

Religious problems concerning psychology or LSD

Sesshin Lecture, Lecture D

Tuesday, July 27, 1965, 1 PM¹

Sokoji, San Francisco

Recently I find many problems concerning religious problems, such as psychology or LSD or the problem of how to bring about complete peace. Those problems are most important problems in the present day. In our system of Zen—I'm not emphasizing philosophy, but when we have discussions, there must be some system for our discussion, otherwise it will [not] result [in] anything. So I just want to present you with some system.

The most important basic construction of culture may be science. Science is very important. But science just studies or treats outward objects, as an object of study. But science will result [in a] materialistic understanding of life. But whether our human being is spiritual or material is a big problem, which has been discussed for a long, long time. We have no conclusion to it yet: are we spiritual or material [laughs]? Our mental function is just an attribute of the body. [Our] spiritual function is basic function for a human being. And this kind of problem is not solved completely.

But anyway, the problems which cannot be solved by science will be solved by the culture of science. So the basic foundation will be science, and next one will be natural science, and next one will be cultural science.

In this science, we discuss about what is truth, what is beauty, what is good, and, if possible, what is holiness. But it is rather difficult to discuss what is holiness—holy nature by cultural science. So the last problem for us is what is holiness? What is holy nature?

This problem will be solved with religion. Our culture has three foundations: natural science, cultural science, and religion. In religion, we discuss also what is our mind, whether it is material or spiritual. It is also our problem for religious study. And, of course, we discuss about what is holy nature. But we treat our mind not as a mind, but as psychology. Psychology is to study our mind as an object of study. "Here is mind, which is universal to everyone. And what is the function of our mind?" This is psychology.

But in religion we study our mind as our own. This is the difference, you know. My own mind—not everyone's mind [laughing]. I don't mind some other's mind, but we do mind my mind [laughter]. That is religion.

So science will bring you some universal truth, which is like a telescope. You will have a vast sight of mind which is universal, as if you see San Francisco from Tamalpais [laughs].² You can see the best sights of San Francisco from Tamalpais. But that kind

of study—of course it helps you, but [laughs] you will not be so interested in the science. The most concerning problem for us is what is mind? [Laughs.] What should I do with myself—with my mind is the most important problem. So, religion only will give you the answer: What should you do with your mind? This kind of mind is the mind we religious people are concerned about very much.

So you should have clear distinction [between] psychology and religion, and from cultural science, and from natural science, or else you will mix yourself up [and] cannot discuss properly. Dogen Zenji had a clear distinction between those kinds of study. Not only Dogen Zenji, but also all Buddhists say there is no inborn sage or natural Shakyamuni Buddha [laughs]. We are all Shakyamuni Buddha, but if you do not practice or if you do not train yourself, you cannot be Shakyamuni Buddha. You have hidden nature, but if you do not realize hidden nature, we cannot be Shakyamuni Buddha. To realize his nature as your own is religion.

Now we want to discuss something. If you have some problem, we want to discuss how to solve the problem. And if you have some question in our religion or what I said, please ask me.

Student A: What do you mean by “Cultural science?” I don't understand. Do you mean, like, philosophy?

SR: Philosophy, and education, ethics—those are culture—sociology, psychology—the culture concerned about mind—our mind, not materialistic side of our life, but spiritual side of and basis of our mind.

Student B: Do you mean “Culture?” in the sense of American culture or French culture or Japanese culture, or do you mean civilization?

SR: Civilization, yes. Not special culture, but culture in—in various countries, which studies the mind.

Student C: What about things like LSD?

SR: [Laughs.] LSD?

Student C: Can it help?

SR: I have no experience of taking LSD, so—but that is not an important problem at all. That is just like a, I think, medicine. So, of course, if you take too much medicine, [laughs]—it will not be good for you. But there is no objection to taking it, I think.

But what I am afraid of is they will mix it up with religion: Zen and LSD [laughs]. There is very, very little relationship—it is quite another matter—another problem. The problem of LSD and problem of religion are quite different matters. But actually, religious people may use it, you know. But, when we discuss something or when we want to figure out the clear idea of LSD, we must make this point clear, or else we

will, have useless discussion. One is going this way, and one is going that way. And they will have no chance to meet [laughs].

