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RYAKU FUSATSU LECTURE
Thursday Evening, July 29, 1971
Zen Mountain Center

As you know, at Tassajara *Ryaku Fusatsu* may be observed as we observe it at Eihei-ji. I want to talk about *Ryaku Fusatsu* tonight and maybe tomorrow night, if I have time. I want to continue the spirit of practice of *Ryaku Fusatsu*. [*Fusatsu*: Traditionally, a ceremony held every fifteen days, in which monks in a Zen monastery recite vows and confess transgressions. *Ryaku*: "abbreviated" or "short."]

Ryaku Fusatsu is one of the most interesting practices at Eihei-ji. Since I left Eihei-ji it is almost thirty-seven—maybe almost forty years [laughs]—but still, I have the impression now—a feeling of observing *Ryaku Fusatsu*.

And the history of *Ryaku Fusatsu* is very long, even before Buddha. In India, there were same kind of observation. And in Japan too we have still very primitive custom or annual ceremony or observation in some part of Japan.

In Japan, as I remember, January 14th is the day when we gather the old memorial tablets or old symbols of shrine. And children or boys get something holy—some equipment we need to observe something holy. And when it is very smoky, because at that time we burned firewood, kerosene lamps, or things throughout the year. Things become very dusty and smoky.

And so in January—of course, New Year's Day, we renew all the decorations, so old ones we carry old ones to the shrine, which is always waiting for those things. Old, old small shrines, or just stone deity called a *dōso-jin*. [*dōso-jin*: *dō*: "road"; *so*: "ancestor"; *jin*: "deity" or "god." Shintō stone figures of deities placed along roadways and pathways, typically in rural Japan, to protect travelers and villages. The images are invoked for an abundant harvest, for good health, and prosperity of offspring.] Most of the days we do not know even there is *dōso-jin*. But on New Year's Day, or from New Year's Day to January 14th, old symbols and ornaments will be there. People take them to the old shrines.

So at that time, we realize that, "Oh, here is shrine." On January 14th we make pretty big shrine, maybe six feet high, with straw. [In a festival called *tondo-yaki* (Bonfire Festival), prayers are offered for a healthy and peaceful forthcoming year. New Year's decorations of pine, bamboo, and straw are gathered for a public bonfire. The decorated bonfire (*tondo*) is carried out to the seashore, purified, and set on fire. People toast and eat *dango* or *kagami-mochi* (round glutenous rice cakes) they have brought to

the bonfire.] And when it is dark, we set fire on it and burn it. And people—children come with rice balls. Rice ball is made on New Year's Day and we put it on the branches of the tree—a kind of tree—and we decorate it in front of altar. And on January 14th, children take all the small rice balls—*dango*, and bake it in that fire we made by the old decoration. Some people knows why we do and some don't.

My mother told me the story of why we do this. All the year round, *dōso-jin*—that god lived in various part of the village, and knows who observe good precepts and who don't. He is supposed to keep the record, as *ino* also does [laughs], in Tassajara zendō or City zendō [laughing]: who attend zazen and how many times someone didn't come. He has that kind of responsibility. So he is supposed to have all the records, and on January 15th is the day when some god come and check his note. And when someone didn't observe, maybe evil spirit come and check the record. And if someone didn't observe good precepts, then that evil spirit will visit his home [laughs].

That was the idea, but *dōso-jin* is very good deity—good god. So before he come he burned the records. And he may say: "Yesterday evening we had a big fire [laughs], so I have no more records. It was burned away, so I haven't—I am sorry," he may say. So wherever the evil spirits goes, many deities will say "*dōso-jin*," they say. And "I'm sorry. We have big fire, and we have no records. So [laughs] I am sorry. Next year I will be very careful. Please come next year." [Laughs.] So evil spirits doesn't know where to go, so all the villagers will be protected from the evil spirit. That is the story.

That kind of story—legendary stories—were also in India. That story came from India to Japan, and in some part of Japan we are still observing it. It is the fourteenth—sometime fourteenth—sometime the fifteenth; it is according to the moon. Full moon will be sometime fourteenth and sometime fifteenth. Before full moon we call it white—white days, white nights, and after full moon we call it black—black days. Moon is more and more become black.

