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"IT IS NOT ALWAYS SO"

SANDOKAI LECTURE XII

by

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NOTE: This lecture covers the following lines of the Sandokai:

Koto o ukete wa subekaraku shu o esushebi mizurkara kiku o rissuru koto nakare sokumoku do o esezunba, ashi o hakobumo izukunzo michi o shiran" [Listen to the words, you should understand the source of the teaching. If you don't understand the source of the Path even as you move your feet, how can you know the way?]

Tonight's lecture will begin with "*Koto o ukete wa subekaraku shu esubeshi.*" *Koto* means "aforementioned things or words," the previous words of the *Sandokai*. But it also means all the various words, things or ideas which we see or hear. So *koto* includes everything. *Ukete* is "to receive" or "to listen to." The character for *ukete* looks something like a hand. *Subekaraku* means "you should" or "by all means," or "necessarily." *Shi* means "the source of the teaching which is beyond our words." *Esubeshi* means "to have actual understanding of it." So, "when you listen to the words, you should understand the source of the teaching." Usually we stick to words, and so, it is difficult to see the true meaning of the teaching. We say "words or teaching are the finger pointing at the moon." words are just to suggest the real meaning of the truth.

If you stick to the finger pointing at the moon you cannot see the moon. So, we should not stick to words, but we should know the actual meaning behind the words.

In Sekito's time each master had his own way of introducing the real teaching to his disciples and as they stuck to their teachers' words or personal Zen characteristics and to his particular way, Zen became divided into many schools, and it was hard for the students to know which was the true way. And actually, to wonder which was the true way was already wrong. Each teacher was suggesting the same truth, the same source of the teaching which was transmitted from Buddha. To stick to words without knowing the source of the teaching is wrong, and that is what the teachers of Sekito's time were doing. And that was the student's way of studying Zen. so Sekito said, "If you receive words, you should understand the source of the teaching which is transmitted from Buddha and is beyond each teacher's own way of expressing or suggesting the truth.

The next sentence is, "*Mizukara kiku o rissuru koto nakare.*" "You" is understood in this sentence. *Nakare* means "not." *Kiku* means "rules." *Rissuru* means "to establish."

Mizukaru means "by yourself." "you should not establish rules for yourself." And you should not stick to them or be bound by them. Most people are doing that. When you say, "this is right!" or "this is wrong!" you establish some rules for yourself. And because you say so, naturally you will stick to them and be bound by them. And this is why Zen was divided into many ways or schools-Soto, Rinzai, Obaku, Ummon, Hogen and Igyo. Originally there was one teaching, but each teacher, or his disciples established one school and they stuck to their "family way" and were bound by it. They understood Buddha's teaching in their own way and then stuck to their understanding and thought that it was Buddha's teaching. In other words, they stuck to the finger pointing at the moon. If three teachers are pointing at the moon, each one has his own finger and so there are already three schools, but the moon is one. So Sekito says, "Don't establish your own rules for yourself."

This is very important for our practice. we are liable to establish our own rules. "This is the rule of Tassajara," you may say. But rules are the finger which points to how we have good practice at Tassajara according to the situation. Rules are important, but you should not think, "this is the only way; this is the true permanent teaching, or the rules they have are wrong." You should not stick to your own understanding of things. Something which is good for someone is not always good for someone else, so you should not make special rules for everyone. Rules are important, but when you stick with rules and force them on others too much it means that you are making a rule-bound establishment.

So when you enter as monastery you should not say, "this is my way." If you come to Tassajara you should obey Tassajara's rules. You should not establish your own rules. To see the actual moon through Tassajara rules is how to practice at Tassajara. Rules are not the point. The actual teaching the rules will catch is the point. So by observing rules you will naturally understand the real teaching.

From the beginning, this point may be missing in all of us. Most people start to study Zen in order to know what Zen is. This is already wrong. It means they are always trying to provide some understanding or rules for themselves.

The way to study Zen should be like a fish picks up its food- snap! They do not try to catch anything. they just swim around. And if something good comes...snap! even though it is very hot you are observing Tassajara rules, eating in the hot Zendo like a fish swimming around, and if something good comes...snap! and as you are doing so, you will get something. I don't know whether you realize it or not, but as long as you are following the rules, you will have something. Even though you don't have anything or you don't study anything, you are actually studying, like a fish who doesn't seem to know what he is eating. That is all. In that way we should study. To understand does not mean to understand something through your head.

If you ask the question "what is good?" of a Zen student, his answer may be, "something you do is good and something you don't is bad." That is all. we don't think so much about good or bad. So Dogen Zenji says, "the power of 'do not' is good." This

is something intuitive. The very inmost function of ourselves. Our innate nature. Our innate nature has some function before you say "good" or "bad." that function appears to be sometimes good and sometimes bad. We understand in that way. But our innate nature is beyond the idea of good or bad. So when you wonder why we practice zazen in such bad weather, this is the first step to your confusion. We should be like a fish, always swimming around in the river. That is a Zen student. Dogen Zenji said, "the bird does not need to know the limit of the sky or what it is before flying in it." They just fly in the big sky. That is how we practice zazen.

