should practice our way and we should remember this. It is not so easy [laughs] to be natural. Not so easy.

In our practice if we have a smallest gap, we will fall into hell. So our practice should be continued. Continuous practice is necessary. And we should not rest. We should continue it, if possible, without trying to continue it. Just to have generous mind and big mind and soft mind is how to continue our way. And we should be always flexible. We should not stick to anything.

I will not repeat the same thing over and over again [laughs, laughter]. I think this is enough. To change our topic or angle of understanding, if you have some questions, please ask me. *Hai*.

Student A: You said when we had the smallest "something," we will fall into hell. I didn't understand—

Suzuki-rōshi: Smallest. Yeah.

Student A: —what word you used.

Student B: It sounded like "cup."

Audience: "Gap."

Student B: "Gap."

Suzuki-rōshi: "Gap," yeah. Gap, yeah. But gap between our effort, rather than our gap of our[?]—gap between our efforts. It is, to be more—we say "soft mind." At the same time, it is big mind, because we do not stick to anything. We do not see things objectively as something good or bad, or strong or weak because, we are strong enough to accept things as it is. So for us who have big mind there is no need to be afraid of anything. But we do not ignore anything. That is strictness of the way.

When we are not afraid of anything, that will be imperturbability. And when the effort is understood by him, to the point that is simplicity, there is no need for him to make his effort in various directions. The only way is just to be yourself on each moment. Our only way is to be referring to the mirror parable in the *Shūrangāma-sūtra*—see SR-69-07-30.]

concentrated on what you do, completely. *[Sentence appears to have been finished. Tape turned over.]*

... whatever it is. If you understand our way in that way, that is simplicity. When the feeling of practice could be extended various ways, that is, maybe, the beauty of the practice. Here we have simplicity and variety of feeling of practice. Simple and rich. Strong and weak. Strong and kind. This is our practice. So you cannot say what is our practice, because it could be various virtues. It should not be so difficult [laughs], but it is difficult. That is our way. So you cannot say our way is quite easy [laughs]. Or you cannot say our way is very difficult. It is not difficult at all. Everyone can do it, but to continue it is rather difficult. Don't you think so? [Laughs, laughter.] You agree with this point [laughs, laughter].

Thank you very much.

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