

68-11-12 [68-10-12-A]

November 12, 1968  
Shikan-taza, Tenryu's One Finger  
Sokoji, sesshin

I want to explain our way of zazen. You know the famous story of Gutei. When Tenryu held up one finger, Gutei attained enlightenment. What do you think of this one finger? When Gutei was pretty old, he said, "I received Tenryu's one finger, which I have been using for my life-time." What do you think this is?

I'll tell you another story. One day Yakusan Igen, the disciple of Sekito, was asked to give a lecture. He appeared on the altar [took the Abbot's seat], sat for a while, and then went back to his room. The director of the temple went to his room and said to him, "You hadn't given us a lecture for a long time, so I asked you to give us one. But as soon as you appeared on the altar, you went back to your room. Why is that?" Yakusan said, "There are many teachers. Some of them are teaching Buddhist precepts, and some are giving lectures on sutras, and I am a Zen master." That was his answer. What do you think that is?

Then I may ask you, "What have you been doing today?" I think some of you must have been very sleepy today, and some of you must have had terrible pain in your legs, and some of you must find it difficult to stop your monkey mind. So I suspect there were quite few people, maybe three or four, who were sitting, and the rest of you couldn't practice zazen in its usual sense. You may understand in that way. Today we don't have much time for *dokusan*, but if we did, I think I'd have many questions from you about breathing, about pain, or about your monkey mind: "What should I do with it?" Since we have no *dokusan* today, it might be a good idea to give you some instructions about zazen.

Last Wednesday, and Sunday too, I talked about their being an obstacle in front of the Buddha nature, or Buddha light, in your zazen. The one finger Tenryu pointed out does not actually mean "one." What he meant is our practice, our *shikan-taza*. What Yakusan demonstrated is also *shikan-taza*, in which you have no gaining idea--you just sit. Because you practice zazen to have complete calmness in your mind, various problems you have really become a problem or disturbance. But when you have no gaining idea, all the things which happen in your zazen will become one finger. At that time your zazen becomes so-called "playful zazen".

When some monk asked a master, "What should I do when cold weather comes?" the master said, "Be a cold Buddha, and when summer comes, be a hot Buddha." When you have no gaining idea, you become various Buddhas moment after moment. Cold Buddha, hot Buddha, playful [painful?] Buddha, monkey-minded Buddha.

Monkey-minded Buddha is the same as the others, but when you want to have a calm, serene mind, you will be discouraged by your monkey mind. When you have no gaining idea, when you just sit and accept it, then monkey mind is Tenryu's one finger. Moment

after moment, various Buddhas will appear in your practice. In that case, monkey mind is not just ordinary monkey mind, but monkey-minded Buddha. When it is hot, it is hot Buddha.

Yakusan demonstrated his practice without words, without saying anything. He just sat. Tenryu pointed one finger. But this one finger was pointed without any gaining idea. Instead of trying to teach them what it is, he just did it, like this. It is not necessary to always be one finger. This is alright. This is alright, too: [raising two, three, four fingers, etc.] But people might be confused, so he always pointed just one finger. If this one finger means something, it could also be two fingers, or three fingers, or many fingers, not one finger. Because this one finger can be various things, according to the situation, we call it the true one finger.

It is like Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, who is supposed to have thirty-three bodies. In accordance with the people he tries to save, he takes various figures [forms], sometimes women, sometimes *asuras*, sometimes a human body. But even though he has many figures, his true body is one.

So we say to "just sit." Just to sit does not mean always having the same pattern of practice. When we are ready to be many figures, when we are ready to practice various ways, that is *shikan-taza*. You may call it the foundation of various practices. If you do not have this secret of practice, you may be easily discouraged. Or, if you make some progress in your practice, naturally you will stick to your same old way, because you feel very good about your practice and you feel you have made some progress in your own way. But if you attach to the same old way, you will surely have a time when you are discouraged with your practice, and you will be very confused. "What is zazen?" you may ask.

