

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Sesshin Lecture, No. 2
HELPING OTHERS
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San Francisco

First of all, a sincere—our practice—sincere practice—our sincere practice is not, you know, practice just for himself. This is not so difficult to understand. Bodhisattva practice is not just to help himself, but to help others. We put more stress to help others. That is bodhisattva practice.

I think because you are not so considerate in your everyday life, you have that question: you know, why we have to practice zazen, or what is sincere practice? If you find out how difficult it is to help others, with bodhisattva mind, with mind of selflessness, you may, you know, imagine how difficult it is to practice to help others. And actually, all the problems we human being has [are] caused by our carelessness, careless activity, or selfish activity. That is, you know—those small careless activity one by one accumulated will cause a big trouble for our society. If we realize this point, you know, we find out the reason why we must practice zazen.

I think you have—you must have read—some of you must have read *Zuimonki*.¹ You know, in *Zuimonki*, Dōgen-zenji is discussing about this everyday problems we have, and he, you know, explain what is bodhisattva mind.

Last night, Yoshimura-sensei,² you know, was asked to help someone's schedule of trip [laughs], and he had to sit up until half past twelve [laughs]. [Laughter.] He knows, you know, of course, we have *sesshin*, you know. Even though he may sleep, you know, today—today's *sesshin*, knowing that he has to help someone who [is] making trip—this is, you know, already a big problem to discuss, you know: whether he should help others, sacrificing his *sesshin*, or whether he should refuse—refuse it because practice of zazen is more important than making a trip.

Now, what will you do [laughs] when you are asked, you know, "please help me," you know? Without knowing how important it is to practice zazen, what will you do? *Ahh*, this is, you know, very—may be very difficult problem. We cannot say, you know, you should refuse it or you shouldn't refuse it. The point is, if you refuse it because you have strong confidence, you know, in our practice—just because you have strong confidence in our practice, then you should refuse it. But [if] even a slightest, you know—not doubt, but slightest selfish idea is involved in his word, maybe he shouldn't.

¹ Eihei Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki (The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Record of Things Heard)*.

² Ryōgen Yoshimura was a Sōtō priest who came from Japan to San Francisco in 1969 (see *Wind Bell*, 1970, Vol. IX, No. 1, p. 30).

Sometime we refuse things because of some reason, because of making some excuse. But that is—mostly those excuse is just for himself, you know, based on his selfish idea.

So you say to practice—if you come and sit here that is our practice. If you think so, that is, you know, too easy understanding of our practice. To practice zazen, refusing everything, without doing anything, asking someone else what he should do, and making time for himself, and practice here, is, you know—when you practice here you have a big responsibility. If you feel very good, you know [laughs], asking everything for your wife or some—for your friend, and feel good to practice here, that is too selfish practice. That is not our practice. Here, you see, you may find out how—what is sincere practice.

Because he couldn't, you know, refuse it, he sit up until half past twelve. So accordingly, he may be sleeping [laughs] on cushion today [laughs, laughter]. Do you think that is, you know, bad practice? It is very difficult to say whether our practice is good or bad. If you think [about?],³ you know, the real meaning of practice, you cannot easily criticize someone's practice. Of course, if he sleep, you know, he will get a big slap [laughs] from student—even student.

But a *kyōsaku*,⁴ you know, is not—symbolize Buddha's mercy, which is not involved in right or wrong, good or bad. Just to help, you know, someone's practice, there we have Buddha's *kyōsaku*. But most people mix up ordinary criticism with Buddha's *kyōsaku*. Buddha's *kyōsaku* should be very strict. It should be like a sword. But our mind—or Buddha's mind should be actually the most generous and merciful, ready to help everyone, as much as possible.

Originally, we cannot rely on moral code, or idea of right or wrong. Because we cannot rely on any rules or moral, we must practice zazen so that we can be both very strict and very generous, always ready to help others. So our zazen is not just matter of a form. The spirit we practice is the most important.

In *Zuimonki*, Dōgen-zenji is talking about when we are asked to do something—or for an instance when we—when you [are] are asked to write a letter for your friend about something—when he need some help, about money—you should ask someone about some legal, you know, thing—you should ask some- [partial word] someone else. And at that time, you know, if you asked—if he doesn't—if he cannot write a letter, you should write a letter of introduction—you should introduce him to—or your friend or to

³ The word "[about]" was added by one of the transcribers (WKR) because of Suzuki-rōshi's practice, throughout this talk but not in most other talks, of dropping "about" after "think." Suzuki-rōshi did not say: "If you think you know the real meaning of practice"

⁴ *kyōsaku* (Jap.): warning stick used to alert sleepy and/or idle monks.

lawyer or some businessman.

