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WHAT IS SELF? - WHAT IS OUR PRACTICE?

December 20, 1970, San Francisco.

In my last trip to Japan I found out many things. The feeling I had there was—they were, Japanese people nowadays...trying very hard, but according to Uchiyama Roshi—do you know him? He is in Kyoto and he is practicing with student and many Caucasian students were there and when I went there they asked me to speak something so I just saw them and talked a little. Japanese people now—group, group-*toki*, group is group, but *toki* means lose themselves. Loose themselves in group. That is...Japanese life now. Group-*toki*. Japan is a big family or a big group. They loose themselves in group, so they don't know what they are doing actually. I don't say all of them, but most of people there lose themselves in group. And, you know, some—some people who think themselves rid of Japan also has some confidence in their effort of making progress in every direction, but still they were involved, they will lose themselves, they are lose themselves in group and they don't know. It is difficult for them to know what they are doing. Even though they do not have any information from other countries outside of the country, I think if their mind is calm enough to see, to realize what they are doing, it is not so difficult to see themselves. But, unfortunately, they lose, they have lost themselves in group. Big group of Japan. And Japanese—weak point of Japanese people is ecstasy. They —when I was...junior or senior in high school, our principal always told us you should not be in ecstasy. If they become—they make some progress in something, they easy get into ecstasy or, or how nice it is! That is the tendency of Japanese people who visit Japan find it very difficult to live in Japan. I think so too. And in comparison to the—that kind of tendency...I think in America there is opposite tendency which is individualism. And based on individual-individual, excuse me...individual practice. If you practice our way, Buddhism will become Taoism. The difference between Taoist and Buddhist is one is _____, the Buddhist is more dualistic, you know. That is the difference. So I think people in America has opposite tendency, which is, which makes good pair to Japanese people and extreme, you know, making effort this way. The other is making effort the other way.

And so, that is why I think I have difficult time in San Francisco. Knowing Japanese tendency and Japanese people's tendency and your way of life it is very difficult to keep harmony. And while you are young it is Okay but even so if you want to make real effort, real progress in your practice, you must have some base of the life or more deeper complete understanding of the practice and way of life.

This morning I want to talk about what is self and what is our practice. We have no—in Buddhism we use word 'self' in some different way. When we say 'self' it means always—it emphasizes selflessness because people had idea of self, we use that word to express our—or to explain our way. We use that word 'self', but actually Buddhist has no such word as self. But using the word self we say selflessness. Selflessness means to see things as it is. When we have no, we are not caught by idea of self we can see

things as it is and truth as it is is selflessness. So as things exist as they are, we also exist as we are. That is selflessness. It doesn't mean we do not exist. We exist but exist as we are. And to know, to realize or not to realize or not to know, but to have that kind of mood of life is our purpose of practice. So if we understand-if we can see, observe things in this way without not much idea of self, it is not individualism or it is not right life involved only in group, forgetting themselves. Forgetting themselves in group is big selfishness. To encourage, or to encourage the idea of self they enjoy the group self. So instead of small self, they have big self.

In the country, like Japan, maybe it is difficult not to be involved in that kind of, you know, busy life. For instance, right now many people are building big cabin with big stone, like I do. But idea is different, but they are doing-if you, you know, go to the suburb of small or big town, you will see big beautiful Japanese building surrounded by big stones and beautiful bonsai-like tree. It may cost a lot of money. If one built that kind of building in some place, some other person who see will imitate it. And they will build same building, or more beautiful one. And that way, one after another they build big mansion-type building and beautiful garden. To me that is, I don't think they are enjoying their garden at all. Umm...so if I go, if I visit Japan, they invite me to their new house, new residence. And introduce me the new garden they built. But it seems to me they do not enjoy the garden or building so much, so much as I do. Maybe that is why they want me to see! (laughs). It is ridiculous, you know, to be involved in that kind of competition without doing-building, they just building and they are very glad if someone says he is very successful person or something like that. So, I...I told them it is very beautiful, but in America rich people do not build so beautiful building, they have big property, but in which very humble, common building, they have-this is-Japan maybe now very wealthy, but anyway it is quite different. Our way of life in Japan is quite different from they have in America. Now I am now-I haven't, I can say exactly how I feel because I am, most I am in America.

This kind of tendency-it is pretty difficult for us to be free from that kind of life or tendency of life. If you-but as a Buddhist, if you think of, for instance, ten grave prohibitory precepts, you will understand what kind of understanding of life we have: Don't kill. We have to encourage our...spirit to follow Buddhist way. We shouldn't be killed or we should kill, real Buddhist spirit. We should not steal anything which does not belong to us. Why we steal something is because we don't know...what is real value of things. Whether it belongs to me or to others does not make much sense. When you steal something, you, you-it means that you know your ego, but you don't know what your material things are. Don't be ashamed or don't indulge in something, or don't act unchaste acts. It means you should not indulge in something, you should not be caught by something. I like old art objects and my teacher would say-"don't...don't act unchaste acts." To him it is unchaste act to be attracted by something, some antique or old art subject is unchaste act to him. It maybe so.

So one by one, if you think of-about what the ten Grave Prohibitory Precepts are you will know what is Buddhist life. Knowing this tendency of human life I think you will find out what is zazen practice. To find or to realize what we are and what things are in its

true sense is the main purpose of or practice. On your black cushion, if you find yourself in its true sense, you exist as you exist. Even though you do not observe things, one by one, the way you exist on your black cushion is the way things exist in each position. So there is no need for us when we should-to be greedy or to be involved in useless competition. When you act, you know, if your life is based on zazen practice, you will have always good harmony with your family, with your neighbors, and things you treat. You will not make, you know, excessive effort or you will not be idle. You will do exactly, you know, you needed. That is the feeling of zazen when you sit. So that you exist here is that Buddha exists and that Buddha exists is that you exist here, there is no difference between Buddha and you. Buddha exists in that way, and you exist in that way. So if you are Buddha, Buddha is, of course, Buddha, and everything could be Buddha. Buddha is someone who attained Buddhahood after making a great effort for many-for six years. Before he make-attain Buddhahood, before he realized this point, he was Buddha, but he realized everything exists in that way. So for him there was no problem and according to the tendency of human being, he left his teaching because we make many mistakes, so the teaching was expressed, left-don't do that, don't be that way!-because you are originally, you will be happy if you are exactly as you are, so don't be that way, or this way too much. That was Buddha's teaching which is called Middle Way.

So only when you have zazen practice in your everyday life you will be free from life of habit or life of excessive busy life. We will know how we can help others only when we know how we should exist...(tape turned)...In this way, having right practice in our everyday life I think we can help others in it s true sense.

Thank you very much.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 70-05-02-B
