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MORNING *SESSHIN* LECTURE
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This lecture was the source for the chapter of *Not Always So* called "Brown Rice is just Right" on p. 40.

How do you like zazen? [Laughs, laughter.] Maybe it is better to ask you how do you like brown rice? [Laughs, laughter.] I think this is a better question. Zazen is too much. [Laughs, laughter.] Brown rice, I think, is just right. [Laughter.] But actually not much difference. [Laughter.] Zazen is a strong food like brown rice. And I was very much interested in the way you eat brown rice. [Laughs.] I'm very much impressed with the way you eat brown rice.

I think you, naturally, when you eat brown rice, you have to chew it. Unless you chew it, it is difficult to swallow, so you chew it very well. Your mouth looks like a part of a kitchen [laughs]. You are cooking [laughter, laughing], brown rice in your mouth and to be a very good food—tasty food. While you are chewing, actually brown rice becomes more and more tasty. So I think when you eat brown rice your mouth is a kitchen. But usually, I realize that usually our mouth is not a kitchen when we eat. For instance, when we eat white rice, we don't chew so much. We just put it in our mouth and without chewing so much. And the feeling is so good, so it naturally goes down our throat. So we don't chew it.

I think Japanese people—at first I understand our ancestors ate brown rice. But because white rice is easier to eat or tastes good, they became more interested in white rice instead of brown rice. But actually when you become accustomed to brown rice, the white rice is not so tasty. When you put it in your mouth, we think it is good, but that's all. No more variety or no more depth of taste. But brown rice—at first it is not so good, and it is difficult to eat—swallow. So while you are chewing, it becomes more tasty. And when it becomes tasty you hesitate to even swallow because it is so good [laughs, laughter]. Brown rice has that much, I think, taste in it.

I think the brown rice is much more natural to our body—to digest in the stomach, because our mouth originally is not just a part of an organ to chew something or to taste something, but also it is a part of an organ to digest things. This process of digestion should start from here, from our mouths, and naturally should be carried on to our tummy. And we must think more about this. When we digest completely the food, what will become of it? It will be carried over, changing its chemical quality. It will circulate all of our body. And

what will become of our body [laughs], is sooner or later we will die. [Laughs, laughter.] And to eat brown rice is best, the most natural to us who are changing one thing to another.

Now when you eat white rice, that kind of natural process will be disturbed by your mouth, because your mouth stops chewing it, and stops cooking it, and stops changing it into something. Without changing it, your mouth will push the rice in your tummy. So there is some gap [laughs] in our organic process of activity.

This organic process is called—in one word, we call it emptiness. We call it empty—our activity is empty—brown rice is empty because it will eventually die [laughs] with our body. But it changes. And while it is changing, it carries on our life energy. And this maybe called also emptiness.

Why we call it emptiness is—it has no form—no special form. It has some form, but that form is never permanent. And there is no end in changing of its form. So, there is no other word than to call it emptiness.

We know we are empty, and we started to know now this earth is empty [laughs]. It is not permanent. We started feeling that way already. And then you may wonder, "What is this universe?" But this universe has no limit. If there is a limit to this earth, there should be something outside of it.

So in one word—there is no other word than emptiness. So emptiness is ultimate reality. And emptiness is not something which could be understood when you make a space trip. Emptiness can be understood when you are chewing rice, and when you are perfectly involved in chewing brown rice. And your world is with brown rice. That is actual emptiness.

But you may say that is not empty. We are doing something. When you say so, we say that is illusive. You think in that way because of your illusive tendency. We have that kind of illusion. That "Brown rice has no form," is right understanding [laughs]. And "Brown rice is always changing with us," is right understanding. And, "Here is brown rice, and here is I who is chewing it," is illusion, which was caused by our illusive tendency of thinking.

We must be completely involved in chewing rice when we chew rice. When you are chewing rice, if you think of white rice, which you ate at some restaurant [laughs], that is wrong practice caused by illusion—the illusive tendency of making everything a substantial being. White rice doesn't exist [laughs]. That which exists for you right now is

brown rice and you yourself. Nothing else exists. You may say, "This floor exists. This zazen room exists." But that is also actually illusion.

So we have to get rid of this kind of illusive practice, or else we cannot practice right practice. And at the same time, we should accept this illusive practice too [laughs]. We should accept it, knowing that it is illusion. To know that is illusive practice—when you know that is illusive practice, that is not illusive practice. That is true practice. For the right practice it is illusive practice, but right practice exists because of your illusive practice. So our imperfect bad zazen is very important—very, very important.

