

69-04-19.2 [69-04-19]

Sesshin

April 19, 1969

It is already 3:30. I have thirty minutes more. Actually, Zen is not something to talk about, and also it is something to talk about. If you understand Zen in that way, your understanding will be perfect. If someone asks you, "What is Zen?", you may say, "Whatever you say, that is Zen." And, you may say at the same time, "Whatever you say, that is not Zen." Both are true for us.

This kind of paradoxical statement can only be understood by your doing zazen, or else you don't understand. That is how we communicate with each other, without sticking to words. You should communicate directly with each other, not by words. This is very important.

So Zen is not something to study, perhaps, as you study science or philosophy. Zen is something to listen to. "Listen to" means to listen with an empty mind, to accept the truth without seeking for what your teacher says. Just listen with an empty mind. Then his words will penetrate into your mind. Whether you understand it intellectually, or not, is not point. We say, if you attend lecture, even though you are sleeping, it is alright. It is all right because the teaching will come right into your home, through your nose, or, what do you call it, skin. There is no need to listen with your ears. This is enough.

To listen with an empty mind as you practice zazen is very important. Once Yakusan, the famous Zen master in China, was asked to give the monks a lecture. "It has been a long time since you gave us a lecture, so please give a lecture." After Sesshin, he went up to the altar and came down, and went his room without saying anything. So, for him, one minute was enough. For me, it takes twenty minutes; for him, one minute.

His Jisha asked him, after he went back to his room, "Why didn't you give them a lecture, some word." And he said, "I am a Zen master. So I will not say anything. If you want to study Zen, you should listen to some Buddhist philosopher and he will explain it in detail. I am a Zen Master, and to practice with you is my vow. For me there is no need to speak, and for my students there is no need to hear a lecture.

There are many stories like this. In the *Shobogenzo*, Dogen Zenji told a very interesting story. Issan and Kyosan established the Zen sect. A monk stayed at Issan's temple for three years, but he didn't ask any questions. So Issan asked him, "Why don't you ask any questions?" This is a kind of the opposite of what you would expect. "Why don't you ask any questions?" This monk, who was taking care of his temple, said, "I already attained enlightenment under Seiho." Seiho was also a famous Zen master. So Issan asked him, "How did you attain enlightenment?" The monk said, "I attained enlightenment when he said, 'To study Buddhism is like a man who was born in the year of fire, seeking for fire.'" Issan said, "Just as I thought, you haven't attained enlightenment yet."

So the monk was rather upset, and he went away. But on the way to some other Zen master, he thought, "Issan is a very famous Zen master, so there must have been some deep meaning when he said, 'you didn't understand.'" So thinking about why he said this, he came back to Issan's temple again, and asked the same question. He asked Issan how to study Buddhism.

But Issan said, "It is like a man who was born in the year of fire, seeking for fire." He repeated what the monk had said, and, at that moment, the monk attained enlightenment. The words were the same. At first his understanding was just intellectual. Everyone has Buddha Nature, you know, so it is rather foolish to seek for Buddha Nature when everyone, including him, has Buddha Nature. "I will never seek for Buddha Nature."--that was his understanding, but it was just intellectual understanding. He must have repeated the same thing over and over wherever he went. "It is like man who was born in the year of fire, seeking for fire." Those were his stock words.

But when Issan repeated same thing, he was struck by his statement. Dogen Zenji says, "If the study of Zen were like the way of study of that monk, Zen would not have been transmitted to us." In short, Zen will not be understood by your intellectual experience. If you want to have direct understanding, you must have some confidence, you must have some conviction, strong conviction, conviction to study: "Whatever happens, I must understand it." This is very important. How long it takes it doesn't matter. "I WILL study." Without this kind of direct experience based on strong conviction, you cannot attain enlightenment.

"Some swordsman visited (name), a famous swordsman. I don't know whether it was Takuan Zenji or (name). I don't remember. I don't know whether this is a true story or not. Anyway, that man wanted to master (name), or *kendo*. He asked him, "How long will it take for me to master your way?" The question was something like that. "If you want to master it in three years, it may take, maybe, a hundred years. But if you have a conviction strong enough to die for it, then you will master it immediately." That is the way. Excuse me? (they can't hear in the back.) If you expect to study, to master it, in three years, it may take one hundred years. But if you don't mind being killed in this place, you will understand it right now. That was what he said. You might understand how important it is to have a strong conviction about practicing zazen if you were to think, "Actually, I can never stand up from this seat unless someone tells me to stand up." Then, at that time, your practice is beyond space and time. "How long doesn't matter. Wherever I am, it doesn't matter. I shall never stand up unless someone tells me to stand up." That is *Shikan Taza*.

When I am talking to you, and when you are listening to me, you have that kind of conviction, and I have it, too. But when you go home, what will happen? And when I am not talking, when I am not practicing zazen with you, what will happen to me? That is the point. So this kind of practice should be extended into your everyday life, but your way of everyday life should not be extended into our practice. You should extend this kind of conviction into your everyday life. That is really our everyday life. But we easily lose this kind of conviction. That is a very important point. I

want you to come back to this kind of conviction. Then your everyday life will be completely refreshed. At the same time, I think, it may be your greatest problem that you haven't this kind of conviction in your everyday life. This is, you know, a very difficult thing.

When you eat, for instance, you would rather eat something sweet and nice. But actually, we should be ready to accept and eat whatever it is, without saying, "this is delicious," or, "this is not so good." When you want to have something more, you should come back to our conviction.

When I was at Eiheiji Monastery, the head of the monastery was (name) Zenji. He told us how he gave up smoking. He was an inveterate smoker when he was a monk, and he told us, "I was very heavy smoker." But when he was traveling, he went across (name) Pass. It was misty weather, so, sitting on a rock on the top of the pass, he took out a pipe and started to smoke in the misty weather. It is very good, as you know, to smoke in damp, misty weather. It was so nice that he was struck by the taste of it, and he determined to give up smoking. That was his last smoke. You know, wherever he was, even resting on the top of a mountain after climbing up, maybe eight miles, he didn't lose the determination to practice zazen. "Oh, I must give (it) up!" No wonder he was such a spiritual character. Even though he was weak when he was more than ninety, he was still like this. When he bowed, we wondered, we worried about whether or not he could get up again. We all watched him. But he did get up, you know. Again and again, he bowed. And, you know, we thought it was much harder for us to watch him than it was for him to do it...full of spirit!

That is, I think, a good example. I'm not trying to convince you to give up smoking, or something like that. But we must have that kind of way-seeking mind. Then your practice will be pretty good.

Thank you very much.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 69-04-19
