

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
SUMMER SESSHIN: FIRST NIGHT LECTURE
"I Don't Know Zazen"
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Tassajara

This lecture was the source for the chapter of *Not Always So* called "Wherever You Are, Enlightenment Is There" on p. 127.

In our practice, the most important thing is to know—to know. "To know" is that we have buddha-nature. Our practice—real practice happens when realization of buddha-nature takes place. Intellectually we know that we have buddha-nature, and that is what was taught by Buddha.

But to know buddha-nature—when you know that we have buddha-nature, at the same time you will know that even though we have buddha-nature, it is rather difficult to accept it. At the same time, we have various evil natures. And buddha-nature is something beyond good and bad, but our everyday life is going on in the realm of good and bad. So there is twofold of duality. One is duality of good and bad—realm of good and bad, and the other is realm of the world where there is no good and no bad.

And our everyday life is going on in realm of good and bad—the realm of duality. And buddha-nature or our absolute nature is found in the realm of absolute where there is no good and bad. Our practice is to go beyond the realm of good and bad and to realize the one absolute world. To enter the one absolute world is our practice. If I say it in this way it may rather difficult to understand.

Hashimoto-rōshi,¹ the famous Zen master who passed away last year or 1967, I think, explained this point. "It is like to prepare a food." We prepare various foods. You separate: rice is here, and pickles are here, and soup is in middle bowl. We don't cook a gruel all the time [laughs]—soup and rice and everything in one bowl. Even though to cook—to prepare food separately in each bowl is our usual world—world of seeming, but when you eat it, in your tummy soup and rice and pickles and everything—*goma-shio*²—and everything gets all [laughs] mixed up and you don't know which is *goma-shio* or rice. That is the world of absolute [laughter]. As long as *goma-shio* is *goma-shio*, and separately prepared on the plate, it doesn't work. Like

¹ Hashimoto Ekō-rōshi (1890-1965) was a scholar of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* and an authority on the origins of the traditional *okesa*. He studied with Oka Sōtan-zenji at Shuzen-ji and was Dainin Katagiri-rōshi's second master at Eihei-ji [*Wind Bell*, 1971, No. 1, p. 3.]

² A table seasoning of ground roasted sesame seeds (*goma*) and salt (*shio*).

your intellectual understanding of Buddhism, it doesn't work. [Laughs, laughter.] That is book knowledge.

But zazen practice is to mix various understanding in our practice and let it work. How to let it work is our practice. The other day, by some chance, I talked about kerosene lamp. You know, when kerosene lamp is just kerosene oil—it doesn't work. Kerosene lamp will work when it is in a state of combustion by aid of air. And even though you have kerosene lamp and air, it doesn't work. When you use matches, it will start to work. And this flame of matches is our practice which is transmitted from Buddha to us. By aid of matches, and by aid of air, kerosene will start to work. This is actually our zazen practice.

You may think, "You are just kerosene oil," [laughs]. It doesn't work. Even though you say, "I have buddha-nature," it doesn't work. If you have no buddha, it doesn't work. If you have no friend, no *sangha*, it doesn't work. When we practice zazen in this way, by the aid of *sangha*, helped by Buddha, we can practice our zazen in its true sense, and we will have bright light here in Tassajara zendō.

We will have question/answer the last day of the *sesshin*. Question and answer will be going with this kind of question and this kind of answer. Back and forth we should discuss this point. We should know clearly what is our practice and what is our everyday life, and how to extend our zazen practice in everyday life. When you are practicing zazen in this way, actually you have true practice in its true sense. But why it is difficult for you to extend our practice in city life is because of lack of precise understanding of our Zen teaching.

When you know why you practice zazen and what is the most important point in our practice, you can practice our way even though your practice is not perfect. You have direction. And you know how to do it. So you will not be mixed up.

Our life, in short, should be always in complete combustion. We should aim at complete combustion in our life. If the flame becomes little bit smoky, you should know how to adjust the flame. If it is too long, you should make it shorter. If it's too small, you should make it brighter. Actually, I think you know what kind of practice you have—whether your practice is good or bad. You yourself know. But instead of being discouraged by it, you should know how to adjust the flame [laughs].

Before you ask questions, you should know how to adjust the flame. To have a so-called-it enlightenment experience is of course important. But more important thing is to know how to adjust the flame—flame of life in zazen and in our everyday life. When the flame is in complete combustion, you don't smell the oil [laughs]. When it is

smoky, you will have a kind of smell. You may realize there is kerosene lamp [laughs]. When your life is in complete combustion, you have no complaint. And there is no need to be aware of your practice. But, we should know that if we talk about it too much—like me—about zazen, it is already smoky kerosene lamp [laughs].

If you see me, you may ask, "Is there lecture tonight?" Maybe I'm very smoky kerosene lamp [laughs]. I don't want to give lecture. What I want is just to live with you, moving stones, having nice hot-spring bath [laughs], and eat something good [laughs, laughter].