It looks like it's very difficult to sit without any gaining idea. But actually, as you sit today, you should, at least, be completely involved in the atmosphere or feeling of the zendo, and just practice our way. You should not be bringing many ideas into the zendo. When you enter the zendo, you should be a quite different person, forgetting all about what you have been doing, and you should just sit. Zazen practice is not a continuation of our everyday life or everyday practice. In the *Fukanzazengi*, Dogen Zenji says, "You should give up everything when you practice zazen. You should put everything aside and practice zazen." At least you must realize that this point is very important.

We say it takes time before you know what zazen is. But actually, the reason we say this is that, without this kind of conviction, you cannot give up everything and practice *shikan-taza*. If you think, "I'll sit two or three months more," then your practice is not pure enough. You are practicing zazen the way you study something else. We should not mix up our practice with ordinary training or exercise. [Tape turned here. Some lost, perhaps something like, "If you study"] this point more, you will find out why we have Tassajara and why the old Zen masters had a very difficult time in their practice. They made such an effort just to put everything aside and practice our way without a gaining

idea. To practice our way even to attain enlightenment is not good, because this kind of gaining idea is usually not pure enough. Instead of, "You should attain enlightenment, forgetting everything else," we say, "Practice zazen without any gaining idea." This is a stronger instruction, the most strict instruction. Without even trying to attain enlightenment, you should practice zazen. That is actually what we mean. Practicing zazen to attain enlightenment may be pretty good, but it's not good enough. It's not strict enough with the impetus of your practice.

Instead of making useless efforts after you start zazen, we make a greater effort before we practice zazen, when we enter the zendo. After entering the zendo, even though you make a great effort, it doesn't work so well. Before you enter the zendo, you should be fully prepared for zazen practice.

I think you are very sincere students, but your conviction is not strong enough, not pure enough. I think that is why many teachers expelled their disciples. "Go away!" If someone is not ready to practice zazen, it is better to say, "Go away." It means "Come again." "Go away, and prepare for coming in again." That is real kindness. I think almost all of you should be expelled from the zendo, and we should start Zen Center again. How about it? Again and again. "Go away!" Or, "let's do it again." We must always have this kind of spirit, or else we cannot clean up our mind.

In Japan, once a year, we have general house cleaning. We decide which day to have the house cleaning by watching the newspaper. Sometimes it may be a windy, cloudy, or rainy day. So we watch the newspaper, and, on a day with good weather, we have house cleaning. On that day we take everything out, we expel everything, even the Buddha shrine or Shinto shrine. We take them out, and we completely clean our house. In the same way, I think this cleaning is necessary for us. Without this kind of effort, you pile up things one after another. Then you will easily be caught by the same old way of life, so you cannot practice zazen in its true sense. But when you have this kind of house cleaning spirit, you can practice *shikan-taza*.

When I first came to America, for a pretty long time, as the older students know, I put emphasis on way-seeking mind. When we have pure, true, way-seeking mind, we can practice our way without any problem. When you have questions or problems in your practice, it means that you are not practicing *shikan-taza*. If you practice *shikan-taza*, you will be a monkey-minded Buddha in *shikan-taza*, you will be a painful-legged Buddha in *shikan-taza*. And your whole body will be an obstacle of Buddha; or to be an obstacle itself is Buddha. Is there any problem when whatever you do is Buddha? That is *shikan-taza*.

When our community is based on this idea, there will be no problem. We will even enjoy our problems. To have various problems is to have many *mandalas*. But without this *shikan-taza*, all the teachings and *mandalas* will be causes of trouble. If we become successful, if our community expands, we'll have problems, big problems. You may say it is better not to have the community--I'm sure you will say so. But before you say so, you should think, why? Why do we have this kind of problem? Why is this a problem for

me?

The more I think about this point, the more I discover why Dogen Zenji put so much emphasis on *shikan-taza*. "First of all, before we practice zazen," he says, "in delusion we should set up our pure way of practice. Before enlightenment we should attain enlightenment." Before you enter the zendo, you should attain enlightenment. Do you understand? Sometimes he said, "If you enter the zendo by mistake, you should go out." If you want to enter the zendo, you should be really prepared for practicing pure practice. "By mistake"--isn't that interesting? "If you enter the zendo by mistake." I think almost all of you entered the zendo by mistake. If so, take a rest in our Zen apartment across the street, and come back again.

Ahhhhh! Thank you very much.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – EZT – 68-10-12-A

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