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Tassajara

This lecture was the source for the chapter of *Not Always So* called "Be Kind with Yourself" on p. 77.

It is more than six months [laughs] since I last came to Tassajara, and I was very much impressed with your practice at this time. And I am now thinking about—not thinking about—but the actual feeling I have now, and some prospect for the future life of Tassajara. I feel something is right, and I want to talk a little bit about my feeling and my hope.

I don't know if you have the actual feeling of true practice. I don't know, and why I say so is because I didn't know [laughs] when I began practicing zazen. Even though I was practicing zazen when I was young, I didn't know exactly what it was. But although I had some feeling of practice, it was pretty difficult to talk about the feeling I had. But now the feeling I had makes some sense—right now for me—right now [laughs]. But at that time, it didn't make much sense, although I had some feeling, and sometimes I was very much impressed by our practice at Eihei-ji or some other monasteries. Or when I saw some great teachers, listening to their *teishō*, I was very much impressed.

But it was difficult to organize that kind of experience—to put some order in those experiences. Maybe because I wanted to put it in some order, it was not possible. This way is to have full experience and to have full feeling in every practice. Then that was our way. But maybe it is true for you.

One reason why we couldn't satisfy our practice is I didn't—I thought I did my best, but I didn't [laughs] make enough effort for our practice. That is why. And another reason was because I wanted to put it in order. People say "stepladder [laughs] Zen." Actually, we are talking about "enlightenment and practice is one," but still, actually, my practice, at least, was stepladder practice: "I understand this much, and next year," I thought, "I will understand a little bit more" [laughs]. That kind of practice doesn't make much sense. Maybe after you try stepladder [laughs] practice, you may realize that that was a mistake.

This morning when [Sotan Ryosen] Tatsugami-rōshi was giving *dokusan* when we were practicing zazen—I cannot explain to you literally what he said, but if we don't feel some actual feeling of practice, some warm big satisfaction in your practice, that is not practice. Even though you sit with the right posture, trying to have the right posture, following your breathing, and following all the instruction which was given to you, but maybe still it is empty [laughs] zazen.

Why it is empty zazen is you are just following instructions, following the form of

practice. And you are following the way of what you should do. Even though you are counting, you are not kind enough with yourself. That was the point of Tatsugami-rōshi's talk this morning. You should be very kind with yourself. Not just count your breathing to avoid your thinking mind, but to take best care of your breathing. There is big difference. Even though you are following your breathing, just to follow your breathing doesn't make sense. If you are very kind with your breathing, then, one breath after another, you will have refreshed warm feeling in your zazen.

Perhaps we are not kind enough with ourselves, with our practice. Still we understand that our practice is following some instruction. If you only follow the instructions given by some teacher, then you will have good zazen. But [laughs] it is not so! Why you have instructions is for you to be able to be kind with yourself. That is the purpose of instruction.

If you don't feel Buddha's mercy in instructions, and if you don't feel Buddha's mercy in your form and breathing, and take care of your practice, then there is no warm feeling in it, and it is not satisfied zazen. You should be fully satisfied with your practice. Or you should be very kind with yourself. So, when you are very kind with yourself, naturally you will feel satisfaction.

A mother may take care of her children, even though she has no idea of how to make her baby happy. But still, what she is doing is to laugh or to make [laughs] her baby happy. In that way you take care of your posture and your breathing. There should be some warm feeling in it. And when you have a warm feeling in your practice, that is actually a good example of the great mercy of Buddha. If you practice this way, whether you are priest or monk or layman, you have actual practice which will help your everyday life, which will be extended to your everyday life. When you do something, you take utmost care of what you do. Then you feel good.

So we say, you are something in what you do. For instance, as Tōzan Daishi said—Tōzan Ryōkai Daishō—you recite his name every morning. And Tatsugami-rōshi bows. When Tatsugami-rōshi bows, you recite all the patriarchs names. And Tōzan Ryōkai Daishō, attained—it is difficult to say, when he attained enlightenment [laughs]. He [laughs] attained enlightenment so many times [laughs, laughter]. So we cannot say when. But when he was crossing a river, he saw himself in the river and he said, "Don't try to figure out what is you. If you try to figure out what is you, what you will understand will be far away from you. You will not have even an image of yourself." Don't try to do so.

But you, the actual you, are rather in the river. You may say that is just a shadow or that is just a reflection of yourself, not me. You may say so. But if you see it carefully with warm-hearted feeling, that is you. [Laughs.] You think you are very warm-hearted [laughs], but when you try to understand how warm I am [laughs], even by measuring temperature with a [laughs] thermometer, you cannot measure your feeling actually. But when you see yourself in a mirror or

water with warm feeling, that is actually you. And whatever you do, you are there rather than here.

If the monks on this side are doing something, and the monks on the other side are doing some other things, [laughs] what is Mañjushrī doing [laughs, laughter]? When you do something, Mañjushrī is there, actually. The real you is there. [Laughs.] You don't have to [laughs] seek for where Mañjushrī is and what he is doing. If you actually have good practice in your everyday life, there is our practice, and there is Mañjushrī, and there is true you, the real you. Don't say Mañjushrī is here or there [points] or in the middle of the zendō. It is actually there when you do things with warm heart, by your warm-hearted mind. That is actual practice. That is how you take care of things. That is how you talk with people.

