

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Sunday, June 22, 1969
San Francisco

This lecture was the source for the chapter of *Not Always So* called "Direct Experience of Reality" on p. 99.

Dōgen-zenji says: "Everything encourages us to attain enlightenment. Mountains and rivers, earth and sky: everything is encouraging us to attain enlightenment." So, of course, the purpose of lecture is to encourage—to encourage you attaining enlightenment. So we call our lecture *teishō*. *Teishō* means "with teaching—with kōan," to help people to attain enlightenment.

A usual lecture—sometimes to explain the context of teaching—like to explain philosophy—to understand our teaching in philosophical way is more a "lecture"—a *kōwa*.¹ *Kōwa* is more philosophical. And purpose of to listen to *kōwa* is to have intellectual understanding of the teaching. While *teishō* is to encourage students to attain enlightenment, or to have perfect understanding of—to have real experience of—to have real Buddhist experience.

So same thing will be subject or topic of our everyday life in its ordinary sense. And same thing will be kōan to encourage—to encourage us to attain, to have direct experience of our life. Even though you think you are studying Buddhism, actually, you are, when you are just reading [laughs]—it may not be true, or it will not help to have direct experience of Buddhism but just intellectual understanding of it.

That is why we, when we study Buddhism, it is necessary to have strong conviction and to study it with mind and body, not only just mind but also body. So if you attend lecture, even though you are sleepy and unable to listen to it, just to attend the lecture [laughs] in spite of the drowsiness will bring you some experience of enlightenment. And it will be the enlightenment itself.

So intellectual understanding is necessary, but it will not complete your study. By actual practice you can study it in its full meaning. So intellectual study, we say, doesn't make much sense [laughs], but it does not mean to ignore intellectual understanding. Enlightenment experience is quite different thing from intellectual understanding. And the true, direct experience of things could be intellectualized. And to have to try some intellectual explanation to our direct experience is necessary to help your direct experience. So, for us, both intellectual understanding and direct

¹ *kōwa*: *kō* (lecture) + *wa* (story or lecture itself). A college- or informative-style lecture, sometimes using a blackboard to convey content.

experience of it is necessary.

Sometimes even though you think this is enlightenment experience, it may be just intellectual, extended explanation of—or extended experience of intellectual things, and not true experience—direct experience. That is why you must have true teacher who knows the difference between extended experience of common experience in its dualistic sense. Direct experience will come when you are completely involved in your practice, or when you are completely one with your activity, and when you have no idea of self—not only when you are sitting, but also when your way-seeking mind is strong enough to forget your selfish desires. Or to forget selfish desire when you do something, study something with your whole mind and body, you will have direct experience.

That you have some problem means your practice is not good enough. When your practice is good enough, whatever you see, whatever you do—that is direct experience of the reality. This point should be remembered. And if you know that, it is not so easy to say "this is right" or "this is wrong"; "this is perfect" and "this is not perfect."

Anyway, for most of us, it is not possible to say "good and bad" or "right or wrong." Usually without knowing this point, you say, "this is right, this is wrong." [Laughs.] That is ridiculous when we know what is real practice. Because you are just involved in usual judgement of good or bad, right or wrong, you can easily say, "this is right, this is wrong."

You may say, for Buddhists there is nothing wrong. Whatever you do, "Buddha is doing it, not me." [Laughs.] And so, "Buddha is responsible for it, not me." But [laughs] that is also a kind of misunderstanding.

When we say we have buddha-nature, that is the statement to encourage you to have actual experience of it. To encourage your true practice we say, "we have buddha-nature—you have buddha-nature." It works only to attain enlightenment, to encourage your true practice. Purpose of the statement is just to encourage true practice, not to give you some excuse for your lazy practice or your formal—just formal practice.

People misunderstand the true meaning of, or true purpose of our words, and you make excuse for your lazy practice, referring to Buddha's words, understanding the statement in relative sense. This kind of mistake is everywhere. "It works only this way and not that—the other way." [Laughs.] Do you understand?

Everyone has buddha-nature. Period. No more. You shouldn't say, "so" or "but" [laughs, laughter]. You should put "period." "Everyone has buddha-nature." [Hits stick on table once.] No more statement. If you say something, you will be get big slap. *Whap!* [Laughs, laughter.] You have to put "period" here. If you don't, your teacher will put big "period"

[laughs, laughter].

In China people carry something on their head. Honey or water in big jar. Sometime he may drop it, of course, by mistake. But if you do not look back, like this [laughs]—it is all right. You should go on and on [laughs], even though there is no more honey or water on your head. If you go on and on, that is not mistake. But if you [say]: "Oh! I lost it! Oh, my!" If you say so, that is mistake. That is not our true practice.

When skillful martial artist use their sword, he should be able to cut fly [laughs] on your friend's nose, *fff!*—[laughs] without cutting off his nose. It means that if you have some fear of cutting his nose, that is not true practice. When you do it [laughs], you should have strong determination to do it! *Whei!* [sound of sword cutting air]—without any idea of skillful or not, or dangerous or not. You should just do it when you have to do it.