If you seek for perfection—if you try to perfect your practice—if you try to practice perfect zazen only, ignoring your illusive practice, that practice is not true practice because even though you say "pure right practice," but that is illusion for you because that which you have is illusive [laughs]: brown rice, which doesn't taste so good. So even brown rice, if you think of getting—if you chew it so that we can get some delicious taste of it, that is for us also illusive practice.

So when you put brown rice in your mouth, the fact that you don't feel so good is there, there is right practice. When you feel pain in your leg, that is the practice you have now. That is a practice you should strive for without thinking about some wonderful feeling of practice. That is illusion. So if you are caught by it [laughs], you will lose your practice and you will hate your practice. So your practice will be completely [laughs] lost. Even though you continue that kind of practice for a thousand years, you will not gain anything. But even though you do not practice zazen, if you chew brown rice, if you accept brown rice and started to chew, over and over, and if you find the true meaning of emptiness in each chew, then that is real practice. That is real zazen.

We say "Accept things as it is." Or we say "eternal present" or "emptiness" or "buddha-nature." The words—the meaning of those words is quite simple. Understanding our life—positive way and negative way—and appreciating our life moment after moment, and being completely satisfied with the surroundings, completely. And continue our life in this way is our practice. And Buddhism—Buddhism is there when we have that kind of practice.

Dōgen-zenji says, we like something which is not true, and we don't like something which is true [laughs]. I think that is very true [laughs, laughter]. We don't like something which is true. Something which we like is—mostly is not true because mostly it is just an idea created by yourself, and which will create some difficulty for you [laughing]—some trouble for you. And that is something by which you will be sacrificed.

So forever we are suffering—we cannot escape from our suffering, and there is no chance for us to attain enlightenment. But if you like it, that is another matter [laughs]. If you like it, it is okay. But you should know this is not true. And if you know that is not true, it means you accept—you have there reality. When you say, "That is not true," that is reality. Or when you say, "This is true," and "This is complete," then that is not reality any more. No such thing exists in this world. If you say, "This is permanent," that is also not true.

Something which exists is bound to change or bound to vanish. If there is something which does not change or vanish—which exists forever, that is not a true being. There is something wrong with it or with you. [*Tape turned over.*]

To make further effort to understand things, that is to deny, like a scientist, you deny the truth you found out—which you have now, and deeper understanding of the truth is true denial. Zen training is famous for its [laughs], for its being difficult—for its strictness. We are raised under the scolding voice and slap.

But it does not mean you are useless or you shouldn't be here—that you should go out. It means, in other words, help—help you to find yourself more—to study yourself more. So we try to give you a chance to find yourself more—to study more. If you go out, if you run away [laughs], that's all.

You think if you go somewhere else, you will find some good teacher [laughs]. But, as long as you have that kind of attitude, choosing or discriminating, you will not have a good teacher. It is you which is wrong [laughs], not the teacher. If you met with a good teacher, because you cannot accept a good teacher because of your discrimination, because of your lack of effort to be yourself—actually you are escaping from yourself. But that is not possible. If that were possible, you may find some good teacher [laughs, laughter]. But that is not possible.

So the most important point is to deny yourself and to establish yourself in its true sense without establishing yourself on your delusion. So we say, "Establish yourself on yourself, not on your delusion." But without delusion we cannot live, we cannot practice. So delusion is necessary. But delusion is not something on which you can establish yourself. It is like a stepladder. You can use it, but you shouldn't stay on the stepladder [laughs, laughter]. But without it you cannot climb up.

So with this confidence you must study our way. That is why I said, "Don't run away! Stick to me!" But it does not mean [laughs], stick

to me [laughs, laughter]. It means stick to yourself, not to delusion. Sometime I may be a delusion [laughs]. You may overestimate me [laughs]: "He is a good teacher." That is already delusion—a kind of delusion [laughs, laughter]. I am your friend. I am just practicing with you as your friend who has many stepladders [laughs, laughter].

So anyway, we shouldn't be disappointed with a bad teacher [laughing], with bad students. Bad student and bad teacher—if we—bad teacher and bad student strive for truth, truth will establish something real. That is our zazen. We must continue to practice zazen and continue to chew brown rice. Eventually, we will accomplish something.

Thank you very much.

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