

think everything out

Monday, August 15, 1966, Lecture C
Sokoji, San Francisco

It is necessary for us to think everything out, or else we find it pretty difficult to have a firm conviction in our understanding and practice of Zen. Originally Zen is not a practice based on some particular intellectual teaching or understanding. But, Buddhism is one of the religions which is highly intellectualized. So for us, especially for those of us who are very intellectual, and even those of us not so highly intellectual, what you read and what you hear is based on some highly intellectualized thought.

So, what we talk about, what we read, is based on some intellectual deep understanding of our life and everything. It is necessary for us to have some intellectual understanding of Buddhism. Before we read Shobogenzo, intellectual understanding is necessary because [Dogen's] teaching is very, very intellectual. It is pretty hard for us to understand without any intellectual understanding. That is why I have to continue this kind of talk.

Yesterday¹ I talked about the Buddhist psychology of eight consciousnesses: what are the five sense organs, and sense data, and sensations, and what is mind, and what is the faculty of the mind which makes us make many mistakes. And, what is the innermost mind which is universal to everyone. And, these eight consciousnesses are not just what we see, or what we hear, or what we understand. It is the innermost origin of every existence—physical and spiritual, subjective and objective. But, I did not talk about the innermost origin of every existence.

And next was holy nature in an ordinary sense. The holy nature is something which is always constant and in eternal existence—which is completely different from the usual existence which we see, or which we hear, or which we think. It is a kind of thinking faculty based on our holy nature. This is the usual understanding of divine nature.

And I talked about our functions of mind in different ways: the most subtle, delicate functions of our mind, and more vivid functions of mind. There are three subtle functions of mind. The first one is the so-called “slightest movement of the mind,” which is called sometimes ignorance. When our mind makes the slightest movement, at the same time we have subjectivity or objectivity of the mind. Those are the subtle functions of our mind. Usually we are not aware of those three functions.

The more vivid functions are to like or dislike. And, we have an idea of continuity of mind. This mind creates the idea of self—“I exist here.” This is actually the idea of continuity of mind. If continuity of the mind takes place, we will be attached to what we see. This is attachment, the third one of the latter six.

The fourth one is terminological conceptions. We put many labels on our ideas: “This is Buddhism, this is astrology, this is communism, this is capitalism” [laughs]. Those are labels. But, although those conceptions are supposed to be pure conceptions, actually those conceptions are firmly rooted in continuity of mind or attachment. It is almost impossible to separate a terminological conception from attachment or continuity of mind, which is selfish mind or a dualistic faculty of mind, which is like or dislike, or good or bad, right or wrong.

So, we can talk about pure conception, but actually there is no pure conception. And furthermore, we put those conceptions, that are firmly rooted in selfish attachment, into actual action. That is why we have suffering, we have confusion in our world. So the fifth one is karmic action. The last one is suffering. Why we suffer is because of our structure of the mind—the mind function consists of those elements. This is another interpretation of our life.

And, today I want to talk about the theory of cause and effect, or causation. The most important teaching of Buddhism is causation. This is very important. If you do something good, you will have a good result. This kind of idea or teaching is pretty important for us.

But, if you carelessly accept this teaching, your understanding will not be our understanding because you will make the same mistake as some heretics do. When you say, “If you do something good, you will have a bad result,” the idea of “you” is here. If you do something good, you will receive some bad result. So, there is what you do, and you yourself. And, you is always constant, and what you do is different and not bound. So here you have an idea of permanency of the mind and an idea of impermanency of the objective world. For us this is not right understanding. This is so-called Senni-gedo's² view of life.

So, when you accept this teaching of causation, it is necessary for you to have a deeper understanding of what is time, and what is various existence, and how everything exists in this world. Things form this world. In this world [laughs]—I am sorry this is so [laughs] sober [laughs]. Not so interesting, but please listen to me [laughs, laughter]. Things are forming one world by acting on each other. You are acting on each other. It means, you say you are things acting on each other, but if you carefully think, this acting on each other means there is no more you or [laughs] others when you are acting on each other. By acting on each other, you lose your character, and others lose their character too. You cannot retain the same character when you are acting with each other. This point is very important. You say when you do something good, the result will be good. When you do something good, it means acting on each other. You are acting on something else. And something else is actually acting on yourself too.

Then, what will happen to you? There is no more constant you, and there is no more constant others. Others may change, and you will change. This is the fundamental teaching of Buddhism: Everything changes moment after moment. Everything changes from formed to the forming. In the next moment something formed will change into something forming [laughs]. This is a fundamental teaching of Buddhism. When you believe in causality, you should not forget this point. Then you will have a perfect understanding of causality.

And, the next point, which is very important for you in believing in causality, is that causality takes place on some particular life. Moral, good action will create a moral, good result. Material good will result in a material good result. If you save money, you will have a lot of money [laughs, laughter]. But even though you save money, you cannot be a wise man [laughs]. But sometimes you make this kind of mistake. If you offer \$100 to church [laughs], what will happen to you? You know, you will lose \$100 [laughs, laughter]. The church will get \$100. That is material cause and effect. But, the mentality or your spirit that donates \$100, will result in religious good.

