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I think, as Yoshimura-sensei¹ told you the other night, Zen masters has some humorous [laughs], you know, element in their life. And, you know, even after death [laughs], or even more, we, you know, know how humorous [laughs] they were if you know them. Humor is, you know— Only when he has real, you know—he has some understanding more than real, you know, then he could be humorous, you know. So humor is more real than [laughs] reality, you know. Reality is not so real. But if you see [laughs, laughter] comic, you know, you know, that is more real than [laughs] usual pictures, you know.

So I think because they have something real, you know, so at the same time they can be always humorous, you know. When they say, you know, something usual, you know, not [laughs]— The way they say, or in his mind, you know, he is always expressing it in some [way] as if he is drawing some comic, you know [laughs]. But for us, for him, maybe, it is comic, but for us it is very real and serious thing.

When I was young, or when I was at Eihei-ji, Kumazawa-zenji,² you know, Kumazawa-zenji—at that time he was *kannin*.³ In sesshin he gave us a talk when we are tired out [laughs]. It was third day or fourth day. And he started to talk about something, and he said, "*Suzume*—a sparrow," you know, "sparrow has broken a *tori'i*." Do you know *tori'i*? Shrine gate, you know, like this [gestures]. A sparrow [laughs] broke [laughs, laughter] *tori'i* made of stone [laughs, laughter]. And he started to explain how a sparrow did it [laughs]. But, in Japanese, you know, "*Kosuzumega*."⁴ I still remember: "*Kosuzumega ishi no tori'i o fumiotta*."⁵ And he said, "Do you understand?" [Laughs, laughter.] And he repeated several times, but no one laughed, you know [laughs, laughter], because he was so

¹ Ryōgen Yoshimura, who came from Japan to San Francisco in 1969 to assist Suzuki-rōshi (see *Wind Bell*, 1970, Vol. IX, No. 1, p. 30). He died at a young age after returning to Japan.

² Kumazawa Taizen (1873-1968). Later the 73rd abbot of Eihei-ji.

³ Also *kansu*: Secretary of a Zen monastery; one of the six traditional operations officers (*rokuchiji*) of a Zen monastery (along with *tsūsu*, secretary-general; *fūsu*, accountant; *ino*, officer in charge of general affairs; *tenzo*, head of the kitchen; and *shissui*, officer of maintenance).

⁴ *Ko* = "baby"; *suzume* = "sparrow"; *ga* indicates "sparrow" is the subject.

⁵ *Ishi* = "stone"; *no* means the previous word, *ishi*, is possessive; *tori'i* = "shrine gate"; *o* means that the previous word, *tori'i*, is the direct object of *fumiotta*, "to break."

serious. But "*fumioru*" sometime means "*funderu*." ⁶ It is, you know, "stepping on the stone," that is "*fumioru—fumioru—funderu*," you know. It's "stepping—stepping" you know, "on the stone," and at the same time it mean "to break" [laughs]. How is it possible [laughs] for a sparrow to break a stone gate?

But we thought, "That is Zen story." [Laughs, laughter.] What he means must be something deep, you know [laughs, laughter]. But he was just joking [laughs, laughter] with a serious, you know, manner like this. He was like this. [Gestures?] As he, you know, is trained very well by zazen practice, he is always serious, but he is always, you know, humorous at the same time. Not just serious, but some element of, you know, happiness or joy is in it. He is always relaxed. And, you know, maybe— Recently I found out that it was a joke, you know [laughs, laughter], but not many people, I think, know that was joke [laughs, laughter]. Quite recently. We didn't talk about, you know, that story anymore.

As we were young, we did not like so ridiculous, you know, stories [laughs, laughter]. Fooling, you know, around serious students, you know. "Oh no! He is fooling us." [Laughs.] We didn't like at all. So we didn't talk about it any more. But quite recently, you know, "Oh!" [Laughs, laughter.] "He was fooling us when we are practicing seriously." [Laughs, delayed laughter.]

When he was dying, you know, do you know what he did [laughs, laughter]? For maybe ninety-six years he was fooling us [laughs]. You know, when he was almost dying, he stretched his arm for the, you know, water pitcher (what do you say? "pitcher"), and the *jisha* gave him the pitcher. And he swallowed the pitcher and said, "KAAA!" ⁷ [very loudly]. And he [laughs, laughter] was no more. He vanished from this world. [Laughter.]

No [laughter continues]. It is terrible [laughs, laughter], you know. And, you know, newspaper [laughs, laughter] reporters including, you know, famous Zen masters, you know, admired his [laughs] death, you know, but I think maybe he was fooling us [laughs, laughter]. You know, that was what he is doing, you know.

When he visited my hometown when I was in Japan five years ago, I, you know, tried to persuade him to come to America. And he asked, you know, about America, for pretty long time [laughs]. He make various questions about America. And he looks like, you know, he agreed. But after, you know, explaining maybe long long time, you

⁶ *Fumioru* can mean either "to break" or "to step on." *Funderu* means only "to step on."

