

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**HOW TO HAVE SINCERE PRACTICE**  
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This lecture was the source for the chapter of *Not Always So* called "Sincere Practice" on p. 115.

Since Tatsugami-rōshi<sup>1</sup> came, you must have heard Dōgen-zenji's name many times. But Dōgen-zenji may not like to hear his name so many times [laughs]. But unfortunately he had a name like Dōgen, so [laughs] there is no other way to address him. So we call him Dōgen-zenji or Dōgen.

As you know, he didn't like to say "Zen" even. In China they called monks who sit in zazen, "Zen monks," but he didn't like to call it "Zen" even. And he said if necessary you should call us "Buddha's disciple." Shamon—he called himself Shamon Dōgen—"A Monk Dōgen."

In China, there were many various schools like Rinzai, Sōtō, Ummon, Hōgen, Igyō. But Nyojō-zenji,<sup>2</sup> who was Dōgen's teacher then, was not, according to Dōgen, from one of the five schools of Zen or seven<sup>3</sup> schools of Zen. His Zen is just to practice zazen, to realize—to actually realize by his body—Buddha's mind, Buddha's spirit. That was his Zen. That was why Dōgen accepted him as his teacher.

Before Dōgen went to China, he studied at Hieizan [Onjō-ji?]<sup>4</sup>—the main temple of Tendai school. And after Tendai, he went to Eisai-zenji<sup>4</sup>—Yoshin-ji [Kennin-ji?], and then he went to China because Eisai-zenji passed away when he was very young. So he went to China to continue his practice with a good teacher.

According to *Kenzei-ki*,<sup>5</sup> he already had attained enlightenment under Eisai, but he wanted to continue his practice with the right teacher. So he went to China with Myōzen, who was also one of Eisai's outstanding disciples. But although he visited many temples and saw many Zen teachers, he couldn't accept them as his teacher until he met with Nyojō-

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<sup>1</sup> Tatsugami Sōtan Ryosen-rōshi: Sōtō Zen master and *ino-rōshi* at Eihei-ji monastery in Japan for many years. A teacher or master of Jean Ross, Graham Petchey, and Philip Wilson (all students of Suzuki-rōshi) while they attended Eihei-ji. He visited Tassajara to help establish monastic forms and practices. He was head of training at Tassajara for the Spring and Fall 1970 practice periods.

<sup>2</sup> Chan master Tiantong Rujing (Tendō Nyojō): 1163-1228.

<sup>3</sup> The five schools Suzuki-rōshi mentioned plus the two schools into which Rinzai split: Yōgi and Oryō.

<sup>4</sup> Also Yōsai-zenji.

<sup>5</sup> Biography of Dōgen written in Japanese by Kenzei, 14<sup>th</sup> abbot of Eihei-ji.

zenji. And when he saw Nyojō-zenji, without studying under him, when he saw him for the first time, he accepted him, Nyojō-zenji, as his teacher. And Nyojō-zenji also thought, "This is my disciple. This is my disciple who will carry my practice."

And when he was practicing with Nyojō-zenji, Nyojō-zenji scolded someone who was sleeping in his practice. And the feeling or experience he had at that time was submitted by Dōgen to his teacher. And he received the transmission from Nyojō-zenji and came back to Japan.

The first thing we should notice here is Dōgen was a monk who wanted to be sincere—one of the sincere good monks of Buddha—a disciple of Buddha. That's all. And he has nothing in his mind when he went to Nyojō—Eisai-zenji, he already gave up scholarly study of Buddhism which he had been involved in for long, long time.

But his problem is how to be a good disciple from the bottom of his heart and mind. So for him to have this spirit was the most important point. He was such a sincere student that he couldn't accept teachers who were not so sincere as he was. Already he gave up scholarly study, so he couldn't accept someone who is talking about Buddhism. Already he experienced what is Zen, so he couldn't accept someone who is just talking about what is Zen. But what he wanted to see is a man who is really practicing Zen in its true sense. So when he saw Nyojō-zenji, who is practicing his way, he accepted him as his teacher. And when Nyojō-zenji saw him, he could acknowledge his sincerity—his sincere practice. And—the next question will be what is sincere practice? What is the way-seeking mind?

Perhaps you want to know what is sincerity in your practice. First of all, when you become very sincere you cannot accept that which is superficial. But when you are not so sincere, it is difficult to know what is sincerity, who is a sincere student. It is difficult and almost impossible. Only when you become very sincere, you will know what is sincerity.

It is like to appreciate art. First of all, if you want to appreciate good art, the most important thing is to see the good work. If you see good work always—in case you see something which is not good enough, you will immediately know this is not so good because your eyes are already sharp enough to know what is bad and what is good work. And when you know what is good work, you will know what is bad—what is not-so-good work.

