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ZAZEN IS LIKE GOING TO THE RESTROOM
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This lecture was the source for the chapter of *Not Always So* called "The Zen of Going to the Rest Room" on p. 42.

How do you feel now? [Laughs.] Excuse me. I thought of funny thing right now [laughs]. I don't know how you feel, but I feel as if I have finished things in the restroom [laughs]. As I am pretty old, I go to the restroom so often. Even when I was young, I went to the restroom more than [laughs] a usual person. I had, I think, some advantage [laughs, laughter] because of that. When I went to Eihei-ji and sat in *tangaryō*,¹ for seven days [laughs], I could go to the restroom without any guilty conscience because I had to [laughs, laughter]. I was so happy [laughs, laughter] to go to the restroom. I think to go to the restroom has something to do [laughs, laughter] with our practice.

Ummon² may be the first one to make some connection between our practice and the restroom. "What is our practice?" Or "What is buddha?"—someone asked him.³ He said, "toilet paper"—no, not toilet paper. Nowadays it is toilet paper, but he says [laughing, laughter], "something to wipe yourself after finishing in the restroom." That is what he said. And since then, many Zen masters are thinking about or practicing on that kōan: "What is toilet paper?" [Laughs.] What did he mean by it?

Anyway, our practice is closely related to our everyday life. Physiologically it may be we have to go to the restroom, but psychologically I think we have to practice zazen. In our everyday life, we eat many things, good and bad: something fancy or something simple, something tasty or something tasteless like water.

But after having this kind of food in our everyday life, in terms of study, but actually if you eat, if you study too much without practicing zazen, our thought eventually will become very unhealthy. I think that is, at least, one reason why we practice zazen. It is necessary for us to make our mind blank before we study something. It is like to draw something on white paper. If you don't use clean white paper, you

¹ *tangaryō*: a period of continuous sitting for several days in the monastery quarters bearing the same name; initial sitting required of a novice to enter a Zen monastery. From *tanga*, itinerant monk; *ryō*, quarters.

² Yunmen Wenyan (Ummon Bun'en): 864-949. Dharma successor of Xuefeng Yicun (Seppō Gison).

³ *Mumonkan (The Gateless Gate)*, Case 21.

cannot draw something which you want. Sometimes you may use some colored paper, but colored paper is also originally white paper. So it is necessary for us to go back to our original state where we have nothing to see, or nothing to think about. Then you will understand what you are doing.

The more you practice zazen, I think, the more you will be interested in your everyday life. At the same time, you will find out what is necessary and what is not necessary—what part should be corrected or what part should be emphasized more. So by practice you can organize your life more—and at the same time you will know how to organize your life. For some purpose we organize our life, but more important is to observe our situation clearly. And to observe our situation clearly we should blank our mind and start from the original starting point. That is to go to the restroom [laughs]. If you go to the restroom and get rid of—squeeze out [laughs, laughter] all the polluted water, then you will feel good, and you will be encouraged to drink more [laughs, laughter] and to eat more.

But after you eat [laughs], you should go to the restroom. What you eat will be gotten rid of by going to the restroom or exhalation—inhaling and exhaling. In this way, actually we keep alive. Because I feel I must say something right now, I put some water in my idea so that I can talk [laughing] twenty minutes or thirty minutes or more [laughs, laughter].

But actually, I want you to notice how you feel after zazen. And in comparison to your everyday life—how a usual person enjoys their life—the way we enjoy our life may be very different.

Usually, our culture is based on some gaining idea: to accumulate something. Science, for instance, is accumulation of our knowledge. A modern scientist I don't think is greater than a scientist in the 16th century. But the difference is we have accumulated our scientific knowledge. And we human beings know how to accumulate it. That is a good point and at the same time, eventually we have some danger to be buried underneath the accumulated knowledge [laughs, laughter]. And we have other dangers, also. Trying to survive without going to the restroom. Actually, we are almost underneath [laughs, pauses, laughter]—we are already swimming in the pond of polluted water and air. We are talking about air pollution, but that is just a picture of human being. Actually we are hardly able to survive in polluted knowledge.

So maybe that is okay, if each one of us knows how to go to the restroom without attaching to something you have in your body. If you have it in your body, you will become attached to it until you get rid of it. Because we think things are ours, we become attached to it.

If we think we have everything, we will not be attached to it.

Actually, we have everything. Without going to the moon, we have it. To try to go to the moon means, we think the moon is not ours. Our mind, as Buddha told us, is with everything, or everything is our mind. Within our mind, everything exists. If we understand things in that way, then we will understand our activity. When we don't understand ourselves, we will try to exchange our property with something else.

To study something is to appreciate something. To appreciate something is to be detached from things. When we become detached from things, everything will be ours. Our practice is to obtain this kind of big mind—in other words, to go beyond our being—each being including ourselves, and let ourselves work as it works. That is zazen practice. And when we practice zazen, we actually clean up various attachments we have.

We are very much afraid of death. But, death is something which should happen to us when we are mature enough. When you are young, maybe, you will be very much afraid of death. And if you die, that is a terrible thing [laughs]. Yeah, it is so. But if I die, it is not so terrible thing to me and to you too, because I am mature enough to die.