Eighth or fourteenth, fifteenth is the day we observe precepts. Laymen observe the eight precepts. The eight precepts is the same precepts priests observe, but on those days, eighth and fourteenth and fifteenth, is the day layman observe same precepts as priest observe, or Buddha's direct disciple observe. Those precepts are called *hachisai-kai*. *Hachi*—"eight." *Sai* means "same." If this shoulder and this shoulder is same—*sai*. Very balanced, *hachi-sai-kai*. *Hachisai-kai*. Why we call *sai-sai* means "equal," like your left-hand shoulder and right-hand shoulder is equal. *Sai* means "equal."

So on that day—fourteenth, or eighth or fourteenth or fifteenth—is the day when laymen and monks observe same precepts. *Kai* is

"precepts." *Hachi* is "eight." And the *rokusai*, [*roku*: "six"; *sai*: "same" or "equal."] *rokusai* is—*rokusai*, it was six—*sai*—mmm—it is rather complicated.

Sai in America—we use it with precepts—*saikai*. So *sai* is more and more changed—its meaning changed. And *sai* nowadays means "pure," but original meaning is "same."

We have *rokusai*. *Rokusai*—before fifteenth we have three days, after fifteenth we have three days. So we have six days to observe pure precepts. And in those six days we observe *hachisai-kai*—eight pure precepts, which is equivalent to *arhat* precepts, or Buddha's disciples' precepts. And eight precepts—four precepts of eight—eight precepts is the nature of precepts, and other precepts is prohibitory precepts.

In Mahāyāna precepts, we put emphasis on nature of precepts. But in Hīnayāna or Theravāda, they put emphasis on prohibitory precepts. Before Buddha, it is some observation to keep themselves from evil spirit by doing something good. *Dāna* precepts was the very old precepts, both for Buddhist and pre-Buddhist people. *Dāna* precepts. If you observe *dāna* precepts, you will be born in some good land after you die. That is why they observed *dāna* precepts before Buddha. And why Buddhists observe *dāna* precepts is different: not for to have good future life, but to accomplish buddhahood in this life. That is Buddhist way of—or spirit of observing precepts and *dāna* precepts.

Anyway, by observation of the precepts, before Buddha, they tried to keep themselves from evil spirits, to protect themselves from evil spirits. After Buddha, they also gathered laymen and monks together, and recited precepts, Buddha precepts. And those who did not—those who failed to observe the precepts may make confession of it. And those who do not say anything is the people who are supposed to observe the precepts. In that way, they recited precepts.

So the most important part of the *Fusatsu* ceremony is to recite *Bommō-kyō*, the precepts [*Bommō-kyō* (*Bommō-sūtra*, *Brahmajāla-sūtra*, *Fan-wang-chin*): a sūtra containing the ten major and 48 lesser Mahāyāna precepts.]. *Bommō-kyō* is about Mahāyāna precepts. And when, for instance, I recite those precepts, you should think about what you did. And if you didn't observe good precepts, you should say, "I didn't. I am sorry." Then, by the power of confession, your bad karma will be weaker. In that way, to purify our mind and to keep Buddha's way, we will observe *Fusatsu*. *Fusatsu* is—*fusa*—*fusa-da*—*fusa* or *fusa-da* means to do something good—to increase good or positive side. *Da* is to stop—to stop doing bad.

Nature of precepts is to encourage good practice and to stop evil desire, or to continue good practice, good precept observation, and to

put an end to bad deluded observation. That is the idea of precepts. *Fusa—fusa-da—fusa*: "to do something." Something we have. To continue something good, and to stop something bad, or to stop some bad karma arise. That is the meaning of stop. *Fusa—fusatsu*. In that way, Buddhists have been observed *Fusatsu*.

Fusatsu is in Japanese or maybe in Chinese too—character doesn't mean anything, but it is transliteration of "*poṣadha*"—Sanskrit. So with this spirit, we should observe *Fusatsu*. And when your everyday practice is good—when you observe this *Fusatsu*, you feel real spirit of zendo. *Fusatsu*.

And *Ryaku Fusatsu*—*Ryaku* means "abbreviated observation," not full observation, because we have so many precepts and so many scriptures. So if we read all of it, it takes long, long time.

