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SESSHIN LECTURE No. 1¹
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In this *sesshin*, I have been explaining the context of our practice and, at the same time, the meaning of rules and precepts. But for us, precepts—observation of precepts and practice of zazen is same thing, you know, not different [just] as our everyday life and practice, zazen practice, is one.

After *sesshin*, we will have ordination ceremony for Paul [Discoe] and Reb [Anderson]. And—and then we will have lay ordination ceremony for the students—all the students who has been practicing zazen who—who has practiced zazen for three years before 1967. And so that is why I explained the meaning of our practice, zazen practice, or way of our zazen practice, referring to the precepts and rules—rules which you may like [laughs]—you may not like so much [laughs].

But if you know what is the precepts and what is rules, you—whether you like it or not, it is something with you, always, before—even before you are born—you were born. So we say: "If there is something, there is rules about it or in it." [Laughs.] There is nothing without rules, you know. That something [is] there means that some rules is there. That is rules. But before we, you know, know our true nature or some truth or rules which is always with you—you, you know, you think when—when someone explain how you exist or what is, you know, your true nature, then that is Buddha's teaching, not mine [laughs]. Nothing to do with me.

"If I am Buddhist [laughs], maybe we have to observe Buddha's precepts. But I am not Buddhist," you know, "I am not yet Buddhist, so that rules is nothing to do with me. But fortunately or unfortunately, if I go to Zen Center, you know, to listen to lecture [laughs] we have to, you know, behave like other students be- [partial word]—behave. That is rules." You may understand in that way. But where Zen Center exist, there is Zen Center's rules.

As you have your true nature, and, you know, to—to be ordained or to become a Buddhist disci- [partial word]—Buddha's disciple is to receive precepts. But that precepts, as I explained—actually precepts you have—which you have essentially—which you essentially have, originally have. But before you know yourself, you know, through practice pretty long time, you don't know your true nature.

When you—for an instance, when you cook rice for the first time [laughs], there is rules how you, you know, cook rice. So according, you know, to

¹ The date of this lecture is uncertain. It may or may not be the first lecture of the *sesshin*.

the way or rules, you know, to cook rice you can, you know—first you wash rice, you know, rice and—soaked in water maybe four, five hours or—no, no—wash it and take it in basket to get rid of water, and keep in the basket, you know, for—for [four?] five hours, and adding 20% more water to the rice, and burn it for maybe twenty minutes or more [laughs, laughter]. Then [laughing] you will have a beautiful, you know, well-cooked rice!

So we know that, you know, if you practice zazen [laughs], if you observe precepts, you will be a good person, you know, like Buddha [laughs]. But the—but if you have no experience of cooking rice, you know, and on—even though you know how to cook it, but when you cook it for the first time, if I—if you—you dip it in—if you, you know—after you wash it—is it—to wait two–three hours before you cook, oh, that's terrible! [Laughs.] To wait two–three hours before we start to cook!

And even though you start to cook, you know, you will worry, you know—you know, before you see well-cooked rice. And is it—is the water enough? May- [partial word]—maybe [laughs], and it may want more water, you know. Or then someone will tell him—tell you: "No, don't add any more water. That is okay." "No! Water [laughs] is not—I think water is not enough, so maybe I want to add some more water." Yes, no, yes, no. [Laughs, laughter.] That kind of problem arise.

It is same thing with our practice, you know. If you just practice zazen, you know, according to the instruction, you will be a good person anyway [laughs]. But because you have no experience of, you know, perfect prac-[partial word]—practice, you worry, you know. That is, you know, you will have some doubt in your practice, and if your teacher says, "Don't move." [Laughs.] "Continue practice," you know, then you may say, "Oh my! That's awful!" [Laughs.] That is same thing [as when] you, you know, feel uneasy before you see the well-cooked rice.

When you make soup, you know, if you make soup according to the recipe—how much *shōyu* sauce or salt to put [in], you know, you will have good soup. But, you know, you—perhaps you want to make it sure, so you will taste the soup. "Oh, oh, this—it will not be—we may need some more salt. Maybe better to put some more salt!" Or you may think it is better to add *shōyu* sauce too—little bit [laughs]. Recipe says no *shōyu* sauce, but maybe better to put some [laughs] *shōyu* sauce, and you will taste it. "Oh. Not—maybe we'll need [laughs, laughter] more salt." While you are tasti-[partial word]—you know, tasting, your tongue, you know, get accustomed to the salt [laughs, laughter]. So [laughs, laughter] are they salt tasting [does the dish taste salty]? I'll add to it—a little bit more salt. [Laughs.] And finally you will have terribly salty soup.

