

**SESSHIN LECTURE NO. 2 – Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**Sunday, June 7, 1971 – San Francisco**

This piece is from the first chapter of *Not Always So*.

*Shikantaza*, zazen, is—our zazen is just to be ourselves. Just to be ourselves. We should not expect anything—just to be ourselves. And continue this practice forever. That is our way.

We say, even in, (what do you say?) [laughs], even in [snaps fingers]—[student: "Snap of the fingers?"] [laughs, laughter]—you know, in snapping your fingers there are millions of *kalpas*—no, *cetanās*. The unit of time. We say "moment after moment," but in your actual practice, moment is too long. If we say "moment," or "one breath after another," you are still involved in—your mind is still involved in following breathing, you know, to follow the breath. We say "to follow the breath," "to follow our breathing," but the feeling is to live in each moment.

If you live in each moment, you do not expect anything. With everything you become you yourself. If you feel strictly your self, without any idea of time, even in the smallest particle of time, you feel your self. That is zazen.

Why we say so is if we are involved in an idea of time, various desires will start some mischief [laughs]—they will become mischievous, you know. But when you have no idea of time—your practice will go on and on with everything.

So this practice is not so easy. Maybe you cannot continue this practice for even one day, one period. If you try to continue it one period, you must make a big effort. So what will you do, then, the rest of the sesshin is to extend this feeling for each period, or to prepare for this *shikantaza*. Maybe that is what you can do. And this preparation, or to extend the practice to another period of time, eventually will be extended to everyday life.

So everyday life—how you practice or how you extend our practice is to expose yourself as you are. You shouldn't try to be someone else [laughs]. You should be very honest with yourself, and you express yourself fully. And you should be brave enough to express yourself. Whatever people may say, it is all right. You should be just yourself, at least for your teacher. You should be just yourself.

Until your teacher may say, "Okay, you should continue your practice in that way," you should try hard. And after your teacher said, "Okay, now you should continue that practice forever. You don't need me anymore," that is actual practice, your actual life. This is rather difficult unless you trust your teacher. Rather difficult, you know. But if you find out your teacher's spirit is the same spirit as you have, then you will be brave enough to continue this kind of practice.

Sometimes you have to argue with your teacher—[laughs] sometimes. That is okay. You should do that. But you should be ready to give up your argument when you are wrong, when you find yourself sticking to some viewpoint [laughs], foolishly sticking to only one viewpoint. Or when you are making some excuse, you should give up.

That is how to be honest with yourself. You should give up, you know: "I surrender. Okay." [Laughs.] "I am sorry." [Laughs.]

If you cannot accept what he says, until you can accept him you should try to understand your teacher. For your teacher and for you, what we should do is to have perfect communication. We should try to have perfect communication. So for a teacher, the important point is, always be ready to surrender [laughs] to your disciple. If your teacher thinks he was wrong, he should say, "Oh, you are right. I was wrong." [Laughs.] If your teacher has that kind of spirit, you should have same spirit, you know. That is not so easy. You may think it is easy. If you continue this kind of practice, sometime people may think he is crazy [laughs]. There is something wrong with him [laughs]. But it doesn't matter.

We are not the same, you know. Each one of us is different from the other. So each one has each one's problem. So, you know, it is okay. Anyway, you should be yourself. Fortunately, you have Zen Center here. The advantage of Zen Center for you is, Zen Center is not shade for you, shade which will protect you. It is not an umbrella [laughs]. But there you can have real practice. You can express yourself fully.

And you should open your eyes to appreciate other's practice. You should be able to communicate with each other without words. Your mind, your eyes should be open to see other's practice. It does not mean to criticize others, but to appreciate or to know others.

That is why we have rules or rituals. You may say, if you are practicing zazen, no one knows, no one understands your practice [laughs]. But when you are practicing, for me, it is the easiest chance to understand you. Especially if I see you from your back, it is very easy to understand what kind of practice you have. So that is why I sometime walk around the zendo—not to hit you [laughs] but to see you [laughs]. Very interesting [laughs, laughter].