⁷ *Ka!* may have been used as an exclamation similar to "*Ha!*" or "*Ho!*" [cf. Isshu Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *Zen Dust*, p. 82].

know, he said, "Oh, that will be a good job for Takashina-rōshi.⁸ [Laughs, laughter.] "Not for me." [Laughs, laughter.] "Maybe Takashina-rōshi." He is always, you know, like that.

When, you know, the old old lady in Yaizu offered, you know, *natsu*⁹ melon (or what do you call?) melon, you know, very sweet and very expensive. She brought it to him. And he was watching it, you know. I was with her. "Oh, very good, very good, but I don't like it." [Laughs, laughter.] "I would rather give it to my students," he said. And he clapped his hand [laughs; Suzuki-rōshi clapped hands twice] and [said], "Take it to your room!" [Laughs, laughter.] In front of her. But when he does it so, you know, so nice, so she couldn't be angry with him, you know [laughs].

So I don't know. It is pretty difficult to know what kind of, you know, mind he has [laughs, laughter]. He is always same, but what he does is always something different [laughs]. So I knew him pretty well, but recently, you know, I find out many things about him—not new things, but something I find out, you know, what he was doing little by little. I think that is real comedy, I think.

And at the same time, Yoshimura-sensei was talking about anti-Buddhism or anti-Buddha or non-Buddha, you know. I think that is, you know, exactly what he was doing [laughs, laughter]. What he did is something more than we can understand or we can see, you know. So even though does something, you know, that is—we cannot take it literally. So actually he isn't doing anything, you know. He is just moving his mouth, that's all [laughs, laughter]. The only way to know is [laughs]—I don't know how to understand him, but how to be like him is already known to us by Dōgen-zenji, you know. How to be like him. Living with people, you know, and living in confusion, always, you know, outside of the confusion: That is, you know, core of practice maybe.

Oh by the way, I have new glasses. So I must use this you know. And I have something to read here [laughs, laughter] [unfolds page]. Oh this— [Laughs, laughter. Took out wrong piece of paper. Much laughter.] This is new one, yeah. Dōgen-zenji said, you know [laughs, laughter]:

The Third Patriarch in China said, "The first principle," you know, "the supreme way," maybe, "is not difficult. If you are away from discrimination, if you stay away from discrimination, whatever you see, that is it." And hearing this statement of the Third Patriarch of China, many people may say every dharma or everything is not good

⁸ Rōsen Takashina (1870-1968): 71st abbot of Eihei-ji.

⁹ *Natsu* = summer.

or not bad by itself, in itself, and there is nothing which is right or which is wrong. So the only way is according to his nature. He should intuitively take his path. And some of the people may say you should not, you know, talk about the supreme way, but draw a circle or stand, stick, fist. Or knock the floor by staff. Or slap students by hands, or give [get] them to give big cry will be the way to express the supreme way.

But Dōgen-zenji said here:

But those understanding is not right, or it is still the understanding of cave dwelling [laughs]. That's not—. Cave dwelling. They are, you know, dwelling in the cave [laughs]. And the saying is something like that.

And that is what Dōgen says about the supreme way. But he says, you know, "What will be the supreme way?" In *Bendōwa*,¹⁰ he says:

Buddhas and Patriarchs appears because of this supreme way, and he does not observe anything but supreme way. If there is a chance for the dharma, dharma will appear. If there is no chance for the dharma to appear, dharma will not appear.

That is, you know, what he says. Oh [laughs]. Ah, you know.

But he says, "Supreme way is like a big *konjichō*"¹¹ I don't know Sanskrit name for it: big bird which will cover whole world by his wing. If he give one beat over the water, the water, the tidal wave will, you know, arise, and bottom of the sea will expose, you know. And it is so big as the bottom of the sea exposed, he will see dragons. Some of them is alive and some of them already dead by big tidal wave. And he may see many fish already dead, but he pick up only dragons who is still alive [laughs]. And he may be the most, you know, discriminative animal [laughs] in the world [laughs]. Stong [laughs] and discriminative animal.

And that will be [laughs], Dōgen-zenji says, that will be the good example of no discrimination [laughs]. But, you know, when Dōgen-zenji says so, discrimination is strict discrimination, you know. When he says so, he changed the angle [?] already. Discrimination, you

¹⁰ "Discourse on the Practice of the Way," a fascicle in Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*.

¹¹ *Konjichō* [also *myōjichō* (Jap.) and *garuḍa* (Sanskrit)]: A "gold-winged bird"; originally, a mythological bird said to eat dragons; one of eight supernatural beings who protect Buddhism; an incarnation of a deity who saves people. [Hisao Inagaki, *A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms*, 4th edition, Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1992, p. 187.]

know— You have discrimination in the realm of thinking mind, you know, or imagination or feeling or emotional activity. You discriminate. You say right or wrong, good or bad, agreeable or disagreeable, or you like it or you don't like it. But how is it possible, you know, to reach the supreme way which is beyond discrimination is what Dōgen-zenji is talking about.