Student D: It has to be understood for what it is, you know...

SR: Yes, what it is. It is quite clear—

Student D: —like to criticize the [4-8 words unclear].

SR: —It is a kind of medicine.

Student D: Right.

SR: The study of LSD is the study of science, not religion. What I notice is in America or maybe in Europe too: there is big confusion between religion and other culture.

Student D: In other cultures?

SR: Mm-hmm. In everyday life it must be mixed up. Religion should use various means to help people. But if the leaders of religious movements mix up religion and other culture, it may be awful.

Student D: Where is the line drawn? [1-2 words.]

SR: No, there is no need to draw a line on LSD. You can use it. I'm not talking about "you should not use it" or something like that. How to use it, and who is using it? You are using it [laughs].

Student D: I have used it, but I'm not using it.

SR: But that "you" is a problem, you know? Small "you" or big "You" [Laughs, laughter.]

Student D: I know who is using it.

SR: This is the most important point. If you do not know what is "you," to use something [laughs, laughter] is crazy. So this point is very, very important. And this point is missing. So it is necessary to make this point very, very clear because almost all people mix up many things. So they will waste their time a lot—not only waste of time, but also it is suffering [laughter]. Don't you think so?

Student D: I don't know. I have to think about it....

SR: Some question?

Student E: This morning you—this afternoon³ you said that just the practice of zazen is not so good because you may be practicing for some [1 word]

SR: [Laughs.] Yes

Student E: —I mean, a better [?]-anger or something like that. And then you said, "Then if you do this you will abuse your practice until it is mixed with other practices."

SR: Mm-hmm.

Student E: And—does this mean that at some point, that a serious student maybe has to begin to take some peace from the scriptures, for example, or otherwise he may be in danger of mixing his practice which would, you know, [1 word]. It seems to me you are referring to some kind of true practice—

SR: Yeah.

Student E: —that's in danger—

SR: Danger.

Student E: —I mean the danger of drawing away from it—mixing it all up.

SR: By "danger" I don't mean you will be poisoned or [laughs]—

Student E: No, I mean—

SR: —you will go insane. Not that kind of danger, but you will not understand what is Zen, and you will make a big mistake. So this kind of discussion is very important.

Student E: Well, how do you keep from making the mistake and mixing your practice? [2-3 words.]

SR: You know, you should know that—

Student E: You won't help me, then.

SR: No, no, no, what I mean is, is the purest—most concerning point. What is your inmost request. What will appease your suffering or your agitation [laughs], or irritation. And how you can appease it.

Student F: Dogen Zenji, I think, wiped himself with one hand and used the other hand to light incense—to put incense down. Isn't that correct?

SR: Mm-hmm.

Student F: He said that. If there's no space or time, why would he do that?

SR: "No"space—[laughs]—oh, what did you say, please?

Student F: If there's no space or time, as the Lankavatara Sutra says—

SR: Uh-huh.

Student F: —why would Dogen make a distinction between which hand he would use for which activities?

SR: Oh, I see. This is a good problem—a good question. This is very good [laughs].

“No space or no time” means we think when we say “time” we have an idea of continuity: Time is something continuous, and space is something wide. This is an idea of time and space.

But time is not only continuity. Discontinuity is also time. In the smallest particle of time, you can think in this way: You can form the continuity of time, adding smallest particles of time. This is continuity also. And actually this understanding is better. If so, time is [both] continuous and discontinuous. Do you understand?

You say, “Flowers grow—comes out in one week from “birth.” You know, it is continuously growing. But when you see a flower, you cannot recognize the growing flower. The flower stops growing when you just see. You can't and don't see the movement of the flower. You cannot see even the movement of the hands of the clock. But it is moving. It is like a moving picture. A moving picture is the accumulation of small pictures. One after another those pictures come, and will form some movement.

So that is what he meant: There is no time or no space. No time as you think, and no space as you think. Actual time is continuous and discontinuous. And it is not even time. It is actual growth in the flower—actual—the sun rising from east and setting in west. This is time, actually. So in this sense, he says there is no time or no space. What actually exists is our movement which moves in one whole existence. We are all moving, and there is some uniformity in our moving. That is actual time and space.