Zen is there. When I start to talk about something, it is already smoky kerosene lamp. As long as I must give lecture, I have to explain it in terms of right or wrong: "This is right practice. This is wrong." How to practice zazen. It is like to give you recipe [laughs]. Recipe doesn't work. You cannot eat recipe [laughter]. Maybe after having a long, long practice in hot summer weather, it may be good to enjoy to say something [laughs] and to listen to something. This is our purpose of practice.

I said just now that to know how to adjust the flame is important. This is actually what Dōgen-zenji worked so hard for—for us descendants. Usually a Zen master will give you: "Practice zazen! Then you will attain enlightenment. If you attain enlightenment, you will be detached from everything and you will see things as it is. So if you want to see things as it is, you must practice zazen hard and attain enlightenment." That is usually what a Zen master will say.

But our way is "not always so." That is, of course true, but Dōgen-zenji told us how to adjust flame—back and forth, he told us in his *Shōbōgenzō*—this point. This is one of the characteristic of Sōtō Zen.

People say in Sōtō, Sōtō school doesn't use kōan, and they have no kōan practice. But Dōgen-zenji, after studying kōans, he simplified all the kōans in a quite simple form, like Tōzan-zenji³ in China did. Tōzan-zenji used five ranks—five ranks of practice, or five ranks of seeming and reality. But Dōgen-zenji did not use five ranks in practice or five ranks in seeming and reality because Dōgen-zenji's understanding or teaching of Zen is much simpler than that. Quite simple. The point of Sōtō Zen—Dōgen-zenji's zazen—is to live on each moment in complete combustion, like a kerosene lamp or like a candle. So how to live in each moment, and how to become one with everything, and attain oneness of the whole universe, is the point of his teaching and his practice.

I don't think you have much pain in your legs. Do you have some? It is pretty painful for you to sit now? It doesn't look like so. Pretty

³ Dongshan Liangie (Tōzan Ryōkai): 807–869.

good, I think. Maybe some pain.

Zazen practice is very subtle thing. When you are working, something which you do not realize will mentally and physically be realized if you practice zazen. I have been moving stones [laughs] for a long time, and I didn't know that I was tired. And I didn't realize my muscles were tired. But today, as I sit in this way calmly, I realized, "Oh! [Laughs.] My muscles are in pretty bad condition." I felt some pain all over. Here [probably points], and in my arm, not in my back so much, but here [sounds like he is rubbing an area]. I have not much flesh here, so I have not much muscle to be painful. But my bone is painful, maybe [laughs, laughter].

You know, if you have no problem, then you may think then you can practice your zazen very well. But actually it is not so. Some problem is necessary. Not much, but some [laughs, laughter], if possible. Then, as Dōgen-zenji said, by the problem you have, by the difficulty you have, you can practice zazen. This is, I think, very meaningful point of zazen, especially in our everyday life. He put great emphasis on this point. So he says, "Practice and enlightenment is one."

Practice is something which you do consciously, which you do with effort. There there is enlightenment. Most Zen masters missed this point. They didn't know how important this point is. They were striving to attain enlightenment—perfect enlightenment. But actually, the most meaningful point of zazen is to have enlightenment in our imperfect zazen.

That is Dōgen's teaching, and that is how everything exists in this world actually. Things that exist are imperfect. Nothing is perfect. Whatever we see, whatever we hear, things are not perfect. But in imperfect things there is a perfect reality. This is true intellectual understanding. Intellectually it is true, but in realm of practice it is also true. It is true on paper [laughs], but it is true also with our body. We can realize how true it is through our physical practice and emotional problems.

So according to Dōgen, our practice should be established in delusion [laughs]. Do you understand? We are all deluded people, and before we attain enlightenment we should establish our true practice in our delusion.

Usually, after you attain enlightenment, you may think you can establish true practice. But it is not so, according to Dōgen-zenji. True practice should be established in delusion, in frustration [laughs]. If you make some mistake, you should establish your practice there. There is no other place for you to establish your practice.

"Enlightenment," we say, but in its true sense perfect enlightenment is beyond our understanding, beyond our experience. That is true enlightenment. That kind of enlightenment is in our imperfect practice, actually—or even in our imperfect practice there is enlightenment. But the problem is that we don't know [laughs].

And here, again, I want to put emphasis on this point. People usually do not trust anything if they cannot actually experience it, actually think about it.

There are two types of people. Some of them cannot trust anything until they understand things in term of right or wrong, good or bad. After they analyze reality in various ways, they understand things and trust things. But some of them become more uneasy if someone explains something so well [laughs]. If someone talks about something—analyzes something eloquently and very precisely, the more he explains about it, the more you may doubt it [laughs, laughter]. "Oh! Is that so?"

[Tape turned over.]

