

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi

SESSHIN LECTURE, Day 5

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This lecture was the source for the chapter of Not Always So called "Freedom from Everything" on p. 12.

I thought there was another day of sesshin, but today is our last day.

I think you have understood what is zazen as your practice. But I didn't explain how you sit—I didn't give you instruction how you sit in detail, but I told you how I practice shikantaza—or zazen. Maybe that is my way, so I don't know how another teacher will sit. I don't know, but that is anyway my shikantaza. I started this practice, actually, maybe two years ago, after I wanted to cross the creek at Tassajara [laughs, laughter], not because I saw many good places to sit. There are two or three caves where you can sit. But it was not because of that. Perhaps some of you were swimming with me at that time. Some beautiful girl students [laughs, laughter] and Peter [Schneider?] were there [laughs, laughter]. And as you know, I cannot swim, actually [laughs], but because they were enjoying swimming so much, I thought I may join [laughs]. But I couldn't swim. There were so many beautiful girls over there, so I tried to go there [laughs, laughter], without knowing I couldn't swim [laughs], so I was almost drowned [laughs, laughter]. But I knew that I will not die, I will not drown. I shall not be drowned to death because there are many students. So someone will help [laughs]. I was not so serious. But, the feeling was pretty bad. I was swallowing water [laughs]. The feeling was too bad, so I stretched my arm so that someone could catch me [laughs]. But no one [laughs, laughter]—no one helped me. So I decided to go to the bottom [laughs, laughter] to walk, but that was not possible either [laughs, laughter]. I couldn't reach to the bottom, and I couldn't get over the water. What I saw was beautiful girls' legs [laughs, laughter]. But I couldn't [laughs], take hold of their legs. I was rather scared [laughs, laughter]. At that time I realized that we will never have good practice unless we become quite serious. I knew that I was not dying at that time, so I was not so serious. Because I was not so serious I had a very difficult time. I thought if I knew I was dying I will not struggle anymore. What I could do is to stay still [laughs], if I am dying. Because I thought I had another moment, I couldn't become so serious.

Since then, I started shikantaza not expecting another moment. Moment after moment I tried to sit as if I am dying in the water. That helps a lot. Since then my practice improved a lot. That is why. And I tried a long time, and I think I have good confidence in my practice, so I told you how I sit my shikantaza.

It was a very interesting experience. I was among beautiful girls [laughs], and that sort of thing reminded me of Buddha's overcoming demons [laughs, laughter]. I am sorry, you are not evil, but beautiful [laughs] demons [laughs, laughter]. But if I am dying those beautiful girls will not help. If I am really dying, not because of water, but because of my sickness or something, it will not help.

So we can sit with demons and beautiful girls, and demons or snakes. You know, snakes are okay [laughs]. When I am dying [laughs], it will not hurt me. Anyway, I am dying, so it is okay. And they are with me. They will be happy to be with me, and I am very happy to be with them. In that situation, everything is with us, and we are happy to be with them, by not being hurt or helped or disturbed. But usually it is difficult to feel in that way because we are always involved in gaining ideas, expecting something in the future. So usually it is very difficult. But at least when you practice zazen, you should not be caught by, or you shouldn't be involved in gaining ideas. The most important thing is to confront yourself and to be yourself. Then naturally you can accept things as they are, and you can see things as they are. You will have perfect wisdom at that time. That is why I told you my way of zazen.

Now, as Katagiri-sensei told you last night, you awaken from the dream. By "dream," he means our usual everyday life, which is involved in gaining ideas. And when you expect things in various selfish ways, that is actually the dream you have. But after awakening from the dream, what you need is another to come back to actual life, which includes your dream.

Your dream is actually in your everyday life. Actually, you cannot stop dreaming, and your life will not be so different from the life you have in your dream. A dream is something you experienced which appears. So actually [laughs], there is not much difference. What you do is maybe the same. But when you realize that this is a dream, it is our life from Buddha's viewpoint.

When you are able to sit—practice shikantaza—and when you experience shikantaza, when you understand the meaning of shikantaza, the meaning of your everyday life will be completely different. [Laughs.] Do you understand [laughs] how different it is [laughs]? If you don't understand, maybe you are not yet practicing shikantaza, maybe. What will be the difference? You have freedom from everything. That is the main point. Usually you have no freedom from things you have or you see. But if you experience, or if you understand the experience of shikantaza, you will have freedom from things. And you will enjoy your life in its true sense because you are not attached to anything.