So when we do something, when I say something, you are listening. And not only you, but also Buddha will listen [laughs] to me. So in this moment there is no need to say “time” or “space.” When I say something, there is you and there is Buddha. So we must not neglect what I am doing just now, and the relationship between you and I, and I and Buddha.

Instead of emphasizing time and space, he [Dogen] emphasized the actual relationship which exists in this moment—just now. So that is why he is very strict with what we do—how we treat everything. You abuse something because you think that there is some material—some permanent existence. So you abuse it. But actually we cannot abuse anything. If you want to abuse it, it will create a problem for you because there is no such thing which can be abused. Everything is actually—everything is living existence which has no alternative way of expression. When I say

something and you are listening to me, there is no alternative [laughs] expression of yourself. For me, it is so. So it is impossible to abuse something.

But when we idealize something, and when we become attached to the idea of “you” I may abuse you. I may think it is possible to abuse there, but it is not possible. When you do something which is not possible [laughs] you will have problems, that's all. That is why he says there is no time or space. Actually what exists is what you see, or what you do, or what you listen to this moment. So you must not abuse it, or you must not even try to use it. Just respect everything, and just treat everything respectfully. That is our way. Do you understand?

So our way is to do something in a proper time and in a proper way [laughs]. That is Zen, in short. And mind and object is one. Did you understand? This is good question, I think.

Student G: There have been some systems of metaphysics which are not strictly Western philosophy, meaning that they are Eastern, which try to explain and understand our existence not as well as by work as by study, so that we have a particular chemical or physical understanding of any object and of why we do things: for example, why we adopt a proper position, why we keep our back straight. Was there ever a time when Buddhism used explanations like those, or has Buddhism from Shakyamuni on always been disinterested in analysis of things from a physical level?

SR: I think that is why you are interested in Buddhism. You have a good background to understand what is Buddhism. You have very advanced science and various kinds of philosophy. And your achievement is perfect—almost perfect, I think, especially in natural science. This kind of achievement is very meaningful for us Buddhists. But Buddhists will give you another interpretation from another angle in your achievement. We do not change what you have achieved. We believe in your achievement. There is no room to [laughs] ignore scientific truth. The science developed by experiment after experiment and achieved scientific progress. And you will continue this effort.

But that is scientific knowledge. We should know that [laughs]. That is not religious knowledge. Religious knowledge is something different. To give another interpretation to science is religion. To understand science from another angle is religion, without changing the conclusion. We do not doubt scientific truth. We accept scientific truth. But we will give another interpretation to it, without changing the meaning or without changing the conclusion of science.

There are many very famous parables in Buddhism. Water—for fish—water is their home [laughs]. For human beings water is not our home. And for celestial beings water is some palace or something [laughs]. Palace, like Cow Palace⁴ [laughs, laughter]. So for human beings, science is something different [laughs]. For me [laughs], science is something different from the viewpoint of the scientist. That is why even a scientist who has very advanced knowledge in a scientific way, may become very superstitious [laughs]. We know many scientists who are very

superstitious. You may say: “How is it possible for him to believe in such a primitive religion?” But some of them are quite superstitious. Science and his spiritual life are quite different for him. Scientific knowledge and spiritual understanding are quite different: two matters for us. Some questions?

Student H: What criteria do we use for deciding what are the proper things and what the proper ways to do them are?

SR: Proper way? Oh. When you say so, that is a question of ethics. Now I am not talking about ethics, you know. Do you understand? What I can say now is for a person who understands what their mind is, there is no alternative way to take “That is good.” There is no “bad” for us who understand our inmost nature. In the realm of morality there are two ways: good and bad. That is ethics, “which is good?” “Which is good?” and “Which is bad?” So you have to take good instead of bad: That is morality. But that is because you live in a moral realm. But in religious life, there is no alternative. There is just only one way. When you become quite religious, there is no other way than to take one way. Water does not come up; it always comes down.

We Buddhists say, “don't discriminate; there is no good or bad.” So that kind of question is a quite natural question, I think. We do not ignore good or bad. So here you see religion will give life to morality. For religious people it is a pleasure to take good instead of bad. There is no alternative way. But for a moral mind, there are two ways—which is good? And you must have some measure, of value. [Laughs.] How to make this measurement is a big problem [laughs]. The measurement for a woman will not be the measurement for men [laughs]. There is a big problem.

