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WHAT IS SELF? WHAT IS OUR PRACTICE?
Saturday, December 20, 1970
San Francisco

In my last trip to Japan I found out many things. The feeling I had there was—they were—you know, Japanese people nowadays are trying very hard, but according to Uchiyama-rōshi,¹ you know—do you know him? He is in Kyoto, and he is practicing with students. And many Caucasian students were there. And when I went there they asked me to speak something [laughs], so I just saw them and talked a little.

Japanese people now—group, group—*bo-kei*:² group is group, but *bo-kei* means "lose themselves." Lose themselves in group. That is Japanese life now. Group *bo-kei*. Japan is a big family or big group. [Laughs.] They lose themselves [laughing] in group, so they don't know what they are doing actually. I don't say ma [partial word—"many"?] all of them, but most of people there lose themselves in group.

And, you know, some—some people who thinks themselves rid of Japan also has some confidence in their effort of making progress in every direction. But still they were involved—they were lose themselves, they are lose themselves in group, and they don't know. It is difficult for them to know what is—what are they doing. Even though they do not have any information from other countries outside of the countries, I think if their mind is calm enough to see, you know, to realize what they are doing [laughs], you know, 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, you know [laughs]. They, you know—when I was, you know, in junior or senior high school, our principal always told us you should not be in ecstasy [laughs]. If, you know, they become—they make some progress in something, they easily get into ecstasy [laughs, laughter] or, or, "How nice is it." [Laughs.] That is, you know, tendency of Japanese people.

And so, that is why, according to Dick [Baker], you know, that is why 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 [laughs]—[He is struggling here with the pronunciation of the word "individual."—excuse me, individual practice. If you practice our way, Buddhism will become Daoism [laughs, laughter].

¹ Uchiyama Kōshō-rōshi (c. 1912–1998): Disciple of "Homeless" Sawaki Kōdō-rōshi and sixth abbot of Antai-ji temple in Gentaku, northern Kyoto, Japan. Disciples include Shōhaku Okumura-rōshi.

² *bo* (to forget); *kei* (lineage or group of origin).

The difference between Daoist and Buddhist is one is, you know, hermit. The Buddhist is more realistic, you know. That is the difference. So I think people in America has opposite, you know, tendency, which is—which makes good pair to Japanese people. One is this 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 [laughs, laughter]. Knowing Japanese tendency and Japanese people's tendency, you know, and your way of life, it is very difficult to, you know, 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, you know, 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 emphasize selflessness, you know. Because people has idea of self, you know, we use that word to express our—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, you know, 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 things-as-it-is is selflessness. So as things exists as-they-are, we also exist as-we-are. That is selflessness. It doesn't mean we do not exist. We exist, but we exist as we are. And to know, to realize or to—not to know or not to realize—but to have that kind of mood of life is our purpose of practice.

So if we understand, we—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 in only group, forgetting themselves. Forgetting themselves in group is big selfishness, you know. To encourage, or to—to encourage the idea of self, they enjoy the group self. So instead of small self, they have gr- [partial word—"group"?] big self.

Wh- [partial word]—in the country like Japan, you know, maybe it is difficult to—not to be involved in that kind of, you know, busy, you know, life. For an instance, right now, many people are building big cabin with big stone, like I do [laughs, laughter]. 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 [laughs]. If one built that kind of building in, in some place, some other person who see it will imitate it, you know. And they will build same building, or more beautiful one. And in that way [laughs], one after another [laughing] they build big mansion-like building and beautiful garden. To me that is, you know—I don't think they are enjoying their garden at all.

So if I go to, if I visit Japan, they invite me to their new house, new residence [laughs] and introduce me, you know, the garden, new garden they built. But it seems to me they do not enjoy the garden or building so much, so much as I do [laughs, laughter]. Maybe that is why they want me to see [laughs, laughter]. It is ridiculous, you know, to be involved in that kind of competition without doing [laughing] what they're building, you know. They just build it, and they are very glad if someone says he is very successful person or something like that, you know.

So, I—I told—I told them it is very beautiful, but in America, you know, rich people do not build so beautiful building. They have big, you know, property, but in which s- [partial word] very humble, you know, common building they have. This is—Japan may be now very wealthy, but anyway it is quite different. Our way of life in Japan is quite different from [what] they have in America. Now I am not—I haven't—I can say exactly how I feel, you know, because I am in, mostly I am in America [laughs].

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 an instance, Ten Grave Prohibitory Precepts, you know, you will understand what kind of understanding of life we have. "Don't kill," you know. We have to encourage our spirit to follow Buddhist way. We shouldn't be killed or we shouldn't kill real Buddhist spirit. We should not steal anything, you know, 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 know, you—it means that you know your ego, but you don't know what the materials or things are. Don't behave or don't be indulge[d] in something, or don't act unchaste acts. It means that you should not be indulge[d] into something. You should not be caught by something.

I like old art objects [laughs], and my teacher would say "Don't—don't act unchaste acts." [Laughs.] To him it is unchaste act to be attracted by something, some antique or old art object is unchaste act [laughs] to him. It may be so.

So one by one, if you think of—think about what the Ten Grave Prohibitory Precepts are, you will know what is Buddhist life. Knowing this, you know, 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 our practice. On your black cushion, if you find yourself, you know, in its true sense, you exist there. But that you exist there means that everything exist as you exist. Even though you do not observe things, you know, one by one, the way you exist on your black cushion is the way things exist on each position. So there is

no need for us, when we sit, 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, [what] you needed. That is, you know, feeling of zazen. You sit. So that you exist here is that Buddha exist, and that Buddha exist means that you exist here. There is no difference between Buddha and you. Buddha exist 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, you know, who attained buddhahood after making a great effort for many—six years. Before he make—attain buddhahood—before he realize this point, he was Buddha. But he realize what is Gautama Buddha himself. And when he found out himself, he realized everything exist 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, you know, expressed—left, "Don't do that, don't be that way!" Because you are originally, you know, 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 hermit or life of excessive busy life. We will know how we can help others only when we know how we should exist. I think that is why Zen Center should be in San Francisco and to make right effort as Buddha told us. So we must extend zazen practice to everyday life, and we must encourage zazen people, zazen practice, to many people. In this way, having right practice in our everyday life, I think we can help others in its true sense.

Thank you very much.

Sources: City Center transcript. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Joan Amaral and Bill Redican 9/28/00. Miyagawa Keishi-san kindly provided assistance with the translation of Japanese terms.