

69-07-08

**A QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION
WITH SHUNRYU SUZUKI**

July 8, 1969

SR: Tonight I have nothing special that I want to talk about. It may be better to answer your questions; first I want you to give me several questions and then I will try to answer them. Do you have some questions? Hai.

Q: Will you speak of purity and worship?

Q: Will you speak of shikantaza?

Q: You said once that enlightenment was just so much "candy." Could you explain that?

Q: It seems that just following the natural flows is my practice. Sometimes I will watch my breathing, sometimes just sitting, really involved in whatever I am doing. It seems sort of unnatural to just try and stick to one particular practice like watching the breath.

Q: Could you speak on the practice of not-thinking, or no thought during zazen?

SR: Mostly your questions may be about practice. The idea of purity of mind is connected to how we practice shikantaza. "Enlightenment is just candy," may sound like a blasphemous statement. To stick to just one practice may look unnatural. Maybe, after all, I have to explain how we practice and the purpose of practice. Our practice should be pure or natural and should not depend on being encouraged by some candy. To be natural and pure and not to depend on candy means to have deeper practice. Our intention to practice zazen is not just in terms of pure or impure, successful or unsuccessful, natural or unnatural. Maybe what you mean is deeper than what you say, but if I take it literally it looks rather shallow.

When we say "pure" it is more emotional: good and bad practice in emotional terms. But our practice is more than that. Whether it is Rinzai or Soto, we do not practice zazen to have some special experience. When we say "enlightenment" it does not mean some particular experience according to Rinzai. Whatever the experience may be, if you feel it or understand it, that is not what we mean by enlightenment experience. Enlightenment experience is to go beyond you or your surroundings, or teaching or zazen or enlightenment, or someone who practices zazen in some form.

Of course there will be no idea of koan practice or shikantaza. You may say on one hand, this is shikantaza, and on the other, this is koan practice. But when you experience enlightenment, actually there is no koan practice or shikantaza. And if you say, "This is enlightenment experience," that is not actually the true experience. How do

you practice zazen without expecting something special, without dreaming of something in your mind? Without expecting some special experience you should devote yourself fully to your practice. When that is difficult we count our breaths or we do koan practice. Koan practice or counting breath practice is some help, you know. To help our pure practice, we use a koan or count our breath.

We say, "Counting breath practice." The purpose of counting breath is not to count your breath without making any mistake, even though we try not to make any mistake. To fully engage in practice we count our breath. Even though you have lazy posture, it is possible to count your breath from one to ten without making a mistake. But that is not true zazen because your body, your activity is not fully engaged in one full practice. Your whole body and mind should be engaged in one full practice. And to help this kind of entire practice of body and mind, we count our breath. So counting breaths is just the handle of your cup. It is not the cup itself; it is just a way to take hold of the cup, or it is some way to encourage your true practice. It is not the actual purpose of zazen, but it is an aid to pure practice.

When I say this, you may have some misunderstanding. You may think: "If that is just an aid to practice, it is not so important; it doesn't matter." But that is not so. Even though you make your best effort in counting your breath, the purpose of counting breath practice is not just to count. And even though it is not the purpose of practice, you must try to count your breath without mistakes. Do you understand? I don't want to explain so much. I don't want to give you another problem by my answer.

When your practice is beyond pure or impure, that is the pure practice we mean. And to sit without candy means to practice our way beyond the idea of the purpose of zazen. We should not even have the idea of enlightenment. Even though you once attain enlightenment, you should not try to have the same experience again. That kind of practice is not right practice.

Now we come to the idea of "natural." You like the word natural. I don't agree with your idea of natural, because you like it so much. You stick to naturalness too much. When you stick to it, it is not natural any more. Our life is not natural, you know. To do something without the idea of what you should do, without any particular way, that may be naturalness, but by naturalness we mean more than that. Before we discuss naturalness, you should know how unnatural human beings are. We are not natural beings; our way of life is not so natural, it is very twisted and unnatural.