If you are dancing or talking [laughs] or making big noise, it is rather difficult to understand you [laughs]. If you are reciting sutra, each one has each one's own voice [laughs] and the way you recite sutra is different. And it is easy to know each other, even though you are not trying to understand. But if you practice together, eventually, naturally you will be a good friend. Sometime because you know each other [laughs], you know too well [laughs], so you have some difficulty because of your small mind. But as long as your mind is big enough to expose yourself and to accept others, if you practice zazen or rituals together, then you will be a good friend.

And another point is already we are free from idea of time. You shouldn't try to be ordained, or you shouldn't worry how long you should stay layman. Or if you become priest, you shouldn't worry what will be your next step. When you are lay student, as a lay student you should, without expecting to be something, you should be honest with yourself. Because you try to be someone else, you lose your practice and you lose your virtue. When you are faithful to your position or to your work, your true being of you is there. This is a very important point.

Zen Center is a community, and those who come and sit are also, actually even though they are not a member, actually they are our members. Even though we do not call them "member," in its true sense they are also our members. When they come for the first time to Zen Center it may be difficult for them to know what we are doing. But more and more, they will feel what we are doing and join our practice. So those who know, who are practicing our way, should give them some idea of practice or feeling of practice. The best way to give the feeling of practice is to have the feeling—each one have our feeling fully. Then naturally people who come will feel it. But if our practice is wrong, what they will feel is something completely different from the proper feeling a Buddhist must have.

Why the wrong feeling is created is because we are involved in selfish practice. I said, "Don't have an idea of time." Why I say so is if you are involved in idea of time—today or next year or tomorrow—the idea of selfish practice will start from there. It is all right to have an idea of time, but that is the extended practice of non-selfish practice on this moment, to express ourselves.

We don't know what will happen on each moment. So if you fail to express yourself fully, then you will regret it later. Because you expect some other time, you fail to express yourself fully. And you will be misunderstood by your friend. So you should be always express yourself fully. That is why we eat in some certain way. You may think that in that way you cannot express yourself, but it is not so. Because you have some way to serve, you can express yourself—how much sincerity you have.

If there is not some certain way—if you have many ways of expressing yourself, you don't know how to do it. So if you know how to do it, you can express yourself in that way. It is big mistake if you think you cannot express yourself. If you want to express yourself, it may be the best way is to do something, whatever you want to do. You may do exactly how you feel, you know, a superficial feeling, just choosing some way—when you don't know what to do. Oh, [laughs] you are not expressing yourself. If you know what to do exactly and you do it then you can express yourself fully.

So in that way, a strong person expresses himself in a very strong way [laughs], and a kind person will express himself very kindly, doing the same thing. When you pass out the sutra cards from this end of the row to the other end, each one passes it [laughs] in one's own way. So if I see it, it is easy to see, because they do it the same way. If they do it different ways, it is very difficult to know. Because all of you do it the same way from this corner to the other [laughs], it is easy to see [laughs]. And because you repeat the same thing over and over again, everyone can understand your friend's way. Eventually, even if you shut your eyes, you will know [laughs]—"Oh," [laughs] "that was Katherine." [Laughs, laughter.]

That is the advantage of having rules and rituals. Otherwise, without this kind of understanding, your understanding of people or your relationship with people will be very superficial. If someone wears a beautiful [rubs own robe] robe you think he is a good priest [laughs]. You know, if someone gives you some beautiful thing, you think he is very kind to you [laughs]. That kind of understanding is very superficial. If she brings a beautiful thing, you think she is good person [laughs]. That kind of understanding is not good understanding. Very superficial.

Usually the system of our society is built up in some superficial, frivolous way, always changing. What the controlling power will be—money or something, you know, a big noise [laughs, laughter]. That is the controlling power because our eyes, our ears are not open, not subtle enough to see things, and our feeling is very dull.

Most people who visit Zen Center may feel Zen Center is a very strange place [laughs]. "They do not talk so much. They do not even laugh." [Laughs.] "What are they doing?" [Laughs, laughter.] But actually, without talking so much we can communicate. You know, we don't smile always, but we can feel others' feeling, and our mind is always open, and we are behaving exactly, you know, behaving—expressing ourselves fully. Actually, even though you are not trying to express yourself, you are expressing yourself anyway [laughs]. If your mind is open, you can see. Those who are accustomed to big noise cannot see anything here—that's all.

