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TRUE PRACTICE AS EXPRESSION OF BUDDHA-NATURE
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This lecture was the source for the chapters of *Not Always So* called "Walk like an Elephant" on p. 29, and "Sitting like a Frog" on p. 151.

In Japan, a terrible fire broke out, and some hotel was burned down, and many sightseeing people were killed in the fire. And recently in Japan, they had many sightseeing people even to Eihei-ji, where monks—only monks practice our way. Uchiyama-rōshi¹ said in his book²—if you open the book, he says recently, "Everything is going like that" [laughs]. Because we have so many sightseeing people, [laughs], for many years hotels are built, one building after another. So the building is very complicated. Once something happens [laughs], it is difficult to figure out which is entrance and which is fire escape [laughs].

I am very much interested in Uchiyama-rōshi's remark, and it is something like that happening to us too [laughs]. Zen Center becomes bigger and bigger [laughs], and people—students who come here will find it very difficult to know which is entrance and which is fire escape [laughs]. I thought maybe he is teasing me [laughs]. But what he said is very true, I think. The world situation is something like that.

But we should know the right entrance for the zendō. Dōgen-zenji says in *Shōbōgenzō*, the right entrance for the Buddha hall is zazen. Zazen practice is the right entrance. So everyone should enter from the big wide entrance. Because there is no Buddhist who does not practice zazen. So all the teaching comes out from zazen, and what we obtain by the practice of zazen is transmitted mind from Buddha to us. So when we practice zazen, all the treasures transmitted to us will come out from our transmitted mind. And how to open up our transmitted mind is the practice of zazen.

So how to talk about, to discuss about transmitted mind or true mind, or to express our true buddha-nature is through our practice. That is "Sesshin sesshō,"³ about which I talked last night. Why streetcars and bus and airplane is so crowded is there are too many people who seek for some special sightseeing place. Why our way is mixed up or confused is because we are practicing sightseeing zazen [laughs].

¹ Kōshō Uchiyama-rōshi: (c. 1912–1998): Disciple of "Homeless" Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi and sixth abbot of Antai-ji Zen temple in Japan.

² Possibly *Modern Civilization and Zen*, Administrative Office of Sōtō Zen, 1967.

³ "Sesshin sesshō": "Expounding the Mind and Expounding the Essential Nature," a fascicle of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*.

This is actually not a word I made up—"sightseeing practice." Some Chinese people say "sightseeing practice" [laughs]. Or Dōgen-zenji says, "Why do you give up your own seat and wander about various countries?"

So we should not be involved in an idea of hasty attainment. We should not practice to achieve something—to attain something. Step by step, appreciating our everyday life—day by day, step by step is our way. When we cannot see what we are doing, where we are, it is useless to put ourselves in hard practice.

If you invite some *kabuki* player [laughs]—*kabuki*—how do you say, *kabuki* dancer or player from Japan, it costs a lot of money [laughs]. You can invite a first-class monk, or you can even invite archbishop from Japan for the same amount of money [laughs].

So many people go to Japan to study something about Zen, but it is rather difficult to study Zen in Japan. Many people ask me, "Could you introduce me to some monastery?" But I have no idea. So I may say maybe, "Why don't you stay at Zen Center?" [Laughs.] And almost all the people say that, "I thought that will be your answer." [Laughs, laughter.] They know very well, but why they go to Japan is to encourage building hotels, giving money [laughs] to build some more new buildings.

They may be very happy to see you, but it is a waste of time and money for you. And you will be very much discouraged because you couldn't see any good Zen master. It is almost impossible to—even though there are good Zen masters, but it is difficult to meet one. And it is difficult to understand and study under him. You may figure out why it is so quite easily.

But the practice of zazen and watching our steps, one after another—this practice is actually true zazen practice. We say our practice should be like a cow [laughs]. Our practice should not be—our steps should not be like a horse. You cannot gallop. You should walk slowly, like an elephant or like a cow. And if you can walk slowly, without much gaining idea, then you are already a good Zen student. There is no other way to follow our way.

At the end of Sung dynasty,⁴ we had many Zen masters. And most Zen masters encourage people to attain—to have enlightenment experience. Why they encourage people to attain sudden enlightenment, with some psychological way is to meet the people's—student's desire—to satisfy student's desires. They provided that kind of technique or trick [laughs]. It may not be trick—I shall be scolded if I say "trick." [Laughs, laughter.]

⁴ Sung dynasty: 960-1279.

But my feeling about that kind of practice is something like a trick.

