

70-02-22

THE BACKGROUND OF SHIKANTAZA

February 22, 1970. San Francisco.

I think that most of you participate one week sesshin from tomorrow. So far we have been practicing counting breathing or following breathing, but...maybe tomorrow, in one week sesshin we will practice *shikantaza*. I want to explain what is *shikantaza*. *Shikantaza* is, as you know, just to sit, we say *shikantaza*. Just to sit, but there is-if you, it is not proper or it is not enough to say "just to sit." For instance, everything is just there. Things are just where they are, but that is not enough. If we say things are just where they are the relationship between things is ignored. When we think about the relationship between things, we will reach the idea of one whole being. We say 'things', but actually things are already some divided materialistic and idealistic being. So before we have-when we have idea of things, you know, we actually have the idea of one whole being. And one whole being exists and things are incessantly changing so, you know, time span, things is not just things as they are. It is changing as a one whole being,. This point is-should be understood when we practice zazen, so Dogen Zenji says, "if your practice does not include everything, that is not right practice." That is why we bow to Buddha and why we, you know, call our practice practice of Buddha's, Buddha's practice, not your practice. But usually in counting breathing or following breathing, you feel as if you are doing something-you are following breathing and you are counting breathing. This is why counting breathing or following breathing practice is, you know, for us it is some preparation, preparatory practice for shikantaza. Because for most people it is rather difficult to sit, just to sit. When we haven't good breathing it is rather difficult just to sit. Of course even though you have pain in your legs, that is just to sit, you know. Pain should be just pain. Not much extra fancy interpretation of pain. My legs-if you say 'my legs' that is extra. Legs is enough. The pain is just pain, you know. Pain-if you pain, if you say pain the pain includes everything and if pain exists, pain exists just like pain as a whole being that is not pain anymore. If there is nothing but pain, what is it?- that is Buddha.

Actually-but it is rather difficult to accept actual pain in that way and as soon as you have pain you want to escape from it. Immediately you are involved in idea of self already so that is not just to sit. So Dogen Zenji's *Fukanzazengi*, he says- "originally we are enlightened, why is it necessary to sit?" There 's not necessary to sit, even though we do not sit we are practicing zazen originally. But he says, "if there is the slightest-this is not literal interpretation or translation-but if there is slightest idea of self, you know, the true practice will change into quite different practice. *Shikantaza* cannot be anymore *shikantaza* if slightest idea appears in our zazen. Even though our practice is not perfect, if we haven't any idea of self, in other words, if we completely devote ourselves to the practice, to the Buddha's practice, them without having any idea of self that is *shikantaza* and that is how we devote ourselves to the-to our practice and to have this kind of spirit is to have way-seeking mind. So if we want to practice *shikantaza*, first of all we should devote ourselves completely to the practice of Buddha. So for us it is

necessary, by all means, to give up the idea of self and devote ourselves completely to the Buddha's practice. That is why we wear robes. That is why we bow to Buddha.

On the other hand, we know how much idea of self we have. When you do something immediately we are involved in idea of self. The other day, I think you have, most of you...listen to Chou kun (?) - Sadhama Dharma Sudhi (?) - he was explaining very well about *shikantaza*. But because he had not much time so he-or he doesn't belong to our tradition, so he didn't explain what is, how we complete *shikantaza*. Instead of putting emphasis on practice, you know, without any, excuse me-giving up the idea of self and devoting ourselves completely to the Buddha, he explained stage of, you know, attainment. That is, you know, if we acknowledge the stages that is still-it means that there is idea of self-this stage, that stage-who attained this stage or that stage, in other words, you attained this stage or that stage, or I attained first stage, second stage, third stage. But when we give up idea of self there is no stage. Whatever there is no complete practice or incomplete practice because whatever we do if there is no idea of self that is it! And he explained it very carefully about this point. I think you could understand what he meant. How idea of self arise in our everyday life and how we should understand our thinking mind which we have in the first stage of practice and Buddha supposed to talk about dharma in his, you know, first stage, where he had still, you know, thinking mind, pure thinking mind. Pure thinking mind is without idea of self. Mind moves like a wave, like waves, one after another. But there is no idea of self at that stage. In that stage, you know, we have pure thinking. Why we say pure thinking is because there is no idea of self. That is to say the images you have in practice, in zazen, various images and no idea of self is involved in it-"oh I have terrible images, I must get rid of it"-that is already idea of self. So we say when some images come, let it come up and let it vanish, or let it sink down. That is how we practice *shikantaza*. When you hear sound, just hear sound. Don't be bothered by it. It may come from this ear and go out from the other ear-that is *shikantaza*. And you shouldn't try to be so even, just sit. That is so important practice. To obtain clear mind and to be free from various difficulties we have or to live without creating problems for us we are always creating problems. I say home made problems. Special...you know, problems. Very tasty problems! It is not just food-very tasty problems. So if possible, you know, we should not create so tasty food. Putting too much sugar or something like that. Something too fancy is same as something ugly. We say, In Japanese we say, *suweta wa* _____ -too much is same as too little. Same as not too much. Not much. If it is too much that is, maybe that is worse than not enough.