But you may say, "I am a monk," you know, "I have no time [laughs] to be involved in worldly things like that." You may easily say so. But think—reflect on your feeling at that time. It is good reason, but, Dōgen-zenji says, you—there must be—there cannot be—you cannot say there is not a slightest idea of selfishness is involved in my when I said—in me when I say so. You can—you may not be able to say so so easily. So perhaps you should write a letter for him—letters for him.

Then his disciple, Ejō-zenji,⁵ asked Dōgen-zenji again: "As you may be all right," you know, "if you write a letter for him, but it will create a big trouble for the lawyer or for the businessman," you know [laughing]. "He may have a big trouble, I think," he said. "Still you should write a letter or not?" What—"Still he should write a letter for him or not?"

Dōgen-zenji says, "Yes, even so you should." [Laughs.] "But whether businessman will help him or not is," you know, "his problem. So you should—if you think that will create some problem for them, you should write," you know [laughs, laughter]. "It may create some problem for you, but whether you should help or not is—should be decided by you. I am helping him, and I am just writing intr- [partial word]—letter of—introducing letter. So think [about?] this point clearly, and if possible please help him."

So if you think, you know, if you are very careful in your everyday life, it is not so simple [laughs], you know, to help others. But usually, making various, you know, excuse for himself and try not to help others. That is what is going on in this society.

If we become very careful, in one hand, we will have more trouble. But on the other hand, this society will be for every one of us. Actually, this society is for someone who has various ability. So this society is not actually for the disable people. So that is why we must have set up—or we must some welfare system. We say "welfare." That is, welfare is excuse [laughs]. That's mere excuse—very cold or very careless excuse created by human lazy cold nature.

If we become more careful about each one's situation, instead of having strong welfare system, we can, you know, enjoy our life with each other. The joy of someone who has ability will be appreciated when he help others. And when he see someone who is helped by him actually, really, sincerely, he will appreciate his life and he will appreciate his talent.

But nowadays, you know, we are just—someone who has ability is busy in working on machine and paper [laughs], you know. He has not much, you

⁵ Koun Ejō-zenji (1198-1280): Dōgen-zenji's senior student and dharma heir. He recorded or edited *Zuimonki* and served as second abbot of Eihei-ji.

know, joy in his life, even though he has great ability: even though he can write a good poem, or even though he can produce beautiful art. They are working for, you know, for the publisher, for the businessman, and he cannot produce what he want to—actually what he want to do. That is what is going [on] in this world. Even though he want to paint in some way—if he is an architect, if he want to design in his own way, you know, because of manager's order, you know, you—his design should be straight, you know, simple line as much as possible, and building should be always square [laughs, laughter], so that the building doesn't cost so much money.

So all the talent and ability of human being is sacrificed because of this kind of careless, cold excuse. In Zen word, a man of immense, immense ability, immense power, should not be fooled by clever words [laughs]. A man of great ability should not be fooled by clever words. So that we can [be] free from those clever excuse, we should practice zazen. There is no other way to acquire—to be free from this kind of superficial understanding of world—understanding of this—our human life. Newspaper, magazine, television, you know—all those publication, if you think [about] this point, easily fool you, you know. It is quite easy for them to fool us. Sometime various—even sociology, psychology, or various cultural study ... [*Sentence not finished. Probably something like "may fool us." Tape turned over.*]

When we are not fooled by it, when we can use it, you know, to help others, it is the—those studies will give us a great advantage for human life. But because we have spirit of, you may say, Zen, we are enslaved by those studies. If you think [about] those point[s] carefully, things which is happening near at hand, you will realize what is way-seeking mind in its true sense, and what is sincerity, what is the spirit of Zen. Our spirit of Zen, especially Dōgen's spirit of practice, is based on everyday life—problem we have in everyday life. If you think [about] this point, just to spend—just to share—just to spare our valuable time for zazen is not zazen.

If you practice zazen, you should pay full respect to the people who is not sitting, who is busy in his work—in their work. When you think about what they are doing, you know, you cannot goof off [laughs, laughter]. This is my favorite word [laughs, laughter]. On your cushion, you cannot waste your time, you know. When you have this kind of respect, you can practice real zazen.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Sara Hunsaker and Bill Redican 9/8/00.