

you must give up worldly desires

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Sesshin Lecture A

San Francisco

¹ ...I want to give some important points. First of all, when you want to study Buddhism or Zen, you must give up worldly desires or you must realize that it is useless to seek worldly desires. But, it may be rather difficult to realize that it is foolish to seek worldly desires.

Sometimes, people mix up religious way-seeking mind and worldly desires. They think they are seeking religious truth, but actually they are seeking worldly desires in the name of religion. Religious sentiment is quite different from worldly desires. By "worldly desires" I mean to seek fame or profit. To seek fame or profit, this kind of desire is very much like, in some points, religious desire.

If you understand something about Buddhist philosophy or the deep teaching of Buddhism, you may be very proud to have some profound unusual understanding of life or view of life, while others foolishly study something which is not so deep or profound. You may say: "You are wrong. My understanding is right. Look here, Buddha says so-and-so. This is the true understanding of life." But, reflect on your mind when you say so. In your mind there is just pride, and no mercy, or no kindness in your mind. You are just proud of something, that's all. Whatever you say, that is out of the question. You should reflect on your mind. So, in this case you are mixing up the study of Buddhism and worldly attainment.

If you study Buddhism people naturally respect you. And, if you say something unusual, people may say, "He is very great." And, if you practice Zen quite well, people will respect you. But, in this case, in this situation, what kind of feeling you have is the point. If you are very proud of yourself, that is wrong. You are not studying Buddhism. And, if you are too proud of your understanding or your practice, eventually people will get tired of seeing you [laughs, laughter]. Then you will be very much discouraged. "But I am studying [laughs] Zen [laughs]." That's very foolish.

So without knowing how to study Buddhism you cannot study Buddhism. This is why we practice zazen with a group in this way. You can practice zazen alone pretty well, but there are many dangers, and there are many pitfalls in such practice. You will easily fall into the pitfalls of that practice. But, if you practice in this way, it is very difficult to be lost. Everyone is watching you besides yourself. Of course, in our practice we are very careful with ourselves. And so, this is pretty good, but even though you think you are very careful, actually people know you more than yourself. If you want to know about yourself, ask people what they say. You will find out quite easily what kind of person you are.

You may say people have a misunderstanding [laughs], but that is just an excuse. You think

people misunderstand you, but we exist in the world of interdependency. So, we cannot separate it from the meaning of our existence—cannot be understood as something separate from others. So, we have to study ourselves as a mirror of the people. And, if your understanding of yourself and others' understanding of yourself does not accord, you have to think.

In short, it is more safe to have very little desire in your study. Don't try to achieve something great. Don't try to study something profound. Just study about yourself in your everyday life. Then you will not make much mistake in your study. When you intend something great, your practice will not be so good. In your desperate condition, you have to study. You have to accept the situation you are in, and you should think this is the best occasion to practice—to study yourself or to study Buddhism.

So, when you practice zazen with people—I mean by “practice” not only zazen practice but also cleaning or work—we call it *samu*.² In *samu*, or in your zazen practice, or in observation of rituals, you should try to work on something difficult, or something which people do not like to do. Usually, if you are in the position of teacher, you will be very happy. But to study Buddhism as a disciple always will [laughs] not be so good. But, you should think, which is better: to be a teacher or to be a disciple? When you feel something good, there is some danger. Or you will be lost in your practice. So, if you want to practice, or if you realize how difficult it is to practice Zen in its true sense, you should rather prefer to work on something which people will ignore or will not like.

Dogen Zenji established the Kosho temple near Kyoto when he was thirty-four. He said:

Only the people who already gave up fame and profit can enter this monastery. Students who have no sincere way-seeking mind cannot enter this monastery. If you enter this monastery with the idea of name and profit by mistake, you should go out. If you have true way-seeking mind, you will not have any idea of name and profit.

In the world—in the various worlds—there are not many true teachers. In this country from ancient times, this temple may be the source of true Buddhism. Because I pity my descendants I will practice—I will emphasize this point especially. The students in this monastery should be like milk and water—should be harmonious, should be friendly like milk and water. And you should practice our way. For a while we are master and disciple. But we are friends forever. And, you are Buddha and patriarchs. We are all Buddha and patriarchs. We are practicing their way of Buddhism, and we are meeting with the true dharma.

You should not forget true way-seeking mind. True way-seeking mind is Buddha's mind and body. And, with it you will be Buddha. You renounced your home and your village, and you are with cloud and water. Who helps you? Usually your parents are the most great helpers, but the more helpful one is Buddha. The more helpful one is your friend and the friend of Buddhism.

Don't go wandering about or sightseeing. If it is necessary, once a month will be allowed. Ancient people lived in the mountains or remote woods and practiced our way, giving up all worldly affairs and giving up their learning and its virtues. And, they sincerely strived for extinguishing the fire in their head. Recollecting those things, we should not be involved in worldly affairs. If we are involved in it, we should be very ashamed of it. In this evanescence of life, we don't know when our life drops like dew on the roadside.

These three points are the most important points. Dogen wrote some more points, but those points are very important. I don't say we should observe those words of Dogen literally right now, but why we study Buddhism will be understood by those instructions.