When you do it with this kind of conviction, that is true practice. So when you do it with this conviction, it is true enlightenment at the same time. Not just because of the skill. It is necessary to have strong conviction to do it, conviction beyond "successful" or "not successful." Beyond any feeling of fear. You should do it. That is real practice, and that is the way-seeking mind, which goes beyond the idea of—dualistic idea of good and bad, right or wrong.

Now—can you hear me?

So if you should do it, you should just do it. We shouldn't mind whatever it is—whether you will be successful or not. That is our vow, four vows. We must do it. We must help people just because we must. Sentient beings are numberless, so we don't know whether we can help completely all of our sentient beings. That is out of question. Our practice should go beyond it—the idea of numerous sentient beings or some limited number of sentient beings. A part of it or all of it—it doesn't matter. As long as we are here, we should continue our practice. That is true practice.

Of course, there is no limit in our understanding of our teaching. The meaning of Buddha's teaching is limitless, but we should do it. Whether you understand it or not, we should try to understand it. This kind of conviction is necessary once you start to study Buddhism. Then that teaching ... [*Sentence not finished. Tape turned over.*]

... has the teaching, valuable teaching which you will not encounter even in a thousand *kalpas* of time. That is the absolute teaching—incomparable teaching to any other teaching. That is the most valuable teaching.

"Incomparable teaching" or "supreme teaching" does not mean this is the best of all or something like that, in its comparative sense. When you have right attitude in your study, the teaching you study is the absolute teaching.

So, as Dōgen-zenji says, "We do not discuss the meaning of teaching in its comparative sense, but we should practice it in its—our practice should be right." With right practice we should study. As a right practice we should study the teaching. We should try to accept teaching with right attitude. Whether teaching is profound or lofty is not the point. But the point is our practice, our attitude to study it. So whatever the teaching is, we do not discriminate teaching in Zen. *Kegon Sūtra* or *Lotus Sūtra* or *Āgama Sūtra*, we don't mind. Whatever the sūtra is, the sūtra is—all the sūtras are our fundamental teaching. We do not discriminate: "This is scripture for Sōtō." Or "This is the kōan for Rinzai." Or "This is scripture for Nichiren Sect." Or "This is the scripture just for Pure Land School." All the sūtras are our sūtra.

Whatever the teaching is, if we have right attitude towards it in our study, that is our teaching. This is characteristic of Zen and characteristic of true Buddhism. We do not set up any system of Buddhism, but we put emphasis on true practice.

In this sense, we say "Zen school." Zen means "right practice." It means to extend Buddha's practice, day by day. That is how to be Buddha's disciple. That is why we started Zen Center here, or Tassajara Mountain Center: to practice our way in its true sense. It may be rather difficult to study our way in the city, but if you understand this point, you have no excuse for not practicing zazen. All the rules we have here is just to make your practice easier. Not to make our door narrow, but to open up our door for everyone.

Maybe Tassajara door is narrower, you may think, but wider. To have rules is to help your study. Because we know how difficult it is, so we set up some rules to help your practice. That is the purpose of having rules in Zen Center. If there is no pole to climb up, it is rather difficult for you to experience what kind of feeling you will have when you jump off from the pole.

If a baby has no toy, it is rather difficult to have actual experience of human being, as a human being. We must experience many things, but if there is nothing, even though whatever things may be—things in our room could be devices to experience human experience. But if we have special toy for babies, it is easier to experience our human—develop our human experience.

The rules we have is just a kind of toy to help your experience as a Buddhist. But it does not mean toy is always necessary. When you are young it is necessary, but after you know how to handle a cup or how to work, it is not necessary for you to have some wheel to push, or to have some toy cup made of plastic. If you want to taste food better, plastic cup is not so good [laughs]. It is better to use some ceramic or cups made of—mud? How do you say it? Clay. You taste better.

So it is not necessary for you to stick to toy always. And you should extend your way of life deeper and wider. Even so, beautiful ceramic is not necessary. If you are ready to appreciate things, and if your practice is always encouraged by things you see, things you eat, any special things is not necessary. Whatever it is, things will encourage your true practice.

If you can enjoy your life in its true sense, even though you lose your body, it is all right. If you are not conscious of your mind, it is all right. Even you die, it is all right. When you are encouraged by everything, and when you realize everything is always helping you, then there is no difference whether you are dead or alive. It doesn't make any sense. It is all right, quite all right [laughs]. That is complete renunciation.

And your practice will be vigorous enough to continue this kind of practice forever, regardless of life or death. In this way, our enlightenment could be explained. And how to have this kind of practice is up to you. I cannot explain your understanding of Buddhism. You should explain your way of life as a Buddhist in your own way.

So, my talk is just to encourage your practice, but even though you memorize what I said, it will not help you in its true sense. Maybe it will give you some suggestion.

Tomorrow I will go to Tassajara and stay there maybe more than ten days or two weeks. So I must say *sayōnara* [laughs, laughter] for ten days or more.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Diana Bartle and Bill Redican (9/28/00). Miyagawa Keishi-san kindly provided assistance with the translation of Japanese terms. Lightly edited for readability by Gordon Geist (04/30/06).