

The second paragraph of the Genjo Koan

Monday, August 15, 1966
Sesshin Lecture, Lecture A
Sokoji, San Francisco

The second paragraph [of the Genjo Koan]:

That we move ourselves and understand all things is ignorance. That things advance and understand themselves is enlightenment. It is Buddha who understands ignorance. It is people who are ignorant of enlightenment. Further, there are those who are enlightened about enlightenment, and those who are ignorant of ignorance. [Recording stops.]¹

SR: —trace of enlightenment—enlightenment— [Fragments only.]

² ...among many instructions about how to sit: to keep your back straight, pull your chin, and about mudra in your hands. The most important thing is, we say, to stop thinking or to keep your mind on your breathing. Dogen Zenji says, “Think non-thinking. Think non-thinking.” This is a very important point, and at the same time this is very difficult to practice because your mind will be easily carried away. Sometimes you feel very good, but as soon as you feel you reached a certain stage, your mind will be carried away because you felt something [laughs], and your mind is not on your breathing any more [laughs]. So, if you want to concentrate on your breathing, you should not mind even the state of mind you are in, in your practice.

In Hinayana Buddhist practice, the best stage is the stage where you have no mental joy or physical joy even. The mental attachment or consciousness or joy is not so difficult to overcome, but it is the physical consciousness which is difficult to be free from. Why we emphasize this point is because we have to live in each moment. We have to be ready. Our mind should be absolutely free from everything spiritually and physically. And, we should be ready for responding both to mental and physical stimulation which may come. And we should have the power to react to everything which may come. When your mind is fortified with something, you yourself feel very safe [laughs], but actually it is not safe. You cannot protect yourself by preparing something. When you are ready to adjust yourself, you have immense strength. But usually by nature we try to fortify ourselves spiritually and mentally or physically. That is why we lose our freedom from our surroundings.

So in our practice, we open our mind, and we just follow our living nature. We say, “Stop your mind.” Why we say stop your mind is because your mind stops your living activity. So [laughs] to stop your mind is to let your mind work. To stop your thinking faculty usually stops your actual living faculties. So if you stop the faculty which stops your living faculty or nature, it means to let your mind work. Do you understand? When you think you stop or you limit your activity, when you do not think, or when you do not fortify yourself by your thinking faculty or rational faculty, your true nature will obtain perfect freedom.

The clock is always moving: The short hand and long hand are all constantly moving. But, when you think, “It is two o'clock” [laughs], clock stops. And when you prepare something with your thinking, it means you fortify yourself two or three miles ahead [laughs]. You think, “Now I'm all right [laughs]. I can sleep [laughs].” But, that makes you more uneasy. You try to feel safe, but actually at the same time you have a fear of being destroyed—the fortified front. So, that makes you more [laughs] uneasy.

So, you think so that you find some conclusion and rest on that conclusion, but actually by thinking you make yourself more uneasy. But, if you do not fortify yourself, you have no fear of being invaded. You are always welcoming [laughs] your enemy. Whatever comes you are ready. “Please come.” [Laughs.] Then you have no fear. That is to stop thinking.

So we not only stop thinking but also we stop some emotional contrivance. When we sit, we just sit, keeping our mind on breathing. We have to live, so we have to take breaths. So this is absolutely necessary for us. So we just sit and keep our mind on our breathing. We do not prepare anything. We just sit. And here the important thing is to have conviction, to have selflessness. This is the most important thing. Without this conviction, you cannot stop your thinking, or you cannot stop your emotional activity. If you want to stop your emotional activity and thinking activity, you remain in your selflessness.

It is not attained, this selflessness, after you attain enlightenment. Before you practiced zazen, you fixed your mind in this truth which no one can deny. We think we have self, but actually, as you know, there is no such thing as self. Usually people think, “I am here,” but actually we do not exist here. This is the truth Buddha found out. Not just for his own truth, but as the truth for everyone. It is absolutely true. If you cannot deny it, you have to accept it [laughs]. If you cannot accept it, it's better not to practice zazen [laughs]. This much conviction is necessary. If you have some doubt in his teaching, you may study it until you accept it completely. But, it will not take long before you accept his teaching—his teaching is so true.

When you practice zazen, you have to be prepared to accept the truth as truth, and stop useless thinking and useless emotional activities which will not help you. To live in each moment is how to practice zazen. In each moment we have to renew ourselves as the clock goes. I don't know Sanskrit so well, but how to attain detachment is to watch or to gaze at something—*upeksha*, they say. *Upeksha* means to watch. To watch means to follow reality like a clock goes. It does not go so fast, but it is not stopping. It is moving, but it doesn't go so fast.

But, our mind [laughs]—in our practice we are so accustomed to preparing something or making some useless effort to protect ourselves, sometimes our hand moves very fast and is waiting [laughs]. I think you set your alarm, and you think this is all right. It means you move the hand of the clock fast—six hours ahead, or seven hours ahead [laughs], and you feel very good. That is all right, but usually we do something like this: You save a lot of money, and you feel very good. You want money when you want it. When you are hungry, you have to buy something. That is why you have to have money. But, you save a lot of money, —and, after all,

you become interested in saving money. It means you are moving your hands of the clock, and you feel very good. But actually it means you stop your clock. A clock is necessary because it goes as the sun goes.