So I understand my life pretty well, and I understood what is human life—what it is to live one day, and what it is to live one year, and what it is to live sixty years or one hundred years. So anyway, when you become mature, and have experienced things—or when you eat many things in this life, I think you will be happy to die as if you go to the restroom [laughs, laughter]. Yeah, actually it happens in that way.

An old man of eighty or ninety has not many problems—difficulties. Physically, they may suffer, but that suffering is not so big as it seems. It is our habit, when we feel uneasy, and when they are young, they have been thinking about death as something terrible [laughs], so when they are dying, they think it is terrible. But actually it isn't.

And there is some limit in our capacity to endure suffering—physical suffering. And mentally we have a limit of capacity, but we think it is limitless. That is why we have limitless suffering—because we have limitless desire. So that kind of desire, as Buddha said, creates our problems. If you understand our life clearly, actually there are not many problems in our life. Because we do not sit, and we are creating problems, one after another, we are accumulating our problems one after another with limitless desire, so we have bottomless fear.

So if we only knew how to clear up our mind, we would not have so many problems as a usual person would have. But as you go to the

restroom every day, we have to practice zazen every day.

If zazen practice is just to have a good feeling in the restroom, it is all right if you go once [laughs]. But our actual practice or need of practice is much more than that—not just to attain some freedom from things, but to continue cleaning our mind. That is absolutely necessary.

And in monastic life, the best practice will be to clean the restroom. So whatever monastery you may go to, you will find some special person who is cleaning the restroom always. We do not clean our restroom just because it is dirty. Whether it is clean or not, we should clean the restroom until you can do it without any idea of clean or dirty. That is actually our zazen practice.

To extend our practice to everyday life is maybe difficult, but actually it is quite simple. It cannot be so difficult, but as we are lazy, as we don't continue it [laughs], that laziness makes it difficult, that's all. That is why we put emphasis on endurance, or to continue it. We say there should not be any cessation of practice. Practice should go, one moment after another.

Some student who practices zazen practice very hard is liable to ignore our everyday life. If someone attains enlightenment, someone may ignore our life: "I had attained enlightenment under some great Zen master, so whatever I do, that is okay. [Laughs.] I have complete freedom from good and bad." Those who do not have enlightenment experience stick to the idea of good and bad. [Laughs.]

Saying it in that way, they ignore their everyday life. They do not take care of their life. They do not know how to organize their life and what kind of rhythms they should have in their own life. An old man has an old man's rhythm of life—way of life. Young ones have their own way of life. How to know the rhythm of their own life is to understand what they are doing. And if you want to understand what we are doing, it is necessary to see our activity, our life, with a clear mind through zazen experience.

Why I came to America was, I was almost disgusted [laughs] with Buddhist life in Japan. I had too many problems [laughs]. That is maybe why I came to America. I didn't know that, but I think perhaps [laughs] that would be the reason why I came to America. When I was in Japan, I didn't practice zazen [laughs] as I do here, as a matter of fact [laughs, laughter]. Since I came to America, I don't have the same problems as I had in Japan. I have very different problems [laughs] than I had in Japan. *Hmm*. I have no time to explain it [laughs, laughter].

Anyway, my mind is like a garbage can [laughs]. So, even if I am in America, which is called a free country [laughs], my mind is a garbage can—even though I am practicing zazen with you. I am a Japanese, and I have many Japanese friends there. So I have enough problems which most Japanese people have [laughing]. In addition, I have some other problems.

So sometimes I wonder what am I doing here. But when I know what I am doing clearly, without any overestimation or underestimation, very honestly [laughs], truly, I have not much burden in my mind—especially zazen practice has been [sighs] a great help. If I hadn't been practicing zazen, I wouldn't have survived in this way.

Last year I was pretty weak, but I am recovering even little by little. I think that is the merit of zazen or because of zazen I think I can survive anyway. And I have no joy of accumulating anything. But I have joy of getting rid of something dirty [laughs]. That is how I can survive in this way.

I started my practice when I was pretty young. Actually I think I started my practice in its true sense after I came to San Francisco. I think you have a pretty difficult time with me [laughs]. I know that, and I am doing something—I am making your practice difficult. But this kind of effort to understand things from another angle is not possible without communicating with the people who are brought up in a quite different cultural background. I think you will understand things more clearly.

To understand things just from some certain egoistic personal or national viewpoint is our weak point. So we cannot develop our culture in its true sense. When our culture came to this point, the only way to make our culture healthy is to participate in the various cultural activities—cultural activities of various human beings. Then you will understand yourself better, as I understood myself better, and zazen better, since I came to San Francisco.

If you understand yourself better and others better, there is not much to study—just to be yourself. And just to be a good American is just to be a good Japanese. And just to be a good Japanese is just to be a good American. Because we stick to [laughs] Japanese way or American way [laughs], our mind becomes a wastepaper basket.

If you notice this point, you will understand how important it is to practice zazen. Maybe I am forcing you to do Japanese practice [laughs]. I know what I am doing [laughs, laughter]. But there is some reason why I do this. If you are ready ... *[Sentence not finished. Tape turned over.]*

... to get rid of various dirty things, then there is no need. But fortunately or unfortunately, even though you don't like it, we should go to the restroom [laughing]—the stinky restroom. I am so sorry [laughs, laughter], but I think we have to go to the restroom anyway [laughs] as long as we live.

If I were young, I would like to sing a Japanese folk song right now [laughs] about the restroom [laughs, laughter].

Thank you very much.

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