We say always, "Do not attach to anything," but literally it does not mean attachment or detachment so much. Detachment is not actually the opposite of attachment. Attachment can be detachment. Detachment can be attachment, too. So words [laughs] don't mean so much. "Detachment" [laughs, laughter], "attachment" [laughs] doesn't mean so much.

Anyway, if you become really happy, you know, really happy, and if that happiness continues, maybe that is detachment, or what we mean. Most of the happiness you have is a kind of happiness which, after having that happiness, you will feel regret. "Oh, [laughs], it was at that time we were very happy, but now [laughs] we are not so happy." You will feel in that way.

But real happiness will last in your mind always and encourage you when you are in your adversity or in your happy life, too. When you are successful, you will enjoy the success, and even though you fail, it is also good [laughs]. It will encourage you. Not encourage, but, anyway

it is good. You can enjoy the feeling of failure: "Oh, this is pretty good." [Laughs, laughter.] "Not so bad as I thought." That kind of feeling you will always have.

So you are always satisfied with things. You have always enough. You don't want too much, as you wanted before. Even though you start a one-hundred-day sesshin from the next morning, you can do it [laughs]. You will not be discouraged. You will not say, "I cannot do that after five days of sesshin. It is too much" [laughs]. You don't say so. "Okay, let's do it," you may say, because you know you can do it. In your life, if you come to a great difficulty, like you came to a big mountain—not like Tassajara. Tassajara has many ways to go through [laughs], but a big mountain doesn't have any passage. Looks like it, actually, but even though you go Nepal, there is a way to get through. One-hundred-day sesshin is difficult if you do it. You can do it. Even though you die, nothing happens [laughs, laughter]. It is okay. Something will happen anyway [laughs]. So you are always happy, and you will not be discouraged. Dōgen-zenji explained this kind of feeling in "Tenzo-kyōkun, Instruction to the Head Cook." Even though you think, "I cannot cook with this kind of poor material," there is a way to cook. If you really want to make your friends happy you can do it anyway. If you have big mind, kind mind, and joyful mind always. That kind of mind arises from shikantaza. As long as you expect anything in the future you cannot do things well. When you don't expect anything and just do it, something will happen there. That is actually shikantaza.

The next point is, the kind of life you choose will be different. Before you may like something great, big, and beautiful [laughs]. Number one in California [laughs, laughter]. Number one Zen Center, and Zen monastery in America, in the world. Even better than [laughs] Japanese monastery [laughs]. That will be what you want before you have right practice. The things you choose will be different and way of life you take will be different.

Your life from your age of hippie [laughs], is very different, I think. The time of hippie is different. Very Buddhist-like. That is why you like Buddhism, maybe. But if you become a Buddhist, your life will change more—you will be a super-hippie [laughs, laughter], not a usual one. Your lifestyle looks very Buddhistic, but not enough. And when you have that kind of strict practice and when you ignore your practice, your weak point of practice, then eventually you will have good practice. More and more you will understand what Zen masters said and appreciate their life more and more. After my lecture, I thought about what I said. Usually I forget [laughs], what I said quite easily, but [laughs] the lecture I gave you was a pretty serious one, [laughs]—the result of actual experience. So I thought about it, and I thought—I think I put the emphasis on some hard practice, difficult, hard practice: "Don't expect the next moment, or anything. Don't move!" [Said with mock seriousness.] [Laughs, laughter.] I am sorry but I have to say so, because your practice looks too weak. I wanted to make you stronger. But actually what I meant was you need confidence. That your practice is not so good is okay, that you move is maybe okay, but if you lack confidence zazen cannot be zazen. If you are not strict enough with yourself, and if you have a lack of confidence, then it doesn't work. That is why I said so, but what makes your practice deeper and deeper, and the experience better and better, is usual effort, usual effort—day-by-day effort to sit. That makes your experience better and better.

In China and in Japan there are many teachers who attained enlightenment like this [laughs] [snapped fingers]: Chht! [Laughs.] Like this [snapped fingers again] [laughs, laughter]. You may

