

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
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NOT VERBATIM

You may think that the various religions of the world will, as a natural course of events, tend to become unified, until a single religion answers to the whole world. But this is not so, because such a tendency towards unity is not the natural way a religion develops.

In Buddhism for example, there are many different sets or schools. These differences arose from the same teachings because of the differences in the way of life e.g. "national character"(?) of those who studied the Buddha's teaching. In this way the one religion of Buddhism of the Buddha's time developed into the range of schools existing since then.

It is not possible for a true religion to be limited to one school; when one school develops, it is at the same time the beginning of further divisions. This is not surprising since each one of us is unique; and religion strictly speaking is for yourself.

Realizing the naturalness of different schools, etc., there is harmony among the various sects of Buddhism.

My school is the Soto School. The Soto School does not depend upon any particular teaching or idea. It follows Dogen's way, which is to resume our natural relationship with our essential mind. His way is not to follow any particular teaching or practice-but still, his way itself is very formal and deliberate. In his guidelines to disciples he even gives specific directives as to conduct in the toilet, e.g., which hand to wipe with, etc.

So even though Dogen's way is not based on a particular formal Buddha authority, it is still very particular. But Dogen's "particularness" is not based on any abstract religious or moral principles; his detailed teachings on behavior are based on practical considerations in everyday life as learned from experience by him and various Zen Masters.

Although the Soto School developed around Dogen and his way, he himself didn't want to be called a "Soto" priest. He wanted to be regarded only as a disciple of Buddha. Another reason he didn't want to form another school was because he saw that, strictly speaking, each one has his own way.

The Zen Sect [?] School is a completely Japanese school started by the great Koho-daishi. It was a virile school which in time lost its spirit as it became popular with the ruling class, gaining wealth, etc. Dogen

was one of the men who arose in the face of this "fancy" Buddhism, teaching instead simplicity by example and teachings.

The Japanese Soto way is quite different from the Chinese "Soto" way. But Dogen was not the only one who taught such a way.

QUESTION PERIOD

Student: What about bowing?

Suzuki-roshi: Bowing is a very important practice. (Suzuki then demonstrated "feet of Buddha" bowing). Bowing is a very important practice for diminishing our arrogance and egotism. It is not to demonstrate complete surrender to Buddha. This practice is to help get rid of our own selfishness. (Suzuki's teacher bowed so often that an area on his forehead became somewhat calloused. In his older age Suzuki's teacher said, "Before I was a lion; now I am a cat.")

(On *mudrās*): Soto Zen mainly uses two *mudrās*, and considers also that the whole body is a *mudrā* when in the proper sitting position.

In the Shingon School, mudras are much used. Shingon also recognizes a basic scripture upon which Shingon functions. This scripture is the *Diamond Sutra*, considered to be the only 'perfect' sutra because it was the Buddha addressing himself.

In Soto Zen, there is no particular sutra upon which the school rests. It is felt that Buddha's essential teaching was (and is) to see into our own true nature; and the best way to see into our own nature is to practice zazen.

If we live together there is actually not much need to speak to one another. We will understand.

Enlightenment is not the same for each person-although it is similar from person to person. Ten enlightened people have ten similar but different enlightenments.

Student: Can enlightenment be lost?

Suzuki-roshi: No, an actual experience of your life cannot be lost-thus enlightenment cannot be lost. However, enlightenment is only the entrance to the way (or temple?).

In Soto we do not put much emphasis on ranks within the Soto hierarchy.

The most important point is selflessness. That is the most important

thing to give or to attain. If selflessness is reached everything else will follow naturally, "Everything will be taken care of."

This transcript is a retyping of the existing City Center transcript. It is not verbatim. The City Center transcript was entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. No tape is available. It was reformatted by Bill Redican (10/26/01).