We should extend this kind of practice to city life, and we must have more friends, so that all of us can be a good friend of each other. It is not a difficult thing when you decide to be honest with yourself and to express yourself fully, without expecting anything. Just to be yourself and be ready to understand others—that is how you extend our practice to everyday life.

But it is not so easy to be free from selfish practice. So even for one hour a day, we should try to sit *shikantaza*, without moving, without expecting anything, as if you are in the last minute. Moment after moment you feel your last minute. Inhaling—in each inhaling and in each exhaling there are countless units of time, and you should live in each unit of time.

And smoothly exhaling first, and then inhaling. Calmness of your mind is beyond the end of your exhaling. And if you exhale in that way, smoothly, without even trying to exhale, you are entering into the complete perfect calmness of your mind. You do not exist anymore. And if you enter the complete calmness of your mind, then naturally your exhaling will start from there. And all the blood you have will be cleaned, catching everything from outside, and that fresh blood carrying everything from outside and pervade your body and refresh your body. You are completely refreshed. And you start to exhale, to extend that fresh feeling to the emptiness. You exhale. So, moment after moment, without trying to do anything, you continue *shikantaza*.

Complete *shikantaza* may be difficult because of pain in your legs. But even though you have pain in your legs, you can do it. Even though your practice is not good enough, you can do it. So, you will gradually vanish with your breathing. You will fade into the emptiness. And natural inhaling will bring you back to yourself with some color or form. And exhaling, again, you gradually fade into emptiness—empty white paper. That is *shikantaza*.

I'm just explaining the feeling of *shikantaza*. The important point of *shikantaza* is in exhaling. Instead of trying to feel yourself, try to fade into emptiness when you exhale.

When you have this practice in your last moment, you have nothing to be afraid of. You are actually aiming at emptiness. There is no other way for you to have a feeling

of mortality. You become one with everything after you exhale—completely exhale—with this feeling. If you are still alive, naturally you will inhale again. "Oh" [laughs, laughter], "I'm still alive!" [Laughs, laughter.] "Fortunately or unfortunately!" So you start to exhale and try to fade into emptiness. This is, you know—you don't know, maybe [laughs] what kind of feeling it is. But some of you will know it. By some chance you must have felt this kind of feeling.

When you have this practice, you cannot be angry so easily [laughs]. Because you are interested in inhaling more than exhaling [laughs], you become angry quite easy [laughs]. You are trying to be alive always. My friend wrote in the newspaper the other day. He had heart attack, and what he could do was just exhaling. He couldn't inhale. That was a terrible feeling [laughs], he said. But if he had tried to exhale at that moment, as we exhale, aiming for emptiness, then I think he wouldn't have felt so bad. To exhale is great joy for us, rather than inhaling. But he tried to inhale—take another breath. He thought he cannot inhale anymore. But if he could try to, you know, exhale as we do, then I think he could take another breath more easily.

So exhaling is very important for us. To die is more important than to try to be alive. Because we always try to be alive, we have trouble. Instead of trying to be alive or active, if we try to be calmer and die or fade away into emptiness, then naturally we will be taken care of. Buddha will take care of us. Because we lose mother's bosom [laughs], we are not anymore her children. So if we—like the emptiness—like we feel your mother's bosom, then mother will take care of you. Moment after moment, you shouldn't lose this kind of practice when you practice *shikantaza*.

Various secrets of religious practice are included in this point. When they [Jodo-shū] say, "*Namu Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu*," they want to be Amida Buddha's children. "*Namu Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu*." That is how they repeat Amida Buddha's name in their practice. Same thing is true with our zazen practice. Zazen practice is not different from their practice. If you know how to practice *shikantaza*, and if they know how to practice—how to repeat Amida Buddha's name, it cannot be different. As long as they repeat Amida Buddha's name their practice is Buddhism. As a Buddhist, we have the same practice in different ways.

So we can enjoy, we are free. We feel free to express ourselves, because we are ready to fade into emptiness. If you are trying to be active and special and trying to do something, you cannot express yourself. Small self will be expressed, but big self does not appear from emptiness. From emptiness, only great self will appear. That is *shikantaza*, okay? [Laughs, laughter.] Not so difficult [laughs] if you try, if you really try.

Thank you very much.

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Sources: City Center transcript and notes on back of original tape case. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Bill Redican (12/28/00). Lightly edited by cuke.com (01/16/03) for readability.