

The Need for Training in Buddhism without Self-Seeking Mind

December 17, 1966

DECEMBER ONE-DAY SESSHIN LECTURE: Saturday Evening

Lecture B

The fourth instruction is:¹

The Need for Training in Buddhism without Self-Seeking Mind

In Buddhist training we always received the true Key handed down by our predecessors. How can we use our selfish mind for this? We cannot gain Buddhism with mind or without mind. Just remember that if the training will and the Buddhist way do not combine, our body and mind are not calm. If not calm, our body and mind are not comfortable.

If we have a gaining idea, we cannot practice Buddhism, which is something beyond our ordinary purpose of life. Usually our conscious activity is directed towards some merit or some result. We are expecting a result, whatever we do. But there may be a difference--there may be two cases: one you expect a result after doing something, and you expect the result within your activity. There may be two cases. To practice zazen because of the interest in practicing zazen is also, strictly speaking, a gaining idea. Of course, to expect something after your practice, this is of course a gaining idea. "If you practice zazen you will be healthy," or "You will have some mystic power like some magic." This, of course, is not Zen.

Maybe you will attain some result. But, we do not practice for the sake of the wonderful result we will have. But it does not mean that zazen practice has no advantages. It has some--it will result in something good for you, actually [laughs], but we do not practice it for the sake of the result we will have. And, we should be ashamed to practice Zen--to practice religious practice with a gaining idea.

A gaining idea usually limits our meaning of practice. Our practice has limitless meaning in it. So that is why Zen has eternal life in it. Because if Zen is some practice directed towards some particular result, it will be the practice which you have in your everyday life. And why Zen helps us in its true sense is because it will cut off the root of the problems we have. If you know how to practice zazen, you will know how to cut off your root of suffering--root of trouble. That is why our practice is valuable.

So, the most important thing is to practice zazen in its true sense, in the transmitted way from Buddha to us. In Buddhism or in Zen, we have had various problems to discuss. But after all, we came to the conclusion that this practice is the most fundamental practice for understanding of the profound meaning of Buddhism.

In Buddhist training we always receive the true Key handed down by our patriarchs. How can we use our selfish mind for this? We cannot gain Buddhism with mind or without mind.

“With mind or without mind” means--even though you say “without mind,” still you have a gaining idea. So he says “with mind or without mind.” It is not a matter of how to understand Buddhism by mind, or if it is without mind, by what mind we can gain the [1-2 words]. This kind of question will follow one after another.

So, our way is to practice zazen as our way transmitted from Buddha. Here we want absolute surrender. Before this absolute surrender comes to you, it is not possible to practice zazen in its true sense. We do not ask why. We do not wonder the result of the practice. Whether we have the result or not is not the question. But, the most obvious thing--the ultimate part is that you are here as a follower of Buddhism. So, as a follower of Buddhism, you should practice the [taps twice, possibly on the tan to indicate zazen]--that's all. There is no reason.

If you are not a Buddhist, maybe there will be no need for you [laughs] to practice zazen. Because you are here you have to do it, that's all [laughs]. Quite simple. Even though you are very tired, you are right here. So as long as you are here, you should listen to me. “Oh, you should practice zazen. That's all.”

So if tea comes, you should drink tea. If you have cake, you should eat cake. [Laughs.] That's all. That is exactly how we exist in this world. This is how everything exists here. This is zazen. So even if you do not enjoy the experience of Zen, Zen is Zen. So, to practice zazen is also the goal of practice, whether it is joyous or not joyous. It is the goal of practice. There is no other goal.

So, our goal is not somewhere, within reach or beyond our reach. Our goal does not exist in our practice. You think you sit because you will have some joy in your practice. That is why you sit, you may say. And actually, because you have some joy, you sit [laughs]. But even if you do not feel any joy, you have to sit [laughs]. That is what he [Dogen] is saying. So there is no problem [laughs, laughter]. This is how to cut off the root of the problem.

You may say, then, whatever you do, that may be Zen [laughing]. So, there will be no need for you to sit. Even if you do not sit, to have breakfast, to sleep, to go to bed is also zazen. If so, there will be no need for you to sit in cross-legged position all day long. [Laughs, laughter.] “It may be a waste of time”--you may say so. But actually, fortunately or unfortunately, you are here. It is too late [laughs, laughter] to say so.

And if you sit and--our practice is not-- moreover, our practice is not just to sit. Whatever you do, that is zazen. Why? Because you know what is the true meaning of Zen. So for you, whatever you do, that is zazen [laughs]. But for people who do not know what is zazen, even if it is actually zazen, but for the people who do not know what is zazen, that is not Zen for him only. But for us, whatever they do, that is zazen. We understand that, as you understand-- whatever you do that is zazen. So whatever others do, that is also zazen. This is our understanding of zazen.

