

OCTOBER *SESSHIN* LECTURE
Shunryū Suzuki
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Transcribed by Trudy Dixon

NOT VERBATIM

Afternoon Lecture:

It is a great joy to practice sesshin with you in this way. I think this is quite unusual to be practicing zazen with many students in this room. Even in Japan I don't think this is always possible. Japan and America are not so far away today, although the ways of life are quite different from each other. I have studied many things in America which I could not study in Japan. And I think that you will study many things from us which you cannot study in America. In this way our effort will bring some result if we keep our straightforward way in practice.

In zazen practice, the most important point is straightforwardness, as the Sixth Patriarch emphasized. According to him, if we always remain in straightforwardness we have our Way and we are expressing our true nature. But this straightforwardness does not mean to remain lazy without making any effort to improve yourself. When your true nature is covered or bound by something, even though you try to express your straightforward nature, it is impossible. So, for the beginner, it may be necessary to know what *is* the straightforwardness meant by the Sixth Patriarch.

If you always remain straightforward, you will have some confidence within the straightforwardness. Whatever comes to us, whatever we face, we should accept and respond to without fear, without being caught by anything—any idea of fear. It is not easy to be straightforward. If you realize this, you will accept pretty hard discipline to keep your true nature.

What I want to talk about now is how to orient your mind in practice. For the beginner it is inevitable that there will be hard discipline, the observation of some rules. The observation of rigid rules is not our point. But if you want to acquire vital freedom, it is necessary to have some strength, or to have some discipline, in order to be free from one-sided dualistic ideas. So our training begins in the realm of duality or rules: what we should or should not do. These kinds of rules are necessary because before you start practice or realize the necessity of religious life, before you adore something holy; you are bound in the realm of necessity, you are controlled completely by your surroundings. When you see something beautiful you will stay there as much as possible. When you are tired of it you will go to another place. You may think that is freedom, but it is not freedom. You are enslaved by your surroundings, that is all! Not at all free. That kind of

life is just material and superficial.

Because we have some idea of freedom, because of our true nature which wants to be free from our surroundings; we start to study something and we choose between good and bad, right and wrong. This will be a new kind of life called life seeking for freedom, which is not realized in a true sense. Some people may think: if we were like cats and dogs there would be real freedom. But this kind of desire will not satisfy our true nature or inmost desire. After striving and seeking freedom you will realize you cannot attain freedom by searching for it.

Of course, if you keep up this kind of effort for a long time, you will develop a kind of intuition so that you will know what you should do without thinking and wandering so much. This is like the expert who can tell how much a package weighs without using a scale. From his experience he will know. In this way you will have a certain ability to know or intuition about what is good and what is bad. But this kind of ability based on experience is not religious experience. Religious experience is not only intuition about what is good or bad, but also joy, happiness and composure.

Even though you continue a certain discipline, it may be difficult to attain enlightenment if you do not know what is true religious experience, or how you should concentrate your effort. But for the beginner, it is the same whether you understand this or not. Anyway it is difficult. Just to practice zazen in certain posture is enough for a while. After you are used to a certain posture, it is necessary to know in what way your practice should be oriented.

Dōgen-zenji said that Bodhisattva Kannon (Avalokiteshvara) changed the direction of a sound by hearing it. Usually sound comes from a bell and you hear it. You think, "There is a bell, it's a wonderful sound," and you are listening to it. That experience is quite usual. But when Avalokiteshvara heard the sound, he made the sound at the same time [laughing]. Do you understand? He made sound, not the bell—you made the sound. You practice zazen, zazen is there. You practice zazen in Zen Center.

"In Zen Center they are rigid" [laughing]—"they insist on rigid forms." So long as you want to study Zen, you should practice in that way. That is your understanding of our practice. It is true but it is not perfect. At first it should be like that, but at the same time, when you practice zazen there is no other zazen than your practice. The practice that you are doing is zazen. None can force you to practice our way. Because you practice zazen there is zazen, and that zazen is your zazen, as sounds come from some temple and go back to that temple from you. When you realize this fact there is no duality or dualistic ideas, no need to choose between two, for you there is only one way.

In naive, childish, animal, or inanimate life there is no freedom; in human or moral life there is freedom; but when we enter religious life there is no longer freedom. Religious life is moved by necessity like animal life. The way we take is the way we should take. In this realm we become one with human beings and one with all the rest of existence, animate and inanimate; we can accept scientific truth and mechanical civilization.

Our vital freedom will be like running water originating from a mountain and passing through valleys and fields, reaching the sea. There is no freedom for the water to return to the mountain. But at the same time there is vital freedom. This kind of life is called religious life. To attain it is to practice zazen without the idea of gaining. To expect some result from your practice is like trying to hear the bell from outside yourself. To expect something from outside, to try to achieve something, is to try to hear the bell from the outside only.

If you do not have the faintest idea of gaining, the sound will arise from you. When the bell is sounding, you are sounding. Stop your gaining idea and keep alert and ready to accept—ready to respond to the slightest sound which will come. When you have no pain in your legs, if you can keep your posture right, if you can practice zazen without difficulty, what you should work on is to stop your ideas of gaining by your practice and concentrate on making yourself alert enough to respond to activity and ready to express yourself in your own way. This is the ability which you will gain by practice. No one has this ability without practice. we should not mix up animal life, the life of a cat or a dog, with the life of an enlightened person.

We are now studying, practicing zazen in one room. Some of you have practiced zazen for a long time. Some of you started just now. But each should have his own way, even though we practice in the same way. This is very important in our practice, but it is not difficult. It should not be very difficult for you to understand what I am talking about right now. Just practice zazen until you get accustomed to right posture and when you get tired of it you should conquer the tiredness. You should make yourself alert; you should try to respond in the right way; and you should try to express yourself in the right way. This is how we practice zazen.

This transcript is a retyping of the existing City Center transcript by Trudy Dixon. It is not verbatim. No tape is available. The City Center transcript was entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. It was reformatted by Bill Redican (10/27/01).