Oh, by the way, why, you know— Shākyamuni Buddha didn't talk about self or talk about God or Buddha. Figuratively he talked about him, but he didn't point out anything as Buddha. Maybe, I think, you know, if, you know, as Yoshimura-sensei pointed out, if he [Buddha], you know, described something about a deity, you know, or absolute being or God, he may be a founder of another Hindu religion, you know [laughs]. That is very true [laughs]. But that was not the reason why he didn't talk about it [laughs, laughter]. I am not opposing to him [Yoshimura] at all, but, you know [laughs], because that was very interesting point. So I thought about it, you know, more [laughs, laughter].

You know, if some religion appears, you know, and some teaching was described or left by someone, you know, you may have various priest, you know, who will, you know, follow his teaching. And some, you know, priest can live [laughs] on it, you know, explaining or selling his teaching, you know. "This is very valuable teaching [laughs, laughter]. This is [laughs, laughter] supreme way. Why don't you come and listen to me?" [Laughs, laughter.] "And he will be such-and-such [laughs]. That is how to maintain, you know, our activity." So in that way many thing will appear which is not supreme way. Instead of supreme way, you know, we will have many secondary way, which should be rejected. And you must have noticed that he al-...
[Sentence not finished. Tape turned over.]

... by magic power, or foreseeing something, or you should not talk about astrology, you know. You should not be astrologist. With this kind of knowledge or power, you shouldn't fool people [laughs], you know. He [Buddha?] was so strict on this point, he did not allow any religion to be like that, including his own religion. So he didn't talk about anything—single word for the—I cannot say single word—maybe some time he—I don't know exactly, but he didn't anyway. He did talk about what it is, but, you know, what exist, you know, in what way, something exist beyond our world. He, I think, he is tired of this kind of, you know, religious activity at that time. So his, you know, his main point is to, you know, to establish something which is very pure, and very accurate, and very real. The way, you know, he talk about, similar [similes?] he use, or way he talked about is very mystic, but what he is talking about is exactly what we are doing, you know. Anything [nothing?] mysterious. If you know ourselves, you can understand what he was saying. And if you understand what he was

saying, you will understand yourself more, you know. More real self will be found by reading his words or by listening to his words.

Dōgen-zenji also, you know, when he says *konjichō*, you know, picks up only living dragon, he is talking about now about our practice. So his instruction about our practice is very accurate, very strict, you know [laughs]. More strict than, you know, more particular than this bird. He didn't, you know, he doesn't want anything if that is not real. He doesn't practice if it is not right practice. He practice only when he see it is right.

So what he says is not just usual, you know, way of paradoxical way of talking, you know, speaking about Zen. He has accurate point, and his whole effort is directed on our everyday practice. He doesn't ignore anything. So that is why we think we believe in his practice. If we follow him, you know, we can, you know, we will have that kind of, not power, but ability; or that kind of possibility is there only when we observe his way.

When I say "accurate," you know, there is no mysterious meaning in it. You can use your own judgment, you know. If you don't accept it, you know, if your thinking mind doesn't accept it, according to Dōgen-zenji, there is no need to observe it. So everything we do should be explained fully, but that, you know, explanation is not good enough. And according to when you accept his teaching, by here, now, then, you should observe it by your body. Then, you know, your understanding is not so important when you start to practice, but before that, maybe, understanding is important.

Why I became interested in Buddhism is because Buddhist explains things very [laughs] well and accurate, and we cannot, you know, give any comment to it, you know. All the comment is already, you know, given to various teaching. Even though you think you, you know, think of some, you know, direct comment to it, you know, maybe, "This is good understanding of the teaching." You may think. But if you, you know, see some other book, someone already did it [laughs]. Almost nothing, you know, to find out, almost nothing to say. It is so, you know, accurate. And many various, you know, naughty students, you know, played, you know, big play [laughs], big fight about our scriptures.

So it is possible for us to make full use of our mind, but the point is, if you want to have supreme way, you know, it is not possible to have it by thinking. If you accept, you know, our teaching logically, by critical eyes, then you should start our practice provided by those strict teachers. So in one way, you know, non-discrimination is our way. On the other hand, when you do something, we must be very sincere. [Refolds and puts away paper.]

I think we are now, you know, making pretty good effort in Zen Center, but there are many danger, you know. Unless we have very strict eye on ourselves, we will lose our way, you know. Even though you can talk about Buddhism, you know, even though you have very very, you know, deep logical understanding of it, but that is not enough.

So, you know, non-discrimination means to discriminate which can be discriminated. That is, you know, discrimination of discrimination [laughs] is true discrimination. And when you discriminate your discrimination, next thing you should do to have some practice of non-discrimination established by someone who is very discriminative [laughs].

So, you know, I think you can spend, you know, this life and next life, you know, if there is next life, or forever you should work on this [laughs, laughter]. Then something, you know— Anyway, we human being can survive on this big world, or else we will be lost. We will be lost, but nothing will happen [laughs, laughter]. But, you know, if that is okay, you know [laughs], it may be okay, but to say so is quite easy, but I don't think you can accept that. So as long as we live, we should work on this and protect ourselves from something wrong or something, some fake, you know. We should only follow something right, you know, something true, you know. That is our spirit and spirit of practice.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Translation of Japanese terms and research assistance by Shōhaku Okumura-rōshi. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Bill Redican (9/27/00).