If we want to live in its true sense, we have to live one moment after another moment. One breath after another. This is exactly how we should live. Forgetting all about breathing and thinking something wonderful [laughs] when you are practicing does not make any sense. It is not how to live in this world. This kind of useless effort will be completely forgotten when we get accustomed to our practice in its true sense. It is very difficult for anyone to give others instructions one thing after another. But, if you know this secret, this secret will help in whatever you do. If you see what they do, you will find out how important it is to live in each moment.

In monastery, the most important teaching is *Dojo daishuni ichini* {?}.³ It means: *Do* is “movement.” *Jo* is “calmness.” Or “to stop activity.” “Our activity should be with people.” That is the most important teaching in monastery. You may think in a big monastery that there must be some rules to control people [laughs]. I thought, when I saw the notice in the monastery, “Oh, of course it is necessary to do things with people at the same time, or else they cannot control us,” but the more you think about it, the more you will find out the true meaning of it. It means selflessness. It means not to move your clock ahead of the time.

Dogen Zenji, early in the spring, would watch the plums coming out in cold mornings. In Japan plums come out at the end of January or February. Even with the cold wind blowing over the icy field, they come out. And Dogen Zenji liked Japanese plums very much. And he gazed at it, appreciating its beauty. He just watched. That is *upeksha*. That is detachment.

Detachment means to live with people, with everything, with the beauty of the plum. That is detachment. The flower does not look like it is moving, but actually it is moving like a clock. It's moving. So it may fade away in two or three days. He would watch every morning the same flower, and his mind followed as the plum went. This is detachment—this is at the same time to appreciate the flower. While attachment is to stop the plum. To attach to a flower and stop its beauty means to appreciate the dead flower. If you want to appreciate a living flower, you cannot be selfish. Your mind should be instead in the state of selflessness. You should be prepared for discouragement when the flower fades away.

This is how we stop our thinking in our practice. So, “think non-thinking.” Usually you will think “think thinking” [laughs]. Think thinking means “think-stopping.” Think non-thinking means “think something actual, something real.” But usually when we think, we think something which is dead. Nothing thinks. Everything is just alive. Only a human being thinks without knowing what he is doing. A human being is really a human being when he understands what is his thinking. Then thinking will work. But, when we think without knowing what is thinking, we will be completely separated from reality. This is why we say stop your mind.

So in your practice, don't try to attain some particular stage in your practice. Of course, in your

practice you will have many experiences, but those experiences are valuable because it is some special experience. It is valuable when you catch the experience in its true sense with detachment, with full appreciation.

Experience is not valuable. When you catch it, appreciate it in its true sense, it is valuable. Do you understand? So, you should not say I attained this stage [laughs]. Some particular stage is not important. That you have attained that particular stage also is not important. The way you had that experience is important. That way may be the same way when you suffer, when you have disagreeable experiences. The same way. So you may realize that. Which is valuable is not some stage or some particular experience, but the way how you have had that experience. According to Dogen Zenji, we do not mind the loftiness of the teaching or beauty of the experience. But we should mind the way to attain the experience.

When you have zazen, zazen becomes zazen. When you have zazen, zazen makes sense. So, when you become you yourself, zazen becomes true zazen. When you are omitted from zazen, zazen does not become zazen. Zazen is not to polish a tile [laughs]. Zazen is not some way to make a tile a jewel. When you polish a tile, that is zazen. So, how you polish it is the most important point. Whether it is a tile or jewel is not the point. What kind of attainment you will have is not the point. Have you confronted the problem is the point. How to confront the problem in our practice is to open up ourselves and to accept things as it is, is the fundamental way. Do you understand?

So, to think is very silly [laughs]. It is as silly as to hitch a wagon to a star [laughs]. It is useless for a star to have stick [laughs]. But you feel very good when you have some stick. You brush [laughs] stars, but it doesn't work. It's much better not to have anything, and just watch the stars. It's very beautiful if you watch stars without anything. But, when you start to brush the stars [laughs], they are not beautiful anymore. But, you may feel very good if you brush a star [laughs]. Maybe for you, you think it becomes more bright. But, everyone will become sympathetic with you. "He is [1-3 words] [laughs, laughter]. What is he doing? Looks very silly." So, when you sit, you just sit. That's all. Don't forget this story. Whatever you do, this attitude is very, very important.

Then, without attaining enlightenment, enlightenment will come to you. This is why we emphasize to stop thinking, and why we emphasize the way-seeking mind. Dogen Zenji says, you should attain enlightenment before you attain enlightenment [laughs]. Do you understand? Before you attain enlightenment [laughs]. It means the way—conviction.

I think you have understood [laughs] why we say stop your mind. Think this point over and over and find out its true meaning.

¹ It sounds like the tape was re-recorded, at a later date, from this point onward with a different lecture. That is, the tape for a lecture originally on Genjo Koan Paragraph 2 was later

recorded over again with a different lecture. (Or the first part of the “ — among many instructions” lecture was recorded over with Paragraph 2 of Genjo Koan.)

² This is the earliest surviving part of the lecture, although the opening words are missing. In a contemporaneous recorded commentary, the tape operator stated that the opening sentence was approximately: “There are many ways to study Buddhism.” That commentary is appended to the end of this lecture.

³ Japanese: dojo: "temple, meditation hall"; daishuni: possibly from daishu, "all the monks in a temple," + ni; ichini: possibly from ichi, "one," + ni. See also lecture SR-69-08-18.

Source: Original City Center tape. Verbatim transcript by Adam Tinkham and Bill Redican (5/10/01). Lightly edited for readability by Wendy Pirsig and Peter Ford (9/2020).