So Zen masters will be a good friend of psychologists [laughs]. And they will help with each other [laughs] how to explain enlightenment experience. And psychologists will explore some new field in psychology, but originally Zen is completely different from that kind of practice.

Actually Dōgen-zenji points out this point very sharply. In *Shōbōgenzō*, in the chapter of "Sesshin sesshō," he referred to another story. Tōzan-daishi,⁵ the founder of Sōtō school—oh, no—I [already] told you about the story between Tōzan-daishi and Mitsu Shihaku.⁶

He referred to another story about the First Patriarch of China and the Second Patriarch in China. The First Patriarch, Bodhidharma, told the Second Patriarch, Eka⁷—he said: "If you want to enter our practice, you should stop—or you should cut off your self from outward objects. And you should stop your emotional and thinking activity within yourself. And when you become like a brick or stone wall, you will enter. That is how you enter our way."

That was what Bodhidharma said to his disciple Eka. But it was actually—for him, it was very difficult practice, as you must have experienced [laughs]. Even to stop your mind is [laughs] difficult enough. It is so for the Second Patriarch. So he tried very hard, but he couldn't understand what he meant actually.

So the Second Patriarch, after trying very hard, he thought he could understand what he meant, at last. So he said to him, "Perhaps I understood what you meant." When he said so, Bodhidharma thought, "Oh, this student must have understood what I meant." So he did not ask any questions. "Okay, you must have understood." [Laughs, laughter.] That is all Bodhidharma said to him.

But he said, "Is there cessation in your way? Is there a break in your *sesshin*?" [laughing]—twenty minutes' break or thirty minutes' break. "Is there some break in your practice—in your *sesshin*?" Bodhidharma said.

And Eka said, "No break, no cessation in our practice." Bodhidharma said, "Then who are you? [Laughs.] Who has constant practice? Who are you?" Just, he said, "Who are you?"

⁵ Dongshan Liangjie (Tōzan Ryōkai): 807-869. Ch'an master of the T'ang period and co-founder of the Sōtō school of Zen (with his disciple Sōzan). "Daishi" means "great master."

⁶ Mitsu Shihaku (Shinzan Sōmitsu): dharma brother of Tōzan. "Mitsu" is the last character of his name; "Shihaku" means "uncle teacher." Tōzan and Mitsu traveled together for twenty years.

⁷ Dazu Huike (Taiso Eko): 487-593. Dharma successor of Bodhidharma.

Eka said, "Because I know myself very well, so it is difficult to say who I am. [Laughs.] Because I understand myself so well, so I cannot say who I am." And Bodhidharma said, "That's right. You are my disciple." Do you understand? [Laughs, laughter.]

Our zazen practice is not to attain enlightenment actually. It is rather to express our true nature. Even though you don't feel you are expressing your true nature, but actually you are expressing your true nature when you practice zazen. And that something is, according to Tōzan-daishi, it is someone in back of the building [laughs]. Someone is talking about something—the backyard across the street. What are they talking about?

That someone is actually not any particular person. That someone means our true nature. So always, true nature within ourselves is talking about Buddhism—discussing about Buddhism. And whatever we do actually is the expression of buddha-nature.

So at last Eka—the Second Patriarch, understood, came to this point. So he said, "I think I understood what you meant by to become a stone wall [laughs] or brick wall. I understand. The stone wall itself is buddha-nature, and bricks are also buddha-nature. Everything is the expression of buddha-nature, so now I understand what is buddha-nature. Before, I thought after I attain enlightenment, we will know who is in the backyard of the house. But there is no special person who is talking about some special teaching. There is no special person, but all things we see, all what we hear about, is the expression of buddha-nature."⁸

When we say buddha-nature, buddha-nature is everything. We say buddha-nature is our innate true nature which is universal to every one of us, or even to various beings: sentient beings or animate or inanimate beings. [*Sentence finished. Tape turned over.*]

There is no special nature which you can understand. How you understand the universal nature is through everything. There is only one way to approach the universal nature. So the only way to realize our true nature is to know who I am—who is doing constantly something.

So he said, when Bodhidharma asked him, "Is there cessation in your true practice, after you enter or even before you enter, or before you join our true practice—is there any cessation?"

He said: "No, even before Buddha there is no cessation in our practice, because our practice is Buddha's practice, which has no beginning and no end." So he says, "No cessation."

⁸ It is not clear to the transcriber where Suzuki-rōshi intended the quote of Eka to end.

"Then who is practicing that kind of practice, or who are you? Who joins this kind of practice?"