So you should not try to make rules for yourself. These are very strict words. They may not seem to mean much, but actually when Sekito Zenji says so, he is waiting with a big stick. If you say something, he answers, "don't make rules for yourself!" Don't try to understand by your head." He is waiting like this. So when he says so, we cannot say anything. "Hai!" That is all. You need not even say "Hai!" You should do things like a mule or an ass.

You may say "this is absolute surrender." But it is not so. It is the way to understand the teaching. This character *shu* means "the source of the teaching." we are liable to wonder what it is. But it is not something which you can understand by words, but something you have when you do things quite naturally and intuitively, without saying good or bad. time is going on and on and we do not have to say "good" or "bad." Moment after moment we should follow the flow of time. You should go with time. When you become tired of doing something you may say "this way" or "that way," just to kill time. But when you see the vegetables in the garden which have almost dried up in the hot weather, you do not have much time to say what will be the appropriate thing today. While we are discussing it you are becoming more and more hungry.

So the kitchen people should go to the kitchen and prepare food for the next meal. That is the most important thing. But it does not mean that it is a waste of time to think about things. It is good to think about things, but we should not stick to words or rules too much. This is a very delicate point. Without ignoring rules, and without sticking to rules, we should continue our Tassajara practice. This is the way Sekito is suggesting.

And he says, "*sokumoku do o esezunba, ashi o hakubomo izukunzo michi o shiran.*" *Soku* means "antenna of insects or sense organs." *Moku* means "eyes." So it means to use our eyes and our fine senses. *Do* is "tao" or "the way." *E* means "understand." *Esezunba* is "not." "If you don't understand Tao with eyes and other sense organs." *Ashi* means "foot." *Hakobumo* means "to carry on," "to go." So *Ashi o Hakobumo* is "to move your feet." "To practice."

Esezunba means "how" or "how can you do that?" *Michi* is another word for "way." *Shiran* is "to know." "Can you know the way? It means that the only way is to use your fine sense organs wherever you go and at the same time to understand the source of the teaching. If you don't do that, even though you "operate your feet," (practice) you cannot know the true way (*michi o shiran*).

So the most important thing is not rules but to find the true source of the teaching with your eyes and ears wherever you are-this is a more direct way to know the source of the teaching without trying to establish some particular way for yourself. If you stick to words, if you do not see the true way through your own eyes and ears or if you stick to some rules and ignore the direct experience of everyday life, even though you practice zazen, it doesn't work, he says. So without thinking "Rinzai," or "Soto," "this way" or "that way," to have some direct experience of everyday life is the most important thing and that is how we understand the true source of the teaching from Buddha.

The true way could be a stick. The original way of Buddha could be stone. Like Master Ummon said, "It may be toilet paper." What is the true way? What is Buddha? Buddha is something beyond our understanding. So Buddha could be everything. So instead of the word "Buddha" we could just say "toilet paper" or "three pounds of hemp," as Tozan said. So, if someone asks you "Who is Buddha?" the answer may be "you are Buddha too." Then, if someone asks, "what is the mountain?" "The mountain is also Buddha," you may answer. In Japanese we say *momata*. *Mo mata* means "also" you should not say "this is Buddha." That statement will lead you to some misunderstanding. But if you say, "this is also Buddha," it is okay. If someone asks, "Where is Buddha?" you may say, "Here is Buddha too." "Too" is not so definite. Buddha may be somewhere else too.

So the secret of the perfect Zen statement is, "It is not always so." As long as you are at Tassajara, this is our rule, but it is not always so. You should not forget this point. This is also Buddha's rule. If you know this, there is no danger and you will not invite any misunderstanding. This is how you get rid of selfish practice. Even though you think you are practicing Buddha's way, you are liable to be involved in selfish practice when you say, "this is our Tassajara-way." But you should be ready to accept some other way too.

This is rather difficult; to have a very strict, strong confidence in your actual practice and to be flexible enough to accept another way too, is rather difficult. You may say that to be ready to accept another's teaching is not a strict way. But unless you are ready to accept another's practice, you cannot be so strict with your own way, or else strictness becomes stubbornness. Only when you are ready to accept someone's opinion can you say, "you should do so!" It means that if someone else comes we can observe his way. Otherwise, you cannot be so strict with yourself.

Usually strictness means to be rigid, to be caught by your own understanding and not to provide room for the understanding of others. Do you understand this point? That is not our way. If someone asked my master's opinion about some matter, he always said, "If you asked me, my opinion is this!" (hitting the table with his stick). When he said so, he was very strong. Why he could be so strong was because he said, "If you asked me." That is our way. So, to be just yourself is to be ready to accept someone else's opinion too. Each moment you should intuitively know what to do. But it does not mean you should reject someone else's opinion.

In every day life is Tao, and if you do not practice the way in everyday activity there is no approach to the true way. That is what Sekito means. Don't stick to words. Don't make your won rules and force rules on others. It is not possible to force rules on others anyway, because each one has his own way and should have his own way.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 70-07-04
