

69-04-08

I was talking about the denial of desire. This may be confusing. Our way is not asceticism, but, if you read our precepts literally, there is no difference. But what they mean is completely different. What the difference is is what I want to talk about tonight. Or what the difference is between "to study" and "to listen to," as in, to go to the master and "listen to" what he says, and "to study". Or WHY you started to study Zen: there must be some reason why so many people come to Zen Center and practice and study Zen.

I think this is because our culture, our civilization, has already come to a dead end, and you realize that you cannot go any further. People who know that this is a dead end may come to Zen Center to find out some way to go further. That is your feeling, whether or not you understand what the dead end is, or why we have come to the dead end. The foundation of our culture is based on individualism, and individualism is based on idea of self. In the time of the Renaissance, we awoke to our human nature, and we started to put emphasis on our human nature, rather than on something which we called divine nature or holy nature. We put more emphasis on what we are and what human nature is, and we wanted to express our human nature as much as possible. Our holy nature, or Buddha nature, was replaced by human nature, and that human nature is not what we mean by Buddha Nature. This is the starting point of a mistake. Whatever our type of thought may be... Communism, Capitalism, or Individualism...all those kinds of thought are based on individual rights, or individual power, or on the supremacy of the individual.

So, for instance, individualism, or Capitalism seeks for the freedom to obtain our desires. Communism puts emphasis on equality of profits or rights. But equality and freedom are not compatible. If you want to extend your desire freely, limitlessly, you cannot divide things equally because you want to extend your desire as much as you can. If each one of you extends his desire as much as possible, it is not possible to possess things equally.

But our conscience always tell us, "You should be free in extending your desire. It is alright. It should be alright to act freely, to possess things as much as you can, if you don't disturb other people." But if you have too much when others do not have very much, you don't feel so good. So, those are not compatible desires.

The reason why this kind of individualism, and our freedom to desire, and equality of rights are incompatible is because our thought is based on a self-centered idea. When we say "equality," "equality" means the equality of our human power. When we say "desire," "limitless desire," "freedom to desire," it means "our" freedom, "my" freedom, or "someone's" freedom. There is no idea of a holy being, or Buddha, or God. There's no idea which will provide some rule, or some background against which to give appropriate positions to equality, and desire, or freedom. For us to accommodate those concepts without difficulty, it is necessary for us to postulate some big, fundamental idea of non-selfish desire, or limitless boundary of material or place, which is not just material or spiritual. Something beyond material and spiritual is necessary. That is so-called

"non-selfishness."

As long as our life is controlled by, or based on, a selfish idea, it is not possible for each thought to find its own place without conflicting with the others. So it is no wonder that we have difficulty in our life, when our life is based on just a superficial idea of self or the individual.

Ascetics before Buddhism practiced asceticism for a good future life, to be born in some place where there is a lot of enjoyment, or a more perfect world. That is a kind of extended selfish practice. But our motivation is not based on selfish desire. The purpose of our practice is to control our desire so that our desires find their own place, and so that every one of us, in extending our desire, practices mortification without any difficulty.

The difference is that our mortification is based on non-selfishness. Before Buddhism, the practice of mortification was based on selfish desire, or an extension of selfish practice. When you practice and study Buddhism, you have a lot of selfish ideas. "I am studying something. I must know what it is." When you want to listen to your teacher, there is not much selfish idea involved. That is the difference. This is a very important point.

The reason you should have a teacher is to learn the truth in its pure form, excluding selfish practice. Study is also practice, you know. It is not just individual activity, it is intellectual practice. It is not different from zazen because it is based on a non-selfish idea. It is not selfish practice.

The reason we say you should practice zazen without a gaining idea is that a gaining idea is based on a selfish idea; and when you just sit because you are told to sit, because that is Buddha's way--*only* because that is Buddha's way--you don't have much of a selfish idea in your practice. When you eliminate the selfish ideas from your practice, that is actually non-selfish practice, the true way of practicing truth.

In the first chapter of the *Shobogenzo*, Dogen Zenji refers to an interesting story. There was a priest called Gen-soku. Gen-soku was the name of the priest who was taking care of the temple of Hogen Zenji. He thought he understood Buddhism very well, so he didn't ask any questions of the master for three years. At last the Hogen Zenji asked him, "It has already been three years since you came here. Why don't you ask me a question?" Gen-soku said...(Someone raises a hand to ask a question.) Excuse me?

Question: The *Lankavatara Sutra* says there are two different classes of beings. One class is called a non-returner, and one class is called the once-returner. I imagine that the former are the ones who maintain or keep their selfish desires and the latter would not keep their selfish desires.