That is, you know, excessive, you know, practice, you know. To make a great effort in your practice is good, but you should—even though you

make a hard discipline, it is same thing, you know. Or sometime, you will —your practice will be lost. So from the student's side, you know, it looks like rules. From the Buddha's side, teacher's side, you know, there is no problem.

So for a student, as I said, something which looks like rules, or precepts, or prohibitory rules is not, Dōgen-zenji says, true Buddhism. At first, all de-[partial word]—all the precepts looks like rules, but we must have it, you know.

So ordination ceremony is to trust Buddha. Or trust—to trust Buddha's precepts. Or to trust your teacher, even though you don't—because you don't know exactly, you are not get through Buddha's practice.

So it is necessary for you [to be] trusting Buddha, and for some gurus to you. That is necessary, for you, for a student. But Buddha may say, "I am not forcing anything," you know. "The rules you should observe is essentially—something you have essentially. Originally you have rules." That is what Buddha may say.

We say: "If you practice zazen, there is, you know, there there is Buddha nature, true nature. That is just expression of true nature." To observe—when you observe precepts, there there is your true nature. But if someone, you know, watch—see our practice, it looks like teacher is forcing some rules to many students. Here is, you know, bamboo sprout, you know, growing every day. Before bamboo become bamboo, you know, it will be a bamboo sprout two feet long or three feet long. It is growing very rapidly. But even though, you know, bamboo sprout is completely—looks like completely different, very, very different from bamboo, but bamboo is —even though it looks like very different, you know, bamboo sprout is really bamboo, and when—before it become bamboo, it should be in that shape, you know. It cannot be big, perfect bamboo, as you use.

But if you don't sit, you don't know bamboo through and through, you know. You may say—someone may say, you know, "He is fooling us," you know [laughing], "telling us this is bamboo. But this is not bamboo. Bamboo is more taller and with leaves. But this ha- [partial word]—this has no leaves! [Laughs, laughter.] Moreover, it is covered by something, some funny thing. [Laughs.] This cannot be a bamboo!" [Laughs.]

But when it is young, you know, there is—there must be some form, you know, even though—which is different from the mother bamboo. But no one actually forces bamboo sprout in that way, you know. Naturally it is in that way and growing in that way. But most people say, without understanding bamboo through and through, they have some idea of bamboo. We have some idea about our way of life and human nature, but unfortunately most of us do not know human nature through and through, like Buddha understood human nature.

You may say Buddha's teaching is the teaching of human nature. He will be a man or sage who had enormous understanding—unusual understanding about our human nature. So that is why, you know, he set up that kind of precepts. So from Buddha's side, it is our true nature. But from our side, it looks like something funny, you know: Buddha treating us, you know, forcing us to be a [laughs] bamboo sprout. [Laughs.] You may understand in that way. That is the trouble. How we solve the pro-[partial word]—this problem is for us, you know, to trust the precepts, and to join his practice. And for Buddha, you know, acknowledging student's quality or true nature, which is same as Buddha. And help students to be a Buddha. That is, from Buddha's viewpoint, that is his way.

Actual—our zazen practice is called practice of—practice [of being] one with enlightenment. It mean that from Buddha—from Buddha, it is enlightenment. From us, you know, it is practice. But actual practice is—actually, for us it is training. For Buddha it is expression of true nature. Actually it is so.

That is, you know, the—if we say, "our practice is expression of practice," you cannot agree with that. But if you say, "our practice is training to be a Buddha," Buddha will not agree with your understanding. And both is true, you know [laughs]. For you, it is training, that is true. For Buddha it is expre- [partial word]—expression of Buddha-nature, and he accept our practice whether it is perfect or imperfect.

When you—so for you, how to become a Zen student is—even though it is not so, you should, you know, receive precepts. You—even though you cannot accept it through and through, trusting him you should accept it. As you cook a rice according to the, you know, instruction. If you can do it just, you know, according to the instruction, that is best. But even though you, you know, you are confused, you know, while you are cooking, it can be—it i- [partial word]—it may be okay.

But anyway, you should start our way, and you should try to, you know, try to trust our instruction, our precepts, our zazen practice. This is, you know, actually to—how you join our practice, why you receive our precepts.

When I was working [laughs]—I was working on a stone with student at Tassajara, you know. He will ask him—I asked him to hit, you know, a stone, to cut it, you know. The stone has naturally—originally some, you know, layer, you know—stripes or layer. I know if he continue to hit it, it will be, you know, broken in two—two pieces. But, you know, I—if—because my student didn't, you know—haven't—didn't have the experience of cutting it, you know. So while he was—he became tired of hitting it [laughs], but I—I—I was quite sure, you know, he will cut it [laughs].