This kind of practice is called Middle Way. Not too much, or not enough, just right. That is Middle Way. Or in Tendai, we say tentative...or what should we call it- *kai-kai* means tentative. The thing we don't acknowledge things, something, some with any substantial idea, it is something tentative. Because they are changing. When -even though we observe things objectively, you know, when we observe things, objective world we immediately seek for the relationship between things, how A is related to B or C and how things related to ourselves, to ourselves. At that moment the self is one of the objective being. You are observing you objectively. So that is already projected self, and you relate objective self to A or B or C and many beings and seek for relationship.

That is how pure thinking works. So self is there, not here. And self is always this side not the other side. And self is not something different from objective world. So there is no objective or subjective world. That which exists is one whole being which is moving constantly. That is Dharmakaya Buddha and if we observe more objectively, that is Sambhogakaya Buddha or Nirmanakaya Buddha, but those three bodies are one. Not different. So in this way we practice zazen. With this kind of idea, giving up all idea of self, we practice zazen.

That is background of *shikantaza*. So intellectually you should clear understanding of things and subjectively we should try to have best posture with best breathing-when we devote ourselves in this way that is *shikantaza*.

Do we have more time? If you have some question, practical question, please ask me.

Student A: I can't attend sesshin because I have to work, I wonder if I could come and sit in the morning?

Roshi: Yes, I think so. Have you tried...

Student A: Sesshin?-No.

Roshi: As we have maybe one hundred, not enough seat, so I don't know what to do.

(Silas explains procedure for occasional sitting)

Student B: Sesshin means to gather one's mind, can you talk about that.

Roshi: I don't know exactly what sesshin is-to gather, but that is not so appropriate name, I think. It is something to control mind, but actually as I told you right now is different. The effort we make is not something to do, to do something or to govern our mind or to control our mind. To do it, just to do it without any idea of self is, you know, more like, more appropriate interpretation of sitting. Of course, to have good *shikantaza* we have preparatory zazen. From old old time, you know, we have that technical term. *Kompunjo* (?), *kompujo* means to enter. That is started from Theravada practice. To prepare for the first stage or the second stage or the third stage, they practice some special practice. Those practice is not the practice of the first stage, or second stage or the third stage, but to prepare for those stages. So in one week sesshin, maybe, you may have some practice to prepare for good *shikantaza*. I think that is very good point. We should not mix up pure zazen and *konpunjo*, preparatory zazen. *Kon* is "near", *pun* is "divided," so to -it is not the pure practice itself, it is different, it is divided from the pure practice, but it is very near to the ...real practice. So *konpunjo*. But if you have completely understanding of zazen, *konpunjo* can be pure practice. Some other questions?

Student C: (Inaudible)

Roshi: Good question. The effort I had-for a long long time I had that problem. And-but I didn't ask anyone about it, you know. But the effort to continue the practice is allowable. To make our practice is pure, effort to make our practice pure is allowable. If something comes out, let it come up, without some effort you cannot do that. If you...this stuff is _____ but if it turn just like this it is not our practice, when it is supported by invisible relationship, then this is completely supported. So how we keep those invisible relationship is, maybe, belief or prayer. "Let me have pure practice." Even though we don't I know what it is. It is too much to know the relationship, but let me do like this. That kind of effort is necessary. If it doesn't go this way or that way, doesn't be like this, it cannot be like this, and so when your zazen, there must be that kind of feeling. That is why we stretch our neck as if your head is going upwards. To the heavens. And your back should be straight as if your back is deeply rooted to the center of the earth. Shhhhhh...that kind of feeling should be in our *shikantaza*. That kind of feeling is not the feeling when we intensify our practice, but some spirit, spiritual feeling.

Thank you very much.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 70-02-22