He may be Eka—personally he may be Eka, but actually what he is doing is constant, permanent, ever-lasting practice which was started in beginningless time and ends in endless time. So, it is difficult to say who—who is practicing [laughs] our way.

So Bodhidharma said, "Every patriarch practices the same way as you do. I am practicing that way, and you are practicing that way." First of all, when you practice zazen, you should know this point clearly, so you do not waste your time. Even though your zazen is not so good—but that is zazen. Even though you may not understand what it is even, someday, sometime—someone will accept your practice. Only when you practice right here without wandering about, without being involved in sightseeing zazen—so I say, "Why don't you sit here?"

What I mean is, if you don't give up sightseeing zazen [laughs], you have no chance to join our practice. If you understand this point, even though you make a big, big trip, that is not sightseeing zazen. That is real practice for you.

So the point is to have a good start and to join the real practice which is always true and which has no danger in your practice. So our practice is not necessary to be a hard one, or good one. Good or bad doesn't matter [laughs]. If you sit with this understanding, and if you do not waste your time, or if you have conviction in your buddha-nature, then sooner or later you will find yourself in the midst of great Zen masters.

When you read—especially young ambitious people read Zen books, or when you listen to various Zen masters talk, they will talk about their master who was very strict with him, or hardship he had in his young age. And he may say it is very difficult to be a good Zen master [laughs]. We haven't so many good Zen masters so far, and maybe it will be more difficult to have Zen masters—good Zen master in future.

So you will be very discouraged. It means that you cannot be a Zen master [laughs]. But when you understand real practice—what it is, you will never be involved in such a foolish problem like Sengai.⁹ Maybe 6–7 years ago, 2–3 years after I came to America, I went to Fields Bookstore, and I saw Sengai's picture. And it was something like a calendar [laughs]. A frog was on the calendar. And Sengai said, "If a frog, or if someone can be a buddha, maybe I can be a buddha too."¹⁰ [Laughing.]

⁹ Sengai Gibon (1751–1837): Japanese Rinzai master.

¹⁰ Literally, "If a man becomes a Buddha by practicing *zazen*—" (Sengai Gibon, "The Meditating Frog," in D. T. Suzuki, *Sengai the Zen Master*, Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1971). The frog is pictured on p. 94.

Frog was sitting like this [probably gestures] [laughs, laughter]. "If people can be a buddha by practice of sitting, then I can be [laughs]—soon I will be a buddha" [laughs]. For the people who know what is actual practice, even though they don't experience enlightenment, if he sees someone who is sitting to attain enlightenment [laughs], we think he is like a frog sitting [laughs].

Actually their sitting is much better than [laughs, laughter] our zazen. I always admire their practice—much better than my practice. They never get sleepy. Their eyes are always open. [Laughs, laughter.] Tatsugami-rōshi¹¹ will admire him very much, I think. "Open your eyes!"—you know. But there is no need for him to say so if we are like a frog [laughs, laughter]. And they do something very appropriate intuitively and in an appropriate way. When something comes, they go like this—*chomp!* [Laughs, laughter.] [Sounds like he is snapping at something with his mouth, like a frog catching a fly.] They never miss anything, but they are always calm [laughs, laughter], and still.

I always think, "I wish I could be a frog." So Sengai says: *Moshimo—Zazen shite moshimo hotoke ni naru naraba*.¹² "If by practice we can be a buddha—". He doesn't say anything more [laughs], and he draws a frog [laughing]—sitting frog.

If you understand what Sengai is feeling when you see a picture of a frog, you are already Zen—you have already understood what is Zen. There is a lot of humor in it, and there is good understanding of our practice. Even though our practice is not better than frog, we will continue to sit. And we can accept a frog as our good example of practice.

I think that is a kind of enlightenment, but—you should know how you actually understand a frog. After practicing pretty long time [laughs], you will probably laugh at someone who is involved in wrong idea of practice, and probably you will laugh at yourself [laughs] who is sitting always [laughs] without doing anything—without making much progress. You will laugh at yourself. When you can laugh at yourself, humorously, then there is enlightenment. But still, your zazen is beginner's zazen or sometimes worse than beginner's zazen [laughs].

Sometimes I am ashamed of myself when I see some student's practice which is very good. "Oh, he is very good," I think. "I wish I could be as young as he is once more." But it is too late.

But anyway, our practice cannot be better than sitting of a frog. So it is

¹¹ Sōtan Ryosen Tatsugami-rōshi: Sōtō Zen master and *ino-rōshi* at Eihei-ji for many years. He was head of training at Tassajara for several practice periods.