Recently, you know, people are going to extremes. To go to the extreme may be natural, according to your understanding of natural. But that is not what we mean by natural. Do you think that what you usually do is natural? We say [in the meal chant]: "To obtain the natural order of mind we should be free from greed." What does it mean? It means to open our mind fully. When we are free from greed, anger and foolishness, we will have natural order of mind. That kind of naturalness is our naturalness. Do you understand the difference? Your naturalness is to be greedy when you feel greedy, to be angry wherever you become angry. To be angry and to eat as

much as you want, that is your naturalness. But that is not the naturalness we mean. It is very different actually.

Naturalness or natural mind may mean more flexible mind, without sticking to something rigid. When our mind has perfect freedom from everything, our mind is open to everything like a mirror. The mirror does not have any image on its face that belongs to it. So naturally it will have various images according to the objects it reflects. That is naturalness; zazen mind. We say, stop your thinking. To think is to have some picture of some thing in terms of long or short, black or white. That is thinking mind. So when we start to think our mind is dead; when we don't think, our mind is open to various things.

SR: Do you have some other question?

Q: You mentioned some practice that we could do daily besides zazen which might help us.

SR: Although I said that, right now I would like to put emphasis on emotional activity rather than thinking mind. But it does not mean thinking mind is bad. It is too important. In our daily life it will help us to know this point. But actually the best way is to practice Zen and to have this kind of naturalness which can be extended to your everyday life, your usual activities. That is more what we try to do.

Q: The difficulty seems to be that I use my thinking mind to rid myself of the influence it has on my thinking mind.

SR: I think that knowing this kind of thing doesn't help much. Even though you know it, even though you have a lot of money in the bank, it doesn't help so much. When you actually use it, it will be a great help, but just to know something about it, this kind of teaching or explanation, is not much help actually. So, the best thing is to have actual practice to control your thinking mind, and just to use your thinking mind when it is necessary. Just to know this kind of thing is not enough. The only way to do it is to have the actual power to do it. And to obtain this kind of power we practice zazen.

That is why, when you practice zazen, you must have strong determination or confidence in your practice. The way you practice zazen should not be like reading some book to find out something good, or being fascinated by some beautiful experience. This is very shallow and shows a lack of determination. So when you practice zazen, you must have strong confidence: "Whatever happens to me, I will not stop my zazen." You should be willing to die in your practice, that kind of attitude is necessary. It is not just to think something or to find out something.

Q: There are many types of work we can do. We can do work which is just physical, however it is very tiring. And all these different kinds of work entail different considerations. Lately I have been giving it quite a bit of consideration and sometimes I don't really know what kind of work would be the most beneficial for a frame of mind

which would be good for zazen. I wanted to ask you if there are certain kinds of work or employment that should be avoided and certain kinds that are more beneficial.

SR; Yes, it is of course better to choose your work. But I think there will be two kinds of work. One is physical work without using your mind so much and the other is the opposite, like office work or calculating. This kind of work is mental work during which you cannot practice koan study. You cannot practice koan study when you are counting something. But if it is just physical work, you can do it. I classified it in this way, but most work is not purely mental or physical-maybe a mixture of both. I think the best way is to be concentrated on what you are doing. That is how we apply our practice in our everyday life. Maybe most work is more mental than physical. Don't you think so?

Q: I think it must be better for us if it is more physical than mental.

SR: I don't know which is better. Physical work is difficult and you will be very tired, physically tired. If you are too tired I don't think you can practice zazen after your work. So, even though you practice zazen it will not help you immediately. Little by little you will gain some power, but it will not help you like drinking some honey. When I cough if I take some water it helps a lot; zazen will not help you so immediately. But what you gain in zazen will not go away; that is the advantage of our practice. Our practice makes our mind clear and makes our physical and emotional activity natural and strong, and your character will also be more like this, more natural. You will give your good feeling to others. This is also important; when you give your good feeling to others, at the same time you will have good feeling too. Do you agree with that?

Q: What is the place of love and devotion in our practice?