There are actually two types of people. Like an artist: If people say, "Oh, that's very good [laughs]," some of the artists will be very glad if someone says, "That is very good. It may be worth ten thousand [laughs]—hundred thousand dollars." But some of them will not be so happy. Some of them will be happy even though no one buys it—no one says anything about his art. But he can enjoy his art.

There are two kinds of people. And there may be two ways of helping people also: to help people by giving something—by giving some actual help to help others. That is one way. The other way is, without giving anything, without saying anything, without doing anything we can help others too.

The joy of enlightenment experience—because that joy is beyond our comparison to our usual experience, you cannot say that is good experience or bad experience—but some unusual experience, that's all.

It is like to push something—to push round ball up to the top of the mountain. It is very difficult. When [laughs] someone who cannot be satisfied with his work until he pushes it up to the top of the mountain, he may lose the ball because it is on the top of the mountain. If he pushes [laughs] too much, it will go [laughing] the other side of the mountain. "Oh!" [Laughter.] That will usually be what will happen to you. If you push everything up to the extreme, you will lose the whole thing [laughs]. We are doing same thing over and over again. You may think, "We should not do that again." But within one month you

will start same thing again, and you will lose the whole thing [laughs].

You practice zazen, or you study Buddhism, and you help people. But if you don't know how to help people in its true sense, you cannot help people. The more you help people, if you help people in usual way, to the extreme, you will lose the friend, that's all. The other day, **Daino Frazer** said, "Something too much is worse than too little."

"Something too much is worse than too little." Actually what it means is to find the true meaning of practice before we attain enlightenment—not to try to attain enlightenment completely—not to try to have complete enlightenment. Why that is wrong is when you try to have complete enlightenment, then you started your practice. It means that your practice is not real practice. You already started to analyze your practice—complete practice or enlightenment, whether it is complete or not.

So complete enlightenment—before you attain enlightenment there is complete enlightenment in its true sense. Dōgen-zenji also says the more you have good practice and good enlightenment in its true sense, you may feel you haven't enlightenment—your practice is not good enough. Only—I cannot say "only"—but most of the time, for human being, when you feel in that way, you have at least better practice and deeper understanding—actual understanding of enlightenment, which is beyond the realm of good and bad.

So enlightenment will be attained in easy times and in adversity. Wherever you are, enlightenment is there. And if you stand upright where you are, that is enlightenment. Try to stand upright. There is our practice. It means that to accept things as it is, to accept yourself as you are.

Sōtō practice is called "I don't know zazen." [Laughs.] "I don't know zazen." We don't know what is zazen anymore. "I don't know who I am." That is Sōtō way. "I don't know." [Laughs.] To find complete composure when you don't know who you are and where you are, what are they—that is Sōtō way. And that is to accept things as it is. Even though [laughing] you don't know who you are, you accept yourself. That is "you" in its true sense. When you know who you are, that you will not be real you. You may overestimate [laughs, laughter] yourself quite easily. That is not you. When you don't know: "Oh—oh, I don't know," then when you feel in that way, you are you, and you know yourself completely. That is enlightenment.

Maybe, even though I say so, I think you feel, "He is talking about something unusual, and he is fooling us." [Laughs.] But actually it is not so. Only thing I can say is you like to be fooled by me [laughs]. If I don't fool you, you will not listen to my lecture. Dōgen-zenji says people do not like something real [laughs], and they like something

which is not real.⁴ That is very true [laughs]. If I am strict with you, I am strict, very strict with that point. Even though you make some mistake, I will not say anything. But if you have some false, unreal confidence or unreal self, I shall be very strict with you because you are in danger.

I think our teaching is very good—very, very good. But if we become too arrogant, and if we believe in ourself too much, we will be lost. There will be no teaching at all, no Buddhism at all. So when we find out our joy of life or composure, when we don't know what it is, when we don't understand anything, then your mind is said to be very great, very wide. Your mind is open to everything.

From what should we be relieved [laughs] is this point. We should be relieved from this kind of arrogance, this kind of selfish way, this kind of immature childish way. And our mind should be big enough to know before we know something. We should be grateful before we have something. Without anything, we must be very happy—not after you have something, but before you have something, we should be very happy. Before you attain enlightenment, we should be happy to practice our way, or else we cannot attain anything in its true sense.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Bill Redican (11/30/01). Lightly edited for readability by Gordon Geist (6/27/06).

⁴ See also SR-71-06-05. Suzuki-rōshi is probably referring to the story of Sho-kung (Jap. Seiko or Shoko) in the *Hsin-hsú* (*Shinshi Ryaku*). Sho-kung loved painted and carved dragons but was terrified when visited one day by the real thing. "Do not become so accustomed to images that you are dismayed by the real dragon" (Dōgen-zenji, *Fukan-zazengi*, in Nishijima and Cross, ed., 1994, Vol. 1, p. 282).