So we, in Japan or in China, instead of observing six times a month, we just observe fifteenth and the last day of the month. And the things we—Mahāyāna school of Buddhism, like Zen or Shin or someone Tendai or Shingon—we read Bodhisattva precepts, Mahāyāna precepts only. That is why we say *Ryaku*. *Ryaku*. *Ryaku* is what we say. Not full but a part of it.

This *okesa* is—if we wear small *okesa* that is simplified *okesa—ryaku*. Spirit is there, but more simple. Why we say so is because we do not read all the precepts, one by one, because it takes too long time. Maybe in comparison to Bodhisattva precepts, I should refer to eight *hachisai-kai*, eight precepts.

The first one we say, "Don't kill." And don't take which is not given to you—don't steal. "Don't steal" means not to take something which is not given to you. And do not cling to the nature of man or woman, or nature—don't cling to the difference. If it is different is pretty good [laughs]. You cling to it more than that. Man and woman—you don't understand the difference of the nature. If you understand, woman is the form and nature is little different from a man, and then it is nearer to understand. But if you say, nature of man and woman is like water and [laughs] flame, or plus and minus, that is not our understanding. Do you understand the feeling?

When you stick to something, it is more than difference. That is why you lose your way. If you think, "She is little bit different from me, physically and [laughs] mentally." Anyway, I have no time to discuss [laughs], but think what I mean. Difference? Not opposite—not pair of opposites actually, but different.

Our minds should have freedom from this kind of concepts. Because you are not free from those concepts, you lose your freedom. You are

enslaved by it. Nature is the same, but function is different, and that is Buddhist understanding about various existing being. Anyway, we possess everything—possess everything. But difference is something is right with you. Something is beyond my reach right now. That is the difference. But anyway, by nature, everything belongs to you then. By nature, everything is same. It looks like different from one to the other. This is the third precept: "Don't be sexual." [Laughs.]

Fourth one is—[he says the series to himself out loud in Japanese, then comes to the fourth precept]: "Don't tell a lie." You cannot tell a lie.

First four precepts are the nature of human being. It express how human being—how everything exist. It means that everything has buddha-nature and everything is the same, is one. When your mind is clear, you will understand in that way. When your mind is confused, you do not understand those men and women, or something true or something which is not true. That kind of duality doesn't exist.

Dualistic understanding is not good understanding. When we are free from dualistic understanding of precepts or of being, then you understand what is buddha-nature. So we call it *shō-kai*—nature of precepts—nature.

And fifth is, "Don't drink sake." [Laughs.] Japanese people like *sake* a lot. We use *sake*. Don't sell or drink *sake*. Don't be intoxicated by liquor or teaching even. When your practice is not good, you will rely on that or you drink *sake*. It means you are lazy. In San-pachi [See SR-71-07-22V.], [chants in Japanese]: *Ju shin do ho ichijō nan koto nakare*. You shouldn't indulge in...

Student: What?

Drinking *sake*. If you drink *sake*, you have not much worry. [Laughs.] You don't feel you have to practice because you feel good. But that is just temporary, tentative relief. So you shouldn't be involved in *sake*—such a drinking practice. That is destructive.

And the rest of the precepts—we have three more, and the three is not just three—many, many, many. You shouldn't sleep on high bed or something like—you shouldn't use something too beautiful [laughs] on your ears, or on your eyebrows, on your lips, or you shouldn't use too strong incense. [laughter.] Incense has [...] okay.

Many, many precepts, not just there are three. But tentatively we count just three. Four—five—six—seven—eight—six—seven—eight precepts. Six-seven is something like that: Don't sleep in high bed. I am a Zen priest. We sleep on this way—my grandfather used to sleep

[probably gestures, followed by S.R. and students laughing]. It looked like needles [laughs, laughter]. Don't sleep [laughs] on such a grand bed. That kind of precept—so many precepts, but tentatively they come to "Don't sleep in high bed." That is next one, maybe seventh—sixth—seventh. I don't remember. Anyway, something like that.

