

70-02-23

## **SELFLESSNESS, BEING AND NON-BEING-THE BACKGROUND OF SHIKANTAZA.**

### **February 23, 1970. San Francisco. Sesshin # 1. (Incomplete)**

In this sesshin I suggested to practice *shikantaza*. For-anyway for beginner it doesn't make much difference-I am sorry to say so, but *shikantaza* or counting breathing, it doesn't make much sense, but anyway, to have strong determination to sit for six-seven days is enough. If you have that much conviction in your practice I think that is pretty good. So anyway, those who just started practice zazen, don't give up and stay six days. And it is also good to practice counting breathing, you know, whether you are counting like you count something, you know-1, 2, 3, 4-that is also good, but I want to give you some fundamental understanding of teaching of Buddhism. Zazen practice, our zazen practice is based on-can you hear me-based on the teaching of sunyata or emptiness. If you do not have thorough understanding of emptiness, even emptiness intellectually, I don't think you can practice our way in its true sense.

Last time, before sesshin-last Sunday I explained about the background of our practice-to have strong belief in relationship between each one of us to various things. I said-if you do not have this kind of understanding your practice, even if it is very good, maybe some casual accidental good practice. When your practice is understood by you completely and when you appreciate your good practice-"Oh this is *shikantaza*." If you understand in this way that practice is-means something, but even though you have-you experience good experience if that is something just happen to you by accident that is not rue practice. Why we-why we have gratitude in our practice is because we feel-this is, this is Buddha's practice and this is-this has been the practice of all our teachers practice and I could have same experience. If you feel in that way, you know, the meaning of the attainment is quite different. You may say whatever we do if we have Buddha Nature, if we have Buddha Nature all what we do is expression-should be expression of our Buddha Nature, your understanding of your experience is not the understanding which Buddha had. So...I think I must explain about this point more, and explain why our practice, our background of our practice should be the teaching of emptiness.

Before Mahayana Buddhism arise, of course, as as Buddhist no one supposed-no one is supposed to have idea of self because Buddha's teaching was the teaching of selflessness so no one could say anything about teaching of-based on idea of being or self, but before Mahayana practice arise or understood their practice tend to be the practice of annihilation or practice of attainment. In other words, to-by annihilating our desires, evil desires, and we attain some stage, that is more Theravada-like practice and understanding, but although they did not believe in self, small self, but actually their practice involved in the practice based on the idea of self. Why it is so is-as long as you recognize good or veil desires like something which exist actually within yourself that means you recognize self with, small self, within yourself because you have small self instead of big self. You acknowledge good nature or bad nature or good desire or bad

desire-to say good or bad is already small self, you know. So even though they do not say selflessness, they do not say-they say selflessness. actually they are accepting small self and their practice was based on small self. So the more you attain some stage-annihilating-not annihilating but over coming evil desires and attain some higher stage, you know, your small self will become bigger and bigger. That kind of practice is not, you know, accord with Buddha's practice of-Buddha's practice which is based on the idea of non-self.

Why we-small self arise is because you, you know, understand things as if things exist. When- why you are disturbed by sound from outside that is because you recognize motor car outside. There is motor car and some...some truck driver...is making that kind of sound. So why you are disturbed by the sound is because you have some substantial idea about things, objective things, being, which is not actually exist. This is the difference between so-called it Hinayana Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism. The Mahayana Buddhist does not accept the idea of being. Being is at the same time non-being. It is being, you know, in...smallest particle of time it is being, as it doesn't exist in that way always, so it is non-being. So common people is not always common people because he maybe Buddha. Buddha is not always Buddha. Even Buddha he is human being. We understand things in that way. When we understand things in that way that understanding can be understanding of non-being and non-self, no self. So how we practice zazen without being disturbed by anything is to know things in its- to understand things actually. Both way-being and non-being, because sound is actually you hear so that is being, but at the same time it is non-being, so there is no reason why we should be disturbed by it. If you-if you practice ready to hear sound as being and non-being, you will not be disturbed by it. If you are disturbed by it, you should know your practice is not good enough. And-but there is no reason why you should reject the sound you hear or the confusion you have in your practice. So you can accept your confused practice disturbing by outward objects. That is, you know, real practice. When you have that kind of understanding which is understood by our ancestors, patriarchs and teachers...if you have this kind of experience of detachment you will say-"Oh this is it. This is Buddha's practice. This is Buddhist practice." Like a fish, you know, in...in aquarium-Golden State Park there is a big fish and they look very clever. If they eat something wrong (trouble with microphone...) I am not so wise as fish...(laughs) when they do something wrong, you know, they...swim the other direction. As long as they are doing something good they go on and on and just before he hit his head against window-...that is, I think, enlightenment and they are always happy to have that kind of way or practice. So, you know, if our zazen could be like their practice that is, I think, good practice but I think our practice is very, you know, casual and frivolous, sometimes good, sometimes not so good and when it is not so good we will be very much discouraged/ So there is no constant or there is no relationship between today's practice and tomorrow's practice and their practice-fishes practice is always continuity. They are doing exactly what they should do and they enjoy very much to-to avoid-in avoiding problem maybe they are doing intentionally. In avoiding problem they-looks like some joy and continuing some-their own way they also have joy. That is, you know, the difference between so-called it freedom and freedom in its true sense or Buddha Nature in its true sense and Buddha Nature in...some...hasty

understanding of Buddha Nature. We say whatever we do that is expression of Buddha Nature. It is so but there must be oneness of various practice, good and bad is one. Success or unsuccessful practice should be one. Figuring out why today's practice was not so good you can try to have good practice. Then there is practice in its true sense.

So how you make this kind of effort is...to have right understanding of practice, and checking up your practice and to continue good practice. Without knowing what is right practice and what is not it is difficult to make your effort. When you have-when you understand-when you have some understanding of practice you can make effort in its true sense in your practice. I think this point is very important. Then, you know, whether your posture is perfect or imperfect there is some feeling in your posture. When your practice is continuous practice of Buddha, then there is some power or feeling in your practice. If you don't have it-even though your posture is right, your practice is dead. There is no feeling in it. It is just like a beautiful artificial flower, even though flower is not so beautiful, if it is natural flower you have-you will have some encouragement when you see the flower.

So before you understand what is non-self or selflessness, it is necessary to understand maybe teaching of non-being-not to exist, although it exists, but on the other hand, it is not permanent, it is tentative being including ourselves. We say self-if we-when we say self it is already self projected outside of yourself, it is objective self, not true self. So that kind of objective being is not constant, not substantial, it is projected figure of something or you may say it is just tentative form and color of something great or you may say it is like a wave in the ocean. Wave doesn't exist-exist, but actually if someone ask you what is wave it is difficult to answer. So you will give up to seek for what is true self. True self is always on your side. It cannot be object of anything. It is always subject. It is always independent and it is universal to every phenomenal being. So to seek for self, you know, selflessness, what is selflessness is vain effort. It is much better not to do it. When you start to seek for what is selflessness it means that you are seeking for small self, and that is big mistake. So in your practice, you know, that is why we say-don't be...

(incomplete-full lecture not recorded...)

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 70-02-22

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