So, this kind of clear understanding is very important. If you are not sure about this point, you will make many mistakes believing in religion. You will mix up religious life and ordinary life. Religious life is religious life, and ordinary life is ordinary life. You should not get them mixed up. But unfortunately, we mix up religious life with something else. But, as I shall tell you, religious life through and through will result in various results in various fields.

A Japanese philosopher³ condensed this way of thinking in this way:⁴

Things forming one world, by acting on each other, means that they are thought of as parts of one world. But for instance, things acting on each other in space means that things have a spatial character.⁵ When it comes to “space” in the exact sense of physics, “forces” are thought of as changes in space.

When things act on each other, it means no more each existence. It is replaced by force which is changing always. Modern science will tell you this truth. And, even an atom is not material. It is force. It is energy, just energy. It has no weight and occupies no space. It is just force. But, it means that when things are thought of as parts of one whole:⁶

When many things are supposed to be a part of one whole, it means that the concept of acting on each other is lost.

When you definitely say, “Here is many things,” it means that the concept of acting on each other is lost. When you say, “I am here and you are there,” technically the concept of relationship is lost—the concept of acting on each other is lost.

Second, the world becomes static. Three, reality is lost.

It is not reality any more if you have a definite idea of each existence. There is no more reality. That is not real. Actually everything is acting on each other.

The world of reality is essentially a world of mutual determination of single beings.

Mutual determination of single beings.⁷

Such a world essentially moves from the formed to the forming.

The most famous contemporary Japanese philosopher is Nishida.⁸ Do you know Nishida? He always sits in meditation, and thinks, and thinks, and thinks. And, sometimes he just practices *shikantaza*—just to sit is *shikantaza*—and created a marvelous philosophy. His philosophy accords with Buddhist philosophy completely. Of course he must have studied Shobogenzo and other Buddhist philosophy. This kind of understanding is necessary when you try to understand what Dogen Zenji said.

In the Rinzai school, always students work on koans. Those are actually koans for you. The purpose of a koan is to work it out. It is not just for concentration. It is not just a means of concentration. If you pass one koan, it means you have passed the rest of the koans. So it takes a pretty long time to pass one koan.

Enlightenment means many things, you know. “I attained enlightenment,” you may say, but perfect enlightenment is quite different. There is a great difference between kensho and perfect enlightenment. Just to see your true nature when you understand—a little bit more than your usual understanding, that is so-called kensho. You took a glance at your true nature. That’s all [laughs]. So, this experience is the experience in terms of consciousness. It is not intuition. You know what it is. You saw something. You experienced something, and you believe in something that is true. That is true experience.

But the experience is just for a few moments [laughs]. That is not perfect enlightenment. When you attain perfect enlightenment, after attaining enlightenment, you have to work on it for many years or sometimes maybe the rest of your life. This is how you study Buddhism.

Here are many interesting words. “To put a head upon a head,” “Mistake over mistakes.” “Ivy and vine over ivy and vine.”⁹

“To put a head upon a head”—What do you think it means? It is a kind of riddle [laughs]. “To put a head upon a head” [laughs].

You try to understand something. It means you are trying to put one more head upon your head. There is no need for you to study anything because you exist in the way you should exist always. But, you forget all about your head [laughs]. So, the moment you see some good head, you think “Oh, that is my head!” [laughs, laughter]. You try to put [laughs] some beautiful head upon your head. But that is not possible. To find your head is our way. Intellectual understanding of Buddhism is to put a head upon your head [laughs].

But, this kind of teaching we study is not to put a head upon a head. It looks like intellectual understanding, but if you study those teachings, you will find out how useless it is to put a head upon your head. But for the people who do not realize that you have your own head always, it is necessary to tell them you have your head [laughs]. This is why we study those teachings or Shobogenzo.

And Dogen Zenji was disgusted with people who have many heads [laughs]—not only one head but also many and many heads: fame, profit, names, and ranks, and popularity, health, wealth [laughs]. They want many heads. So, he was disgusted with people. He told them you are trying to have this kind of head and another kind of head. But it is useless. The best way is to find your own head which you have. This is why Dogen Zenji left Shobogenzo for us. But, for the people who are so busy in finding their many heads, it is almost impossible to find their own heads. So, he thought it may be better not to try too hard to tell them, “You have your own head,” because they are too busy.

So, someday, someone will understand my teaching. And someone will find his own head. But, this is not the appropriate time for people to find their head. If you study Japanese history—you know what kind of life Japanese people had at that time. So, I want you just to understand—my talk is just to make you realize—how useless it is to devote yourself to just material life. Or to devote yourself to build up some big ego. This is quite useless for us. When we find out what we have within ourselves, all the rest of the treasure is ours.