Those points are the most difficult points for American people. You know, you are very ambitious, and you are trying to do something good always, and try to be successful [laughs] always, without knowing the true meaning of it. So even though you come here and study Buddhism, to me you are going the other direction [laughs]. It looks like that. I hope this is my misunderstanding, but I am very sorry, more and more [laughs] I find you going in the other direction.

For an American maybe it is not bad, but for a Buddhist it is not so good. So, that is why I say you should know what you are doing. Your idea of Buddhism is something in the clouds, [laughs], where you cannot reach. And, still you are ambitious people with a big stick [laughs, laughter], and reach for that. But that is not our way.

Our way is just to stand on the ground [laughs] and step by step to go forward. Sometimes we may go sideways [laughs], but as long as your feet are on the ground it may be pretty good.

So, we admire a cow, which cannot even run. They are very slow [laughs]. A cow is our good example. Do you know the pictures of instruction of ten cows [ox herding pictures]? Because it goes very slow on the ground. You shouldn't try to be a dragon that flies in the sky. If you want to be a hero [laughs], hero of the commonest people, you should not try to control people or to give some big influence to others.

Here in this country some other kind of hero is necessary. We have too many heroes, so I don't think you want heroes like Napoleon or like some statesman. You should be a pioneer, to the other direction. You should be a pioneer in its true sense. If you have some [?], the [?] should be directed toward the right direction.

Before, many ambitious people took a world trip. But now who takes a world trip, spending much money? [Laughs.] This is ridiculous, you know. In this situation, to stay in one place always is the same as to make a world trip. Not much difference. If you stay in San Francisco, you will meet various people without going anywhere because they will pass through San Francisco. Whenever they come to San Francisco airport, they may come and visit you [laughs],

laughter]. There is no need for you to go around. We are all going in another direction.

My father was a priest. My father passed away a long, long time ago. His friend who was a priest stayed only at one temple, but he had many good friends. He is a kind of exception, but there is some truth in his way. So, try not to study Buddhism in your pleasure. And choose your way in some common and plain world. There, there are true pleasures of life, and eternal truth is there.

In your sitting, if you have this kind of confidence, you will understand many things which is quite different from the understanding you will have by some other ways of study. You can do many things, but without realizing this point, to do it means nothing. That is why we practice zazen. What I mean is to change your direction of study. I do not say, “Don't do this,” or “Don't do that.” But, we have to study Buddhism a different way from your ordinary way of studying, or else Buddhism will be just an interesting philosophy.

[May be responding to a question not heard on the recording, which had been stopped for an indeterminate period.]

Hmm? Oh. Love for another person? Worldly desires? Yeah, sometimes. Or most of the time it may be so [laughs]. But true love is the same as Buddha's teaching. Something which is very exciting—will have many things involved in it, so you have to know which is the most basic element of the love. Love may be like a beautiful building, very beautiful. But if the foundation is not good, it will not last long. So, you should find out what kind of foundation is necessary for the building of love.

You have to study about love. Usually, you study love in comparison to something, some other thing—or hatred. And, to feel resistance, to build resistance to war or something is love. You may understand this way. This is a very realistic understanding, and it will not reach to the bottom of the meaning. So forget all about it, and intuitively study it.

To attain liberation even from yourself is important. This is why we sit with firm conviction. Whatever people may say, don't be bothered by it. And watch yourself, whether you have true love or not. That is how to study what is love. So, usually if someone says “white,” you may say “black” [laughs]. This is quite a usual thing. If someone says, “white” you may say “black.” We have this kind of tendency. And, we have this kind of understanding always. It means you will have no freedom from it. To imitate or to follow others may be foolish. But, to feel resistance is also foolish. So, don't be caught by words. And, rely on your intuitive direct experience. That is the important thing.

All desires are not worldly desires if you have this point. But, if you do not have the foundation, even a beautiful building is not true love. Don't be caught by the fanciness of the world or techniques of the world. We have various natures, so psychologists or religious leaders study our nature and organize big [laughs] organizations—and you will be captivated by them if you are not wise enough to know yourselves.

The hero in the Meiji Period, Saigo Nanshu,³ said: “It is difficult to manage someone who does not want fame or profit.” [Laughs.] It is very difficult to manage people like that. But, “The most trustworthy person is the person who has nothing to do with name or profit.” He is the most trustworthy person, he said. That is very true. All right? [Laughs.]

A Zen master may say: “What you say is right, but what you mean is not right” [laughs]. What you say is right, but what you mean is not right [laughs]. So, “Under many scolding slaps, you should study.” [Laughs.] What, do they mean [laughs]?

As we are a big group now, so [laughs] we must be very strict with ourselves. Okay? We have not much candy [laughs]. You are too many, so [laughs] instead of candy we have to give you some salt so that [laughs, laughter] we have not many difficulties. If we serve just salt, not many people will come [laughs, laughter]. We have no more candy. Now let's sit without candy [laughs, laughter].

Thank you very much.

¹ The opening words were not recorded on tape.

² *samu* (Jap.): Physical labor around a temple: sweeping the grounds, gathering firewood, etc.

³ Saigō Takamori (literary name Nanshū): 1827–1877. A popular leader in the overthrow of the Tokugawa Shogunate and in the restoration of the Emperor Meiji. He was trained in both Zen Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism.

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