That is why Dōgen-zenji always put emphasis on the teacher. If you want to know what is sincerity, you should have good teacher. Only when you have a good teacher will you know—by him you will know—by seeing him you will know who is a good teacher—what is a good teacher. When you see a sincere person, you will know what is sincerity. That is not something which I can describe. That is something you will feel by your intuition. That kind of intuition will be gained by seeing good teachers

always.

And next thing which is important is to give up or to be ready to give up everything, including your understanding of teaching or your knowledge about Buddhism. Most of you may accept some teacher whose knowledge is understandable—acceptable for you. You will say he is a good teacher [laughs].

But you cannot judge your teacher by your low standard. Only when you have well-polished-up eyes or standard of judgment, you will understand—you will see—you can tell which is good and which is bad. But as long as you have some standard, that standard may be your own standard which cannot be perfect.

So the best thing is to give up everything. Many teachers give up—burned all the *sūtras* they study and practiced zazen only. In that case he did not rely on anything, but he just practiced zazen to purify his mind. To accept the true teaching—any teaching can be a good teaching for you, but because of your foolish judgment, the teaching does not make much sense. You are spoiling good teaching by your own judgment. But when you have no judgment, and when you see or accept the teaching as it is, that is, in other words, good teaching.

What Dōgen transmitted from his teacher is this acceptance—giving up everything. Great spirit—to be ready to give up everything. Especially when he practiced zazen, he has nothing in his mind. He was just practicing zazen. That purity of practice struck him.

When you are trying to give up everything, you haven't given up everything yet. When you become tired of foolish discussions or foolish study of the foolish mind—to seek for something which is called truth or true teaching, you will be completely involved in pure practice, giving up everything.

My teacher, Kishizawa Ian, he was actually a great scholar. But his study started after he gave up everything [laughs]. He didn't care for position or fame or reputation. Whatever people may say about him he doesn't care. And he continued his study and his practice just to meet some ancient teachers who devoted themselves to our teaching. When we realize this point, there is no Sōtō or no Rinzai. Before you give up everything, you have Sōtō or Rinzai. When you give up everything, there is no Sōtō or Rinzai.

In Dōgen-zenji describing various teachers' ways of practice, among them there are Rinzai teachers, Sōtō teachers, and some other schools—teachers of many schools. He just wanted to see him through books. That was also true with my teacher. Whenever he met some student or some scholar, what he asked was—give me some record you have.

Whatever record it may be, he was very much interested to see it, to read it. He was seeking for his friend always, his teacher always. Whether he is famous or not, it doesn't matter for him. Only when you give up everything, you can see true teacher.

Even the name of Buddhism is already a dirty spot on our practice. It is not teaching but their character or their effort. When you seek for even enlightenment, his mind is not big enough. He is not sincere enough because he has some purpose in his study. For us I think everyone wants to see a great man. That is not a selfish desire. It is the desire which everyone has. But the desire to accomplish something or even to propagate Buddhism is not pure enough. Just to see someone who is holy and great and pure is our purpose of studying Zen or Buddhism. *[Gap in tape: Recorder stopped for unknown period and restarted on same side.]*

... on what point your teacher could be strict. First of all, when you are lazy [laughs] he will be very angry. If a good, intelligent student is always involved in something which is not pure enough, he may be angry. He is wasting his time.

As much as possible, we should follow our inner voice, rejecting useless things and how—sometime we will think something is necessary to support yourself. But Dōgen says if you study hard—if your practice is pure enough, you will be anyway supported by Buddha. You shouldn't worry who will support you or what will happen to you. You shouldn't worry about this kind of thing. Moment after moment, you should completely devote yourself—listening to your inner voice. That is to see someone who is great in its true sense. To see someone who you can accept—that is the most important point for Zen student.

So if you cannot accept a teacher as your teacher, you should seek for someone else as your teacher. Without this kind of spirit, it is almost impossible to study our way.

With this spirit, or to polish up our way-seeking mind, we practice zazen. How you practice zazen is to have right posture. Tatsugami-rōshi said [laughs] very interesting remark, "How about your *mudrā*?" "Hai." [Laughs.] That was very good!

"How about your eyes?" "Hai." [Laughs, laughter.] In short, zazen is, "Hai." That is a [laughter]— "How about your spine?" "Hai." [Laughs.] "How about your chin?" "Hai." [Laughs.]

Actually you are not checking your posture. You are just accepting your posture: "Hai." [Laughs.] That is zazen. There is no more activity in your practice, and that spirit is the greatest of all the spirit you may have [laughs]. Even though you are like this [probably gesturing], "How is the posture?" [Laughs, laughter.] "How is your breathing?" "Okay" [said in a

humorous, laboring voice] [laughs, laughter].

There is no other secret in our practice. If you have something more than that, that is heresy [laughs, laughter]. You have some extra. When you have some extra fancy practice, your practice will not reach to the point. I think everything is—may be the same.