“Mistake over mistakes.” Mistake over mistakes means that we are always making mistakes, and we are developing our mistakes without knowing what we are doing.

“Ivy and vine over ivy and vine.” This is also to find out various useless understandings of religion.

But, he used those words in the opposite sense. Where he used these words, for instance, “to put a head upon a head,” means to use one head in various ways [laughs]. Although you don't put a head upon a head, you use your head in various ways. If you realize what your head is, you can use it as if you have many heads. So “to put a head upon a head” for him means to use your original head.

“Mistakes over mistakes” is to express the true way in various ways. Why we call it a mistake is because we do not attach to something which we do. Tentatively it is right, but the next moment it may be a mistake. So after you did it: “Oh, that was my mistake. Excuse me [laughs]. I will do it better next time.” And, you may say, “Oh, that was a mistake too. This time I will make it right.”

So, this is the way we should do. “Mistake over mistake” is right. “Right thing after right thing” is wrong. You are forcing something on others. “This is right. You should obey [laughs] me.” “This is not completely true”—right. Tentatively: “Excuse me I have a favor to ask you. Please help me.” That is all right. But it should not be complete. When you say, “This is right,” that is wrong [laughs].

So, he said “mistake over mistakes.” This is right.

“Ivy and vine over ivy and vine.” This is how we act on each other. It is not so simple. We should be prepared for the hard work we will have. We should be always prepared—we should have a

firm conviction to work it out. But, the way should be little by little, step by step. If you want to do it with a hasty mind, you cannot do anything. So, to find out “ivy over ivy” is the right way, right observation. Usually we prefer an easy way—simple way. But that means you are not sincere enough.

So, we should be always prepared for those ultimate facts. Whatever you say, this is true. Dogen Zenji always used these stock words in an opposite way. So he said, “You should pile up ivy over ivy,” when usually people would say, “Don't pile up ivy over ivy.” When people say, “Do things correctly,” Dogen Zenji says, “You should do mistake over mistake” [laughs]. That is right.

“To put a head upon a head” means “to turn one's own face to one's own core.” Maybe in English it is quite different, but in Japanese both ways are possible. “To turn your face to your own core.” You know, to do like this. This means to have two or three or more heads [laughs]. Sometimes you will try, sometimes it is too much. This should be the way. You should not attach to some holy expression of yourself [laughs]. This is not right.

This kind of preparation is necessary when you try to understand what Dogen Zenji said in the fascicle of [Shobogenzo] “*Sokushin Zebutsu*.” “*Sokushin Zebutsu*” means “Mind Itself Is Buddha.” This is maybe rather hard—this is maybe a pretty unfamiliar way of thinking—but we have too many concrete ideas. So our mind does not work properly. So, it is necessary to cut off those concrete ideas when you want to study, when you work out, or when you think out.

But the proper way of practice is just to practice, and teaching is next. Practice is first. Teaching is next. Instruction or lecture is last [laughs]. But some accommodations [laughs] may be necessary. I have to accommodate your way [1 word], as Dogen Zenji did. But his way of accommodation is quite strict [laughs]. And so we have to be prepared for his strict understanding of things.

Thank you very much.

[Tape stopped and restarted.]

It's hard. It is five past two. But the schedule says “Zazen from two o'clock.” But we will have five minutes' rest.

¹SR-66-08-14.

² Senni-gedo (Jap.): Senni (Senika) + gedo (non-Buddhist). An Indian non-Buddhist school led by Senika in Shakyamuni Buddha's time. It held that the body is perishable, but one's divine nature (atman) was imperishable.

³ Nishida Kitaro (1870-1945), an important 20th-century Japanese philosopher. (See also SR-66-05-26.)

⁴ Suzuki is paraphrasing the second paragraph of Nishida's "The Unity of Opposites," in Kitaro Nishida: Intelligibility and the Philosophy of Nothingness, Honolulu: East-West Press, 1958, p. 163.

⁵ Should read: "... things have a spatial character." [Suzuki said "... things have no spatial character.]

⁶ Suzuki-roshi is paraphrasing the third paragraph: "But when things are thought as parts of one whole, it means that the concept of acting things is lost, that the world becomes static and that reality is lost. The world of reality is essentially the one as well as the many; it is essentially a world of the mutual determination of single beings."

⁷ The fifth paragraph: "Such a world essentially moves from the formed, the product, to the forming, the creative production."

⁸ Nishida Kitaro (1870-1945), an important 20th-century Japanese philosopher. Suzuki-roshi entered Komazawa University, Tokyo, in 1926, at a time when Nishida Kitaro was widely read. (See also SR-66-05-26.)

⁹ Suzuki-roshi pronounced it "vein," but he is probably referring to a vine, as in Dogen's Shobogenzo "Katto": "Branches or fruit are both dependent on and independent of vines and ivy" (revised from Yuho Yokoi, The Japanese English Zen Buddhist Dictionary, p. 108).

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