Roshi continues: Yes. "Why don't you come and ask some questions", the master said. But the Acolyte replied, "I studied for a long time under Seiho Zenji, and I think I completely understand what Buddhism is." "How do you understand Buddhism, and what kind of teaching did you receive from him?" The priest answered, "When my former

master asked me about my understanding of this saying of an old master: 'To study Buddhism is to seek for fire,' I answered, 'It is like a man who was born in the Year of Fire, seeking for fire. For one to study Buddhism who, himself, is Buddha, is like Buddha studying Buddha. That is my understanding of how we study Buddhism.'" But Hogen did not accept it. He said: "That is what I thought. You don't understand what Buddhism is at all." So the

Acolyte was very much upset and he went away, but before he had traveled very long, he thought, "Hogen is a famous Zen Master. There must be some reason why he said that when I said that to study Buddhism is fire seeking for fire." So he thought, "This may be a good chance for me to have a real understanding of Buddhism. He must have a good understanding of our Way." So he went back to him and asked him how to study Buddhism. The master said, "It is like a fire seeking for fire." Dogen Zenji said, "...and the man became enlightened." The same words, and he became enlightened. He thought, "I understand what Buddhism is. My understanding is perfect." That is why his understanding was not perfect. When he gave up his intellectual understanding, his limited understanding, and sought for more truth, when he tried to seek some more, his mind was opened and enlightened.

So Dogen Zenji says, "If you understand like the Acolyte, and think that is the way to understand what Buddhism is, Buddhism will not continue very long." If we think it is alright to understand the teaching literally, and that to stick to the teaching is alright, Buddhism cannot be transmitted to us. When we try to limitlessly extend our true nature, instead of our selfish, limited self, then Buddhism is there. When we forget all about the intellectual limitation of the teaching, then true Buddhism will be extended forever. In that way Buddhism will have an eternal future.

Some recent teaching, or something which was told to you by someone--if you stick to it, that is not true teaching. When you receive it and accept it with a non-selfish attitude, you will have it...something humble. With that attitude, you will have true understanding of the teaching. The teaching is there. That is why Hogen Zenji is necessary for the Acolyte.

Even though the *Shobogenzo* is perfect, you want your teacher. That is why we recite the Sutra before we start lecture. The *Shobogenzo* is here, and I bow to the *Shobogenzo*, and I study the *Shobogenzo* with you. If I say I know something, that is wrong. The extended practice of bowing to the *Shobogenzo* is in the way I speak about it and how you listen to it, instead of in some confidence. If you have confidence, that confidence is not in something which you have, but is confidence in something you can extend forever; something which comes from selflessness, which is the base, or foundation, of all teaching. So instead of putting emphasis on the Soto way, or the Rinzai way, or the Tendai way, we put emphasis on nothingness. Everything comes from nothing, and our way will be extended forever, limitlessly. That is how we study Buddhism.

When our desire is based on a selfish idea, that is not acceptable. We cannot accept that kind of desire, but when our desire is an unselfish desire, that is how we extend our way.

So the mortification of asceticism in pre-Buddhistic practice and asceticism, and our way are different. The way to control our desire looks like it's the same, but actually it is completely different. This is the most important point, and I didn't refer to this point in this lecture when I gave the lecture at Tassajara.

To control, to extend, our desire is to be strict to ourselves. You know, without being strict with ourselves, we cannot do anything, because that would be the wrong practice. So, first of all, we should reflect on our practice, and before we say something we should reflect on ourselves. This is a very, very important point. You should not rely on some teaching, but you should reflect on yourself, and polish yourself up, and get rid of any selfish ideas as much as you can, even though you have attained a wonderful attainment or enlightenment. If you do not polish yourself, if you forget to polish yourself, that enlightenment will not work. That is not real enlightenment.

When we realize ourselves, and after reflecting on ourselves, and when we are able to see "things as it is," whatever the thought may be is acceptable. Capitalism is all right; Communism is all right.. nothing wrong with it. But when your understanding is based on a selfish idea, and when you try to force your opinion onto others, then, without reflecting on our way, and when you attach to your own idea, rejecting others' ideas, then your effort will end in a dead end. You will fight with others, that's all, and both will be hurt. You cannot survive any more because you will lose your true background.

You may have some questions; please ask me.

Question: Is deep breathing the same as introspection?

Roshi: Introspection? First of all we have to have wisdom to see "things as it is." When we have no selfish ideas, we can see "things as it is." So we always know what we are doing, and we know that we are not perfect, and that our idea is a one-sided idea. So we have always room to accept some outside idea, too, because we know that what I say, or the way I practice, is not perfect. That is humbleness, you know. That is how to accommodate your opinion to others' opinions.

Question: You said that we should control our desire, and I still don't understand how to go about that.

Roshi: How do you do that? The reason I said "control" is that your way of extending desire is based on a selfish idea. So, without reflecting, your desire is a selfish one and you will try to extend it. You think there is nothing wrong with extending your desires. That is the mistake. Something is the matter. Something is wrong. It is wrong if you just extend your desire without thinking or reflecting, without, not "controlling," but without observing, without reflecting on, your desires. What is desire? Desire, in its usual sense, is always based on a selfish idea. Isn't that so? But when you think, "Nothing is wrong with extending my desire," then you will feel some restriction if I say that you shouldn't. That is "control" in its ordinary sense. But when you reflect on your desire, when you understand it, it is pretty selfish, you know. Then, naturally, you will limit your desire to some extent.

That is not control, that is the way desire should be. There is a big difference. Do you understand?