SR: Both love and devotion are very important, but love and devotion should be defined. We do not believe in some label, love and devotion, or some beautiful words. That is just a paper picture. We are not so interested in just a picture; what it means is more important. Love or devotion is something which can be recognized by others so they can respond with confidence. Even though you say, "I love you," "I love our practice," or "Oh, thank you," it doesn't mean much. So again naturalness is important. Something that comes from the source of your hara is more important than some idea or some beautiful words.

Q: For about the last hundred years, in western culture, the idea has emerged that we are civilized. Sigmund Freud said that the repression of many instincts, such as anger, may lead to more problems. If you allow the complete freedom of animal instincts you have chaos, but if you repress them too much people become unhappy and destroy themselves in other ways. How would Zen Buddhism look upon that problem and how would it resolve that? Freud could not see any resolution.

SR: I could not clearly follow you, but as for Zen, our way is not like "this" or "that." We don't like to say, "This is Zen" or "That is Zen." "This is true way, that is not." Tonight I have no time to explain it, but we have some formula to avoid going to extremes, and to

have always right judgement about things that you see, about what you do, or about what you want to do. There is some way, not teachings, but some way to observe things more effectively and more clearly, and to know what is wrong with your activity, what you did or what you want to do. So, usually, I am sorry to say, when you ask questions you want to know exactly what is Zen, but we don't want to say what is Zen because something which is said will create problems.

Q: My question wasn't, "What is Zen." It is more, just, how to live? Maybe it would be simpler if I give an example. If I am angry at something and continuously repress my anger it may be bad for me, for my life and for my practice. If I express it, I get rid of it but I may hurt somebody else. So what am I going to do?

SR: I think it is more harmless to express it than to repress it, but at the time you must know what anger is. Actually we cannot be angry with anything, you know. When you are angry with something you should at the same time understand something about yourself. To show, "I am so foolish," you should be angry. Not to stop someone from doing something but to show your foolishness you should be angry. "Oh, I am sorry, I must be angry!" Then it will be a help to you and to others also. At that time you are free from anger, and being angry you will be helped because you don't suppress your feelings.

We have precepts like: Don't be angry. Dogen Zenji's explanation of it is: Anger will be like a beautiful cloud in the sky, or beautiful waves of water when the sun or the moon lights them. Anger is something like that. So according to him there is no need to repress it because it is so beautiful. But when you say it is beautiful it is not so beautiful. When you are just angry, like a boy, like a naughty boy, it may be very beautiful. That kind of humbleness is more important. If you practice our way you will understand how difficult it is to be humble. It may be better just to be honest whatever you do. We should know that whatever we do or have done is not perfect, so we should say, "Oh, excuse me." If a master slaps his student he should say, "Excuse me." But usually after hitting someone you feel you should kick him too. That is not so good.

Q: You have suggested to us that as students we should try to steal our teacher's way.

SR: [He misunderstands "way" as "wife."] Did I say this or not? I have no idea about my wife being stolen.

Q: Will you please explain how we commit that crime?

SR; How? Do you want to commit that crime?

Q: Steal your way.

SR; Oh, "way." I thought you said "wife." "How can I steal my teacher's wife." Way! Oh, I shall be very glad if you steal my way. To steal your teacher's way may not be difficult, but it may take a pretty long time. If you are patient enough or if you like him, naturally

you will eventually steal his way completely. It happens in that way. Even though you don't try to imitate his way, even though you hate to steal his way, it is quite so. I don't know why it happens in that way. To be a teacher is awful, you know, because we don't know who is stealing our way. You reminded me of an awful thing. students will learn something that a teacher will not want them to learn or to steal. If the teacher is forgetful, his student may be forgetful quite easily. And even if the teacher is very patient it may take a long time for the student to be as patient as the teacher. Something that the teacher wants his students to steal from him they may not steal. Dogen Zenji says, "We must practice hard for our descendants, for our disciples." Not for ourselves. If we know how important it is to have good disciples, then we will practice very hard. when we come to this point, our practice is not just for us. It is for our disciples or for others rather than ourselves. When we have real relationship of teacher and disciple, that relationship is much deeper than the relationship between you and your children, or you and your wife or husband. It is much deeper than that.

Thank you very much.

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