It is same thing, you know. The teacher knows, you know, it will—it will be cut, but student doesn't know, you know. So he doubt. But—but at last, you know, it was cut all of a sudden in two. *Phht!* [Laughs.] That is, you know, practice. It is not so easy, you know. It looks like almost impossible, sometime. But after long, long experience, you know, of various teacher, not only Dōgen-zenji, you know, or Bodhidharma, you know, we know what kind of stone a human being is. So if we continue to practice in this way, he will be clearly, you know, cut. We know that. That is, you know, Buddha's—Buddhist way, and Buddha knows that. But even though you don't know it, if you continue to do it, it will work.

So to, you know, to start to trust, you know, the way, Buddhist way, is how—why you join our order, actually. And we say when you join the order—order, and started to hit it, hit the stone, [in the] same place over and over again. And when it is broke in two, we don't know, you know, why—by the last one, it was broken, or by the first one it was broken. You know, it is difficult to know. Anyway, first hit is—was working, that is clear. So we say even though our practice is not perfect, as long as you are practicing our way, that is enlightenment itself, that is how you cut the stone, how you become a buddha.

And for Buddha, you know, if he become a buddha, you know, even though he become a buddha, he cannot stay [in the] buddha stage. He will naturally start to help others, and he will continue his practice forever. Knowing—because he knows hu- [partial word]—human nature, and because he knows, you know, almost all the people does not know human nature so well, so he cannot trust their own true nature. And they will be confused.

So for Buddha, he cannot help starting to practice with others, and he cannot help helping others too. And in that way, you know, Buddha start again our practice, join our practice. He will practice with us always. So Buddha become student, and student eventually become a Buddha. And Buddha and we student is always one. That is the picture of our practice.

To have this kind of relationship between Buddha and you, or teacher and discip- [partial word]—disciple is very important, or, without this relationship, you know, Buddhism cannot survive or exist. Buddhism is not just moral code or is not philosophy or story, you know. Buddhism is actual way to become human—for human being to be human. So Buddha's teaching is how to be human being—human, and how to [for] Buddha [to] be Buddha. Although there are two names, human being or sentient being, or Buddha, but actua- [partial word]—essentially, it is one. Who knows human nature is Buddha; who do not have—do not know human nature through and through is sentient beings.

In ordination, when—when you join our order, you know, we—you will receive a robe which was designed by Buddha and which was weared by

Buddha. And to receive this robe means to trust him. It is so important that to have Buddha, that we, you know, to encourage our way-seeking mind, to be free from our doubt, to have strong faith in our way, or to encourage our way we wear robe, which is set up by Buddha and used by Buddha. But nowadays, it is a symbol: symbol of teaching, symbol of his precepts, spirit, and—and it express by its color and by the material we use and size we decide, you know, we express Buddha's teaching too. Not just symbol, but to understand teaching, which is expressed in robe, is also necessary. So for—for us it is the teaching itself, and it is the Buddha's spirit itself, even though we cannot use it to protect us from cold or from hot weather.

You may say, you know, recently, knowing that it may be difficult to understand—to accept Buddha's teaching, I, you know, I am talking about it without any—without changing or—or without any modification. Between our superficial understanding of human nature, and his deeper—deep understanding of human nature, there is big difference. It is quite natural for us to accept the teaching is difficult. For you, may be difficult and for—for us, too—for us Japanese too. You may say Japanese people [laughs]—Japanese culture is, you know, already ninety-nine [point] nine percent Buddhism, so it may be easy. But, you know ... *[Sentence not finished. Tape turned over. Side B of original is recorded very poorly: severe pitch distortions for the brief remainder of tape.]*

... for you to, you know, understand Buddhism or for Japanese to understand Buddhism. Japanese people, you know, their life is based on Buddha's teaching [laughs]—on ninety-nine percent Buddhism. And your—your, you know, way of life is very very different from [laughs] Buddhist way. I don't know which is, you know, [more] difficult.

This kind of thing is, you know— I think you will find it easier to understand Buddha's teaching than Japanese may do because, you know, for an instance, if someone make a robe for you, you know, or if someone make a robe or dress there is suits for you, you know. If you do it from the beginning [laughs], you can do it very [2-3 words unclear]. But if someone sewed, you know, all the [6-10 words unclear] [laughs] it is very difficult [3 words unclear] ... *[Tape ends mid-sentence with severe pitch distortion.]*

Sources: City Center transcript by Meg Brown. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Re-transcribed by Nigel Edmonds, December 1999. Checked against tape by Bill Redican (12/23/99).