The last one was very important one. "Don't eat after [laughs]—after twelve, afternoon." That is why John and Jisho, at lunchtime while we are eating before the second service start, we come to the Mañjushrī and take back his flower to the kitchen because he doesn't... That is sad. So maybe I shouldn't... I shouldn't remain like this, but I feel it. Mañjushrī is a spirit of a body of precepts.

[Laughs, laughter.] Excuse me, I need to ask a... I was—I am not...

That is very important—that precept. That is independent precept, and before Buddha set up precepts for Buddhists it is a very important precept are the four precepts which means our Buddha nature. That is our buddha-nature. How to realize buddha-nature. Don't kill; don't steal; don't act with unchaste acts—or that is not literal understanding precepts—don't be sexual, don't tell a lie. Those are very important precepts. But don't eat after twelve means Buddha's or Buddhist activity or Buddha's everyday life. So as long as we put emphasis on our everyday life—not only our ... [Sentence not finished. Tape turned.]

... our everyday life is very important. So that is one independent precept, especially in Theravāda and before Buddhists. Indian people, after finished their household life, they would go to the forest or mountain, and study—religious study, receiving food from people. And as soon as they receive just enough food to eat on that day, came back and eat before noon. And after noon, they didn't eat and practiced hard, and studied pure religious life. That was the Indian people's practice.

But they say do not eat after twelve o'clock means you should keep up with pure religious practice. That is the origin of *takuhatsu* practice. *Takuhatsu*. In that spirit we practice *takuhatsu*. Do you know *takuhatsu*—what is *takuhatsu*? With begging bowl, we go out. And in the morning we—the priests—go out with begging bowl and receive some food and recently money too, and come back.

At Tassajara we have guest season. Guest season is a kind of *takuhatsu*—should be a kind of *takuhatsu*. We help people by our spiritual practice, and they give us material—money. So it is practice of *dāna*—a practice for them and for us too. We give them spiritual truth to them, and they—they give us material resource to us. That is the spirit of our guest season—the extended practice of *takuhatsu*.

But guest cooperation is more complicated than *takuhatsu*. Very similar to city practice or worldly practice. Looks like business.

But if you go out with begging bowl, it is pure Buddhist practice, direct Buddha's practice. Relationship—monks and laymen will be direct practice of *dāna* practice. So you feel as if you are practicing Buddha's way if you are practice *takuhatsu*. And if you practice guest season practice, unless your spirit, your understanding is very good and your spirit is very strong, you will be easily confused. And you will be mixed up—your practice will be mixed up with usual mundane way of life. But you shouldn't be mixed up.

So the last one: Don't eat after noontime is a very good and very important precept. It is a direct expression of Buddha's practice, like *takuhatsu*. Don't observe *takuhatsu*. In one word, it include our everyday life—Buddhist everyday life. Same thing: don't eat after noon, after twelve o'clock, and practice *takuhatsu*, same thing. And this practice has been long, long practice for other Buddhists, even from before Buddha. For spiritual people this is very important practice.

And more and more in Bodhisattva precepts, buddha-nature precepts became more important, and three refuges, and the Three Collective [Pure] Precepts was added. So we have sixteen precepts, three refuges, three treasures. We take refuge in the three treasures, and the Three Collective Pure Precepts. Is that six?

And Ten Grave Prohibitory Precepts. "Prohibitory precepts," we say, but it is the precepts of buddha-nature. So according to Bodhidharma's explanation of precepts—buddha-nature is pure and clear, each precept have, we say, buddha-nature is clean, pure, and clear. And the other words follows when he explained the Ten Grave Precepts. That is Zen precepts or Mahāyāna precepts.

I think I want to continue this lecture. I hope I can finish it tomorrow night. If I couldn't I will continue to extend it to the next lecture. Okay?

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Joan Amaral and Bill Redican (9/27/00). Miyagawa Keishi-san kindly provided assistance with the translation of Japanese terms. Illustrations in Appendix from the Internet. Lightly edited for readability by Gordon Geist (18/4/08).

Appendix:



Dōso-jin along a country road in Japan



Bonfire decorated for the
mochi
Tondo-yaki (Bonfire Festival)



Toasting *dango* or *kagami*-
(round glutenous rice cakes)
on the *tondo* bonfire