So if there is no religion, you will make an effort to utilize morality, or to make some excuse in what you do. That is [laughs] if there is no religion, that will be your effort—not pure enough, you know. You are just making an excuse because our constitution says like this: “Oh, this is good, and this is bad.” But when it is not convenient, you will not say anything [laughs, laughter]. That is morality. You will abuse morality, and abuse law, and abuse religion. Religion is very handy to use [laughs]. So if you say, “Shakyamuni Buddha says” [laughs, laughter], even a stone will be a medicine. That is the abuse of religion—the abuse of Shakyamuni Buddha. That is not religion at all. I don't know what it is. Not even science [laughs, laughter].

Some questions? We have 15 minutes more.

Student I: In the manual for meditation that you have in the hall, it says “Place your tongue on the roof of your mouth.”

SR: Mm-hmm.

Student I: Why is that?

SR: Usually you are doing like that, but, a beginner will wonder: what should he do with his tongue. When you sit for the first time, your mouth will be full of water

[laughs, laughter]. When your tongue is like this, your mouth will be filled with water. But if your tongue is like this, it's all right. If you do like this, try and see what will happen to your mouth [laughs, laughter]. That is our idea of precepts. If we say "250 precepts," or "500 precepts," you will say, "Oh, my!" [Laughs, laughter.] "What a rigid religion Buddhism is!" But our precepts are something like that. What you are to do—we assure our conduct, by study. What you are intuitively doing is our precepts. We do not force anything on you.

Student J: Sensei, do you think that the yoga practiced by the religious people in India is very close to zazen? Do you know very much about it?

SR: No, I don't want to know it [laughs]. If I know it, I think I must say something, but—[laughs] I am afraid [to say much]. If it is good, it's all right, but—. It is not yoga practice itself, but in what way or for what purpose they practice yoga is a very important point. It is like medicine, you know. If you take it in a proper way, it is all right, but if you rely on it too much—. So yoga practice is not the only way [laughs] to help you. We should know that, I think.

More questions?

Student K: The book *The Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* by the Lama Anagarika Govinda⁵ compares point-by-point Hindu yoga with zazen posture—not going into all the special postures—Hindu yoga with Buddhist yoga. And he comes to the conclusion the whole reason one does it is quite different and the background is quite different, and you end up with something quite different.

SR: Yeah. I think so. Maybe. That is Buddhism. The background or idea.

Student L: How could there be two truths?

SR: Huh?

Student L: How could there be two truths—how could there be two reasons?

Student M: [Apparently to Student L.] What are you talking about?

SR: Two reasons?

Student L: Yeah, two reasons: the reason for this and the reason for that.

SR: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Student L: There's a difference [?]

SR: In philosophical, you know, study there is always antithesis?

Student: Antithesis.

SR: Antithesis. [A few words off-mike with students.] Uh-huh. It is inevitable in philosophical study.

Student L: The appearance, yeah, that's the appearance.

SR: Uh-huh.

Student L: That's the truth.

SR: There is always paradox in philosophical study. It cannot be helped. And there is truth where there is paradox. There is truth if you have eyes to see [laughs]. But as long as you are confined in philosophical study you have no eyes to see through the paradox. Philosophy is good because it is paradoxical. So we Buddhists use paradoxical expressions. It should be paradoxical, so we apply paradoxical expressions as philosophers do. And we do not think that is paradoxical.

We have one week for discussion, so [laughs, laughter] it may be better to finish today our discussion now.

¹ According to a note in Wind Bell (1965, IV, No. 4, p. 1), this seven-day sesshin began at 5:45 am, Monday, July 26, 1965.

² Mt. Tamalpais (2571 ft), a mountain just north of San Francisco in Marin County with a panoramic view of the Bay Area.

³ "Just practice is not so good, because you may practice zazen for sake of something. You will abuse your Zen practice until you mix pure practice with various fancy or wrong practice."—SR-65-07-26-A.

⁴ A large convention arena in Daly City, just south of San Francisco.

⁵ 1898–1985.

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Bill Redican (6/14/01). Lightly edited for readability by Sally Harris Sange, Danny Parker, Peter Ford, and David Chadwick (8/2020).