So by selfish mind, or with mind or without mind, we cannot gain our way.

Just remember that if the training will and Buddhist way do not combine, our body and mind are not calm.

If you do not practice with this understanding, your mind will not be calm.

If not calm, our body and mind are not comfortable.

So when you have some doubt or problem, you should consider whether your understanding of life is right or wrong. The absolute, ultimate teaching is always like this. For instance, everyone has buddha-nature, we say. But you cannot say because everyone has buddha-nature, therefore [laughs] you--everyone has buddha-nature, therefore or because. If you limit the meaning of the statement, putting "therefore" or "because" [laughs], that is not the ultimate truth. But when you understand it, you put "because" or "therefore." You say, "everyone has buddha-nature, therefore [laughs] there will be no difference whether we practice zazen or not." You limit the original meaning of the statement by putting "therefore." You use the statement for your own excuse [laughs]. Everyone has buddha-nature. Period. That is how to listen to the ultimate truth. There is no room for the statement, to accept your reasoning.

Then your body--your being and your mind will combine. It does not mean to force something on you. To see you yourself as you are--that is the perfect combination of body and mind. This is the perfect calmness of your mind.

What should we do to couple the training will with the Buddhist way? Our mind neither clings nor forsakes. The mind is free from fame and profit.

"Training will with Buddhist way." Our training will must not be the usual training will which you do for some purpose--which you do by means of something.

Our mind neither clings nor forsakes. The mind is free from fame and profit.

We do not train in Buddhism for others. Like most people these days, the mind of the Buddhist trainee is quite far from the way. He practices what others praise, although he knows that it is false. He does not practice what others scorn, although he knows that it is the true way. This is indeed a cause for regret.

Usually people practice for the sake of profit or fame, even though he himself knows that isn't right. He emphasizes this point very much.

When viewed objectively, this hardly seems the proper use of the true Buddhist mind. The penetrating eyes of Buddhas and patriarchs illuminated egolessness--egolessly. We should emulate them.

This kind of way of practice is not proper, they know. But because they do not know what is Buddhism or because they do not even expect some better way, they are doomed in those useless ways. So they are just caught by the fame and profit, and practice zazen.

Buddhist trainees do very little for themselves. How can they do anything for fame and profit? They must train in Buddhism only for Buddhism. The various Buddhas, feeling deep compassion for all beings, do nothing for themselves or for others. They merely act for Buddhism. This is the Buddhist tradition.

Buddhist trainees usually do very little for themselves. How can they do anything for fame and profit?

They do not know how to save themselves, and so they do very little for themselves.

How can they do anything for fame and profit?

They say "fame and profit," but how can they do it? They are just trying to do so, but it will not work.

They must train in Buddhism only for Buddhism.

Buddhism is for the sake of Buddhism, not for others or not for themselves: just to follow our way is our traditional way.

The various Buddhas, feeling deep compassion for all beings, do nothing for themselves or for others. They merely act for Buddhism. This is the Buddhist tradition.

In Buddhism, in our practice, there is no idea--no different idea, or no dualistic idea for ourselves or for others. We just do it--practice it for the sake of Buddhism.

They merely act for Buddhism. This is the Buddhist tradition.

Observe how even insects and animals nurse their young and bear hardship to bring them up. When the young reach maturity, the parents seek no profit.

This is our way.

Compassion for the young is strong even among tiny living creatures. Likewise, the various Buddhas have a natural compassion for living beings. The teaching of the Buddhas are not limited to compassion. They are expressed universally in many facets. This is the basic spirit of Buddhism.

So we say "compassion" or "Buddhism," but actually for true Buddhism there is no name--no

name of Buddha or no name of compassion or mercy. By those names we just limit the true meaning of compassion or Buddha. If so, the only way to grasp the true meaning of the word is just practice it without any gaining idea before we know what it is, just as a bird or animal raise their babies up. This is how to study Buddhism in its true, strict sense.

Today I think our practice may not be so good because I myself could not devote myself to the practice thoroughly. But I think we have reached some stage where we can practice the true way. At least, even though quite few, some of us understand this is the true way, and this is how to live in this world in its true sense. Even though it looks like a strange way to understand our meaning of life, it is not.

We have had [will have] a very difficult time before we reach this understanding: the understanding where there is no problem of attainment, where there is no problem of distinction between religion in its true sense, where we can find the advantages in various religions. And people say nowadays we are busy, but to have a fine chance to sit here in this way is very valuable. This is a very rare opportunity. We should not waste this rare opportunity to practice religion.

Thank you very much.

¹ Suzuki is reading and commenting on Section 4 of Points to Watch in Buddhist Training (Gakudo-yojin-shu), a fascicle written by Dogen in 1234, in Reiho Masunaga (Ed. And Trans.), Zen for Daily Living, Tokyo, Shunjusha Publishing, 1964, pp. 56–72.

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