think so, but actually that was the result of many years practice or many times of failure. These are Dōgen-zenji's famous words: "That you hit a mark is the result of ninety-nine times failure." [Laughs.] The last arrow hits the mark, but that is after ninety-nine times failure. So failure is okay actually. But each time you hit the mark, each time you shoot you do it with confidence, you are sure to hit the mark. That is important. So Dōgen-zenji said, "Ninety-nine failure is okay." [Laughs.] So anyway, I will [laughs] continue to try to hit the mark that doesn't work. So each time you sit, it is necessary for you to do your best in your practice. Anyway, if you only sit in the cross-legged position for forty minutes, "That is zazen," you may think. But that is not zazen. If it is preparation, it is okay. Like you practice yoga, it is okay. But, the most important point should be done—all your effort, physical and spiritual. That is why we must have good breathing. Anyway, when you do something physically, breathing follows. And if your way of breathing is not appropriate, you cannot do any physical work. Even when you sew, breathing should follow. When you lift some heavy things, breathing should be completely controlled, or else you cannot lift a heavy thing. You may say, breathing—anyway you can take breathing, but breathing—if you want to have good breathing, it is not so easy. Your posture should be right, and your mudrā should be right because your mudrā is a symbol of your mentality. If your spine is not straight, your breathing will not be deep enough. So if you think about those points—how to control all of your mental and physical effort. Of course it takes time. Enlightenment does not come until you are in perfect control of your mind and body. You cannot accept it. You don't feel you have enlightenment. Or, in other words, when your mind and body are completely one, then enlightenment is there actually. Whatever you hear, whatever you think, that will be enlightenment. So it is not the sound of bamboo hit by a stone or the color of plum trees that makes them enlightened, but their practice which is there. So they attained enlightenment. In your everyday life, you have always a chance to have enlightenment. Whatever you do: if you go to the restroom, there is a chance to attain enlightenment. If you cook, there is enlightenment. If you clean the floor, there is enlightenment. I think we are very fortunate to have various teachers. It has not just happened in this way, but previous human effort came to this point. Your culture came to this point where you want to study Zen. Japanese Zen tradition came to the point that we need some revival. This kind of feeling didn't arise in Japan in just ten or twenty years. But for a pretty long time this kind of movement was there.

So far as I know, Oka Sōtan-rōshi was the source of all the teachers—the source of power of all the teachers. Tatsugami-rōshi studied under Harada-rōshi. Harada-rōshi's teacher was Oka Sōtan. My teacher was Kishizawa-rōshi, and my master was Suzuki So-on, and their teacher was Oka Sōtan-rōshi. Yoshimura-rōshi's teacher was Hashimoto-rōshi. Hashimoto-rōshi's teacher was Oka Sōtan-rōshi. At Komazawa University there were good scholars of Buddhism—Eto Sokuo. He was my classmate—my teacher's classmate—master's [Gyokujun So-on's] classmate when they were studying at Komazawa. At that time, Oka Sōtan-rōshi was head of Komazawa. So things didn't happen to Zen Center just by chance. If we don't know what to do, if we study Oka-rōshi's teaching, Kishizawa-rōshi's teaching, or [Kōdō] Sawaki-rōshi's [?] teaching, the answer is there, because all those teachings came from one source. He was a really great teacher. Not only he was a great teacher for his disciples, but also for laymen who studied under him he was a great teacher.

I wanted to tell you something about how to extend our shikantaza to your everyday life, today, right now. And I took out the interpretation of precepts by Oka Sōtan-rōshi. And I read the

preface of it [laughs], the preface, which was written by Kishizawa-rōshi. And in the introduction, written by Kishizawa-rōshi for Oka Sōtan-rōshi's interpretation of precepts, he referred to Oka-rōshi's precepts lineage, which was wrong [laughs]. Which was wrong.

Kishizawa-rōshi knew after many years of study under Oka-rōshi, what is the right lineage. The lineage should be like this, he knew—Kishizawa-rōshi knew how it should be. But Oka-rōshi's teacher's lineage was wrong because Dōgen-zenji's lineage consists of two lineages: Rinzai and Sōtō and came to Dōgen-zenji one from Nyojō—from the Sōtō lineage. Another is from Myōzen—a Rinzai master, disciple of Eisai. But his lineage is just Sōtō—Oka-rōshi's. So Kishizawa-rōshi had to ask him why. "Why is this? It is wrong," he said, "But your lineage is wrong" [laughs]. "What is that?" When he asked him Oka Sōtan-rōshi's face changed, and tears came down from his eyes. "Yes, it is wrong." And he started to talk about his lineage. When Oka-rōshi was young, he wanted to go to Komazawa University—Komazawa College to study Buddhism. He wanted to go there. But his master Token did not allow him or could not afford to send Oka-rōshi to school, so he didn't say yes so easily. So he said, "I want to study hard and become a good teacher and give precepts, jukai—ojukai—having ojukai-e and precepts to many people, so let me study more." And his master Token was pleased: "Okay, then you can go." But after he finished schooling, he came back. At that time he was making a wood print for the lineage, to make the lineage paper, okechimyaku. Some of you already received my okechimyaku when you received the rakusu. His master was making one which is wrong, so Oka-rōshi explained in detail, it should not be like this. It should not be just the lineage of Sōtō. It should be Rinzai and Sōtō.