Question: Would you explain why the Sutra says "no eyes..etc.,...until we come to...?"

Roshi: We think, "I have ears; I have a nose." But a nose is not just a nose. A nose is an organ for smelling, and ears are an organ for hearing, and the combination of the five senses organs will create some understanding. So just the nose, or just the ears doesn't work. But we usually think, "I have a nose; I have ears. Our ears are quite a different organ from our nose." But that is not true. Even you cannot see, your ear will see something. The function of the ears will change, and the ears will have some faculty to see colors. By listening to something you can see some color. That kind of change will take place, if you cannot see. So the nose is not just the nose, and ears are not just ears, as we think--so, "no nose." "No nose" is right. There is a nose, that is right, and there is no nose, and that is also right. "Yes" and "no." You should understand it in two ways. YES and NO. That is complete understanding.

So you do not stick to your nose. "I have no nose. That's okay," you may say. "You have no nose." That's okay. "You have no ears." "That's okay," you may say. Both are true; they are two ways of explaining something. So the reason it says "no nose" is because we think there is a nose. You shouldn't ask questions like that, you know. No nose is all right. When you do not ask questions, if you take it for granted, you know, that is the real understanding of things. That kind of wisdom is necessary if you want to see "things as it is." As long as you have stick to some selfish understanding, or special understanding, you cannot see "things as it is."

Question: If things as they are are selfless, where does the small self come from?

Roshi: Actually there is no small self, but you say there IS a small self. That is the mistake. We usually make that mistake.

Question: Where does that mistake come from?

Roshi: That is not actually a mistake, you know. That is all right. You may ask me why I say it's a mistake. That is a one-sided view. You don't see "things as it is" because you stick to a one-sided view. Okay? Your eyes show me you're wondering, "Is that all right? Is that true?"

Question: You said that it is not good to allow our desires to extend themselves limitlessly. Would you also say that it is not good to restrict them too much so that one becomes unhappy, and makes others unhappy, too?

Roshi: When I say you should restrict your desire, I mean you should not extend your desire in a limited sense. For instance, "This is my desire." You limit the nature of desire already. Without limitation means to have a wider understanding of the desire--then you can extend it forever. (Student asks for a concrete situation of what Roshi means.) Concrete situation? Concrete situation...concrete situation...actually, you know, there is

no concrete situation. (audience explodes with laughter) If you say a "concrete situation" you should also say a "limited desire." When you say "concrete situation," your limitless desire will be limited. But, actually, you cannot limit your desire, so there is no concrete situation. It is some...but it is changing.

Question: If someone comes up to you and you don't want to do what they want you to do...someone came up to me and felt my arm to feel how big it was. And instead of showing off...they grabbed my arm, and I just raised it without flexing it. Then I lowered it and let it be put where they put it. I was sort of surprised at my response; I thought...gee! Would that be a concrete situation?

Roshi: As long as you see the situation, if you reflect on your situation, it is all right. Then you will not do too much or too little. You can do just what he wants.

Question: (Mostly inaudible, but the student says he is confused about the terms "limited" and "unlimited.") I think you say that if we reflect on our desires then we can...if we see they are selfish desires we can limit them.

Roshi: Yes, you limit the desire.

Question; Then...(Can't decipher it.)

Roshi: The point is that, whatever the desire is, it is necessary to control it; in short, it should be under control. But the reason we should control our desire is that the desire we have right now, in this moment, is not a perfect one. Our desire is a, more or less, selfish desire. Only a desire which is complete is Buddha's desire. We should know that. Buddha's desire is not some desire which we actually have right now. All the desires we feel that we have are actually limited desires, not perfect desires. We should know that, but when we don't know that, we get into trouble. That is what I mean. The only perfect desire belongs to Buddha. A perfect one is one which includes everything. Whatever Buddha does, it is all right, because he is just one whole being. For him there is no friend or no enemy. What exists is Buddha himself. So, for him, it is alright, but, for each one of us, who is a part of him, it is necessary to accommodate our desires. If you desire so much, you should ask someone if you should extend your desire a little bit more or not.

Question: Are our desires conditioned by our human nature?

Roshi: Human Nature? When we say human nature, human nature will, perhaps, be understood in two ways: in comparison to Buddha Nature we say human nature, in its humble sense and with a humble attitude. But when most people say human nature, they may think that, because this is our human nature, there is nothing wrong about a human being having a human nature, so we can do whatever we like! That is another kind of understanding of human nature. We should know that when we understand human nature in its more humble way, in comparison to perfect nature, then human nature makes sense. That is what we mean by human nature.

Question: If I have desire for cheese, then, as I understand you, I should eat only just some of it and limit my desire. But if someone interpreted you to mean to limit himself and not have ANY cheese, then that person might become angry when he sees other people eating cheese, because he has limited himself, but still wants cheese!

Roshi: But so you should not always interpret the same words in the same way. That is how we study Buddhism. If we can always read the same words in the same way, that is another mistake. We must constantly open our eyes, open our mind, and see the situation. That is the point.

Okay, Thank you very much.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 69-04-08