¹² Suzuki-rōshi is quoting Sengai's one-line verse: *Zazen shite moshimo hotoke ni naru naraba—*.

okay. But to see someone who is practicing good zazen is very impressive, not only to me but also for everyone. I think that if your zazen is good enough to give good impression to others, your zazen is pretty good. Even though you don't think so, it is actually very good zazen. But even though you think your zazen is very good, and you are proud of your enlightenment experience like this, if he doesn't impress anyone [laughs], his zazen may be wrong practice.

I think there are several important points or factors in our practice. One is, we should not be involved in hasty gaining idea in our practice. We say we should not practice zazen for the sake of others or the sake of yourself. Just practice—just practice zazen for zazen. It means you should just sit. You should not sit for fame or profit. Just practice zazen.

We say many things, not to do this, or we talk about precepts, but the point of practice—observing precepts—is there is no need not to do something bad. There is no need to try not to do something bad, but if you do good thing like zazen, you cannot do bad thing at the same time [laughs, laughter].

So if you continue positively, continue to do something good, that is how you observe our precepts. So the point is just to sit, forgetting all about fame or profit. Just to sit for the sake of zazen. That is one point. And that kind of attitude is also the attitude to have real way-seeking mind. Way-seeking mind means to find your inmost desire.

The first step will be to know what is good and what is bad. Like when you go to shopping, it may be difficult to know which material to choose. For instance, if you go to a draper's shop, all the materials—there are various colors, there are various quality of material in various colors, and it is rather difficult to choose.

Starting from that kind of practice, you should brush up your intuition. How to buy or get something good—if you try to compare one to the other [laughs], even though you spend two or three days, you will not get something appropriate for you. And after trying two or three days [laughs], what you will get will be something which is not at all appropriate to you, and you should visit the same store again. If they change it for something else, you are lucky [laughs].

Don't say this kind of practice is useless. It is actually the first step to our way. But how you practice good practice and how you buy something appropriate to you is the same. When you are not involved in shopping too much, you can get something appropriate.

After you know the secret of intuitive activity which is free from various restrictions, you will find our way in your everyday activity. Until you understand why we practice zazen and what is actually true activity,

intuitive activity, free from various desires and restrictions, it is difficult to figure out what is good practice, what kind of practice—how you practice zazen. But it is okay. If you continue it, eventually, little by little, without knowing how you acquired that kind of intuition or intuitive activity, anyway you will get it.

So it is rather foolish to be involved in some particular hard special practice. Our practice is hard enough [laughs], so don't seek for some special enlightenment, and don't seek for some special practice—way of special practice. Dōgen-zenji said there is no Buddha who attained enlightenment—real enlightenment, who gave up our zazen practice. Only through our zazen practice various teachers attained—there is no other word, so I say "attained enlightenment" [laughs]—became Buddhist, real Buddhist. [*Sentence finished. Tape changed to Tape 2.*]

By the same way as you do something else, our practice is very different from usual practice. You have the book *Zen and Archery*,¹³ but when you understand our practice, because the author understands real practice, archery can be Zen, but only for him it is Zen [laughs]. If you don't understand how to practice archery in its true sense, even though you practice very hard, what technique you acquire is just technique. It doesn't help—help you through and through. You can hit a mark without fail, but without bow and arrow you cannot do anything. If you understand the author's point, when archery is—could be Zen, then maybe without bow and arrow the archery will help you. How you get that kind of power or ability is only through right practice.

So, we should have the right understanding of practice. To have the right understanding of practice you should have the right teacher who has the right understanding of practice. So you should not have any gaining idea in our practice. And follow your teacher. And you should understand completely what is right practice. So Dōgen-zenji says, right practice and *sanshi monbō*. *Sanshi monbō* is "to have a good teacher" and, "to receive right guidance in your practice."¹⁴ Or else you will not understand what is Zen.

And one more thing is, we say *Sōzoku ya tai nan*.¹⁵ *Sōzoku* is—"to continue our practice is very difficult thing," maybe the most difficult thing. If you continue it, having right understanding by a good teacher, and if you practice it without any gaining idea, and continue right practice or fundamental practice—the only one practice, which is fundamental to various practices is the most important thing.

¹³ Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1953.

¹⁴ Literally: *sanshi* = "visiting teachers"; *monbō* (also *monpō*) = "hearing the dharma" (Jap.).

¹⁵ Literally: "continuity is very difficult" (Suzuki-rōshi is quoting Tōzan Ryōkai).

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