His teacher agreed: "Okay, maybe I was wrong, but this lineage is the lineage which Kankei-zenji had"—also a famous teacher. "So according to Kankei-zenji's lineage, my lineage is not wrong. But if Dōgen-zenji's lineage is like that, it should be like that," he said. And then he said, "I will make another wood print." But Kishizawa-rōshi, when he came back and saw him—when Oka-rōshi saw him again, he had finished half of it already, which was quite good. And Token—his teacher—Sōtan-rōshi's teacher went to some specialist to make it and studied how to make it and tried to do it again. But as Oka-rōshi came back, he made it although it was not complete. But he made it. And show it to him. At that time Oka-rōshi's face changed again, and tears came down, especially when he said, "This is the okechimyaku, lineage paper for you when you have big ojukai-e. This is for you." When he said so, he almost cried and teacher and disciple cried—hugged and cried. And then the teacher said—Oka-rōshi said, "This lineage paper is okay, although it is not exactly as Dōgen-zenji had it. It is okay. As long as this wood lasts, I will use it." So that is why Oka-rōshi's lineage paper is wrong. Because it was wrong, Kishizawa-rōshi accused him that it is wrong. So when he was accused, again he [Oka] cried. Oka-rōshi was that kind of person. It is not usual for a scholar or usual for a great Zen master. Not usual at all—very unusual. Why we say Dōgen-zenji is so great is not because of Shōbōgenzō maybe, but because of his sincere practice, not only as a Zen master but also as a man, as a human. He was the most sincere student of Buddhism. Oka-rōshi was that kind of teacher. I didn't know actually what we should do with our old okesa after Yoshida-rōshi showed us which should be right traditional okesa. I didn't know what to do. But when I took out [Oka-rōshi's book on the precepts], I didn't know the idea of solving this problem by Oka-rōshi's help. But when I wanted to know what will be the interpretation of precepts not to do unchaste act. So I wanted to know about it. But what I found is that preface [by Kishizawa-zenji]. I haven't read that part. I thought, it is just the

introduction [laughs]. But when I need it, you know, it appears in front of me like that. You may say that is just by chance, but I don't feel in that way [laughs]. If you say things happen just by chance, all the things happen just by chance [laughs]. When we don't know, we say, "Things happen by chance." Katagiri-sensei and I discussed very hard about that point—what should we do? [Laughs.] We had no answer for that. It is not that kind of thing we can ask Yoshida-rōshi or someone else about. We should solve this problem just between us, who are responsible for this. You think things happen in this way in America, at Zen Center, but it is not just by chance. It is the result of many years of many peoples' hard work, sincere work. It is not just the way of propagating Buddhism. To us there is no idea of Buddhism. What is the truth will be always our main point.

As Katagiri-sensei said last night, breathing should be upright to the sky. And we should sit on the black cushion without moving, so that we can grow to the sky. That is how you practice zazen, how I practice zazen, how Katagiri-sensei practices zazen—as a priest, as a layman. There is no difference in the virtue, whether you are layman or a priest, if we know what is the purpose of practice and how we should grow—what will be our way of life as a Buddhist. The only difference is we put more emphasis on the truth. Usual people do not respect truth so much—little bit different [laughs]. But eventually you will find out which is more important, as you have already found out. We cannot be fooled by anything so easily, and we shouldn't fool anyone. We must "settle ourselves on ourselves," as Katagiri-sensei says. Excuse me [laughs]. "To settle one's self on one's self," that is a very important point. How you do it is to be yourself on each moment. Whatever you do, you must do it. You shouldn't expect someone's help. You shouldn't be spoiled by some shelter. You should protect yourself, and you should grow upright to the sky. That's all. That's all, but little bit different. Maybe we are crazy [laughs, laughter]. According to them we are crazy, but we think they are crazy [laughs]. It's okay [laughs]. We will find out pretty soon which is crazy [laughter].

Okay. Thank you.

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Sources: City Center transcript and notes on back of the original tape case. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Translation of Japanese terms and research assistance by Shōhaku Okumura-rōshi and Miyagawa Keishi-san. Bill Kwong-rōshi commented on this lecture in a dharma talk at Sonoma Mountain Zen Center entitled "Dying in the Water." In particular, he clarified the story about Oka Sōtan's lineage papers. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Bill Redican (11/30/01). Lightly edited for readability by Gordon Geist 6/29/03.