Today I was mending someone's broken cup. If I fix it—*Chht*—[laughs], that is okay. After fixing it, if I do like this [probably gesturing] [laughing], you will break it. So the work you do will not be so good. If you just do it [laughs], that is zazen. But usually, you do like this [probably gesturing] [laughs, laughter]. That is extra, and waste of time, and you are spoiling yourself by doing this. "*Hai*." [Laughs.]

"Don't kill." It is the same thing with precepts. "Don't kill." You may think, "No, I cannot survive [laughs] if I don't kill anything. No, that is not possible." That is you are doing this way [probably gestures]. "Don't kill." "*Hai*." Whether it is possible, or not is it is out of the question. "Don't kill"—we don't want to kill. So if someone said, "Don't kill," "*Mmm*." [As in "yes."] That's right." [Laughs.] "I will not kill." Then you have perfect buddha-nature at that time.

Because you say, "that is not possible," or "impossible," "right" or "wrong," and because you compare Buddhist precepts to Christian commandments, so you lose the point. When you say "okay," whether it is commandments or our precepts, it doesn't matter. There we have buddha-mind or perfect mercy of God—of the god.

So if we notice this point, there is no other secret. Rejecting everything, giving up everything. When you listen to your inner voice directly, without even trying to listen to it, whenever you have chance to hear it, there is the way. There there is a voice of Buddha.<sup>6</sup> [*Sentence finished. Tape turned over.*]

So when you see or when you listen to your teacher, you will not think about his nationality or his sex or whether he is old or young—it doesn't matter. That is what Dōgen says. Even a girl of seven years old may be your teacher. If you know this point—the secret of practice—that is pure practice which you can apply to your everyday life.

Our instruction of practice—pull in your chin, or keep your spine straight, or *mudrā*—about *mudrās*—are concentrated on this point. This is the front door to the various religions. There are no other doors. As Dōgen-zenji said, "Don't hang around" [laughs, laughter]—"hang around the gate. You should directly enter the gate." *Hai*. Okay. Then you are inside the gate. If you sit [probably gestures] [laughs, laughter]—and if you peek in the

<sup>6</sup> The rest of the lecture was not in the original transcript. It was entered here from Side B of the original tape.

inside of the gate, wondering what is going on there, you have no chance to practice pure practice. It is quite easy if you say "Hai!" That's all. No other secret.

My teacher<sup>7</sup> had many disciples [laughs]. Not so many, but pretty many. And he was always angry with us—always [laughs]—because we were lazy. We were always pretending—we were always pretending to study Dōgen's way. But actually, we were not. So he was very angry with us.

But he cannot be always angry with us, so he start to speak something to the audience—many people in lecture hall. He [laughs]—instead of being angry with us, he was angry with people—all the audience. *Rrrr!* [Laughs, laughter.] *Ohh.*

So we were listening to him—we feel as if we are scolded. And when he was not scolding us, we realized what we are doing, and we became very sorry.

"The first precept—'Don't kill.'"

This is a precept transmitted from Buddha to us.

"Can you keep it or not?"

And he said, "Yes! I will keep it!"

This is the way you keep precepts. He was almost screaming [laughs]:

*Dai-ichi husesshō-kai, nanji yoku tamotsuya inaya?*

*Yoku tamotsu!*<sup>8</sup> [Laughs.]

"This is the way you keep precepts!"

We don't have that kind of spirit. When you say, "Yes I will!" there, right there, is Buddha's voice. When you hesitate, you are always [laughs], you are always saying nothing happened to you. Only when you say, "Yes I will!" and feel how you feel it when you said "Yes I will!"—when you fix your mind to do so, whatever happens. Without this spirit, you cannot extend our way, especially in America, I think.

It may be difficult to accept Tatsugami-rōshi's way. I know that [laughs].

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<sup>7</sup> Kishizawa Ian-rōshi.

<sup>8</sup> Suzuki-rōshi is speaking in a loud, ironic, and formal voice—probably imitating his teacher Kishizawa Ian-zenji—presenting a short dialog of two voices. *Dai* (great); *-ichi* (number one); *hu* (not); *sesshō* (kill); *-kai* (precept); *nanji* (thee [older form of Japanese]); *yoku* (well); *tamo* (keep); *-tsuya inaya* (or not [makes the sentence a question]). *Yoku tamotsu!* (I must keep it well!)

I know very well. But you should try, and you should say, "I will do it!"—not because it is Buddha's teaching or Japanese way or American way or appropriate to our society or not. You should do it—and feel what it was.

[Laughs.] Did you see the movie *2000*? [Laughs, laughter.] That is what you are doing. Or was it—*2001*?—square, I am. All the monkeys hanging around [laughs, laughter]. [Probably gestures like a hominid.] That is [laughs], what we are doing. If you feel it—if you seize it, nothing happen. It is yours. Maybe that is the key point of practice and way to save all sentient beings.

Thank you very much.

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