So there are many ways because some of you are priest, some of you are layman, and some of you are married priest and some of you are not married priest. But our practice is the same, not different. Those who are not monks and priests may make his own way to go. Those who are not married or who have already married, they have their own way of extending our practice to everyday life. So although our situations are different, practice is just one.

Mañjushrī is actually one, but even though he is one, [laughs] he is everywhere, and with everyone, and with things you do. Whatever practice you are involved in, there is Mañjushrī. But the secret is not to forget the true mercy of Buddha who takes care of everything. If we lose this point, whatever you do doesn't make any sense.

Tatsugami-rōshi puts emphasis on warm heart, warm zazen. If you practice zazen, you will feel very warm. Even though it is cold, you should feel some warm feeling in your practice. The warm feeling we have in our practice is, in other words enlightenment or Buddha's mercy, Buddha mind. It is not a matter of just counting your breathing or following your breathing. Counting breathing is too, too, too tedious [laughs]. So maybe it's better just to follow [laughs] breathing. This is easier and less disturbance in our practice [laughs, laughter]. This is just [laughs, laughter]— Doesn't make any sense.

The point is, one breath after another, inhaling and exhaling, you have to take care of breathing in and out, just as a mother may watch a baby. If a baby smiles, mother may smile [laughs]. If a baby cries, mother will worry. "Ohh" [laughs]. That kind of close relationship—to be one with your practice is the point. I'm not talking about anything new. Same old thing [laughs, laughter]! I am sorry. But I was very impressed this morning when he was giving you *dokusan*. I wish you could understand Japanese [laughs], but you don't. But I think you must have felt some feeling from his talk.

We have various rules here. I think it may be like some machine gun looking glass [sighting scope] [laughs]. Do you know the machine gun looking glass?

There are many lines on it. It is easier to see something, where the target is [laughs]. And it is for the teacher, of course [laughs, laughter]. Of course it is so, but it is for the student too: to work on something more carefully. When you want to work on something more carefully, naturally you will count, and naturally you want to figure out how to work on it. That is just relying on your machine gun looking glass. I don't know what you call it, but they have it. If you see the movie [laughter] *BOOM!* [Laughs, laughter] It goes in that way. And there you see the glass in that way.

It is just to help your practice, for the teacher, or some students. It is not something actual. Actual relationship between teacher and the student is this: "Hi, how are you?" But this is too direct and too much, so we have to have a looking glass and [laughs] through it, we need something between us. If we are too close with each other we cannot see, but we can feel. But if we feel too much too close [claps hands together twice], it doesn't make any sense. We cannot help each other. So we need some distance.

The rules will give us some distance between teacher and disciple. Because of the distance, a student may have some freedom in his activity, and the teacher will find out how to help him. When you play something, if you are too close, you cannot play the game. Only when you have some distance between you, can you play something [laughs]. You have some freedom. If a student does not have any freedom, the teacher cannot tell actually what he wants to do and what kind of instruction he needs. Only when he sees from a distance can the teacher help him. [*Sentence finished. Tape turned over.*]

... something to restrict your freedom, rather than to give you freedom to behave and to act in your own way. The teacher, without criticizing him, and knowing what the student really wants to do or what kind of mistake they have, the teacher may help him in a more meaningful and helpful way. It is, for instance, something like when you want to know whether your coffee has too much sugar [laughs] or too little, or is too strong or too weak, you will stir it up. It is necessary to do something on coffee or on what you do. We should act on it. That is rules. By rules we know what kind of experience you need or what kind of help you need.

The background of our rules is based on also a warm, kind mind. It is not so important to follow the rules literally, but within the rules you should try hard. And sometimes, if you don't feel so good, you should [laughs] try to break it [laughs, laughter]. You should do something like that. Oh no [laughs, laughter]! Then we will know what is wrong with him [laughs, laughter]. Maybe his tongue is not so good, or today he lost his belt. That also gives us some help. So you are pretty free within our rules. So when you practice our way, our rules are very, very organized. Anyway, it is very good for students and for us.

That is actually Tassajara life. And that is why we make our rules [laughs] stricter and stricter. Don't misunderstand us. If your practice improves, we have to know

about your practice more carefully. So we must have very small, very fine, more lines on it [laughs], so that we can measure exactly [laughs, laughter]. If your practice improves, a more exact [laughs] glass [crosshairs] is necessary.

You may think Tassajara becomes more and more rigid and strict. And what will happen to us after all [laughs, laughter]? Nothing happens [laughs]. You are you —still you. You have big freedom, but your practice will be improved a lot. And when your practice improves, you have good control over your everyday life. When you have good control of your desires and everyday life, then you will have big freedom from everything. That is the goal of our practice for priest and for layman.

Ahhh. I don't think I have any more time.

Thank you very much.

And, yeah, you know. I have to go. I have to leave you this afternoon. Take care of your practice. Take good care [laughs] of practice and to be very kind with yourself.

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