

This fascicle of [Shobogenzo]

Friday, August 19, 1966
Sesshin Lecture, Lecture C
Sokoji, San Francisco

In this fascicle of [Shobogenzo] “Sokushin Zebutsu,” “Mind Itself Is Buddha,” he [Dogen Zenji] is giving us instruction on what is our practice, what is the transmitted way of practice from Buddha to us. “Mind itself is buddha” looks like a kind of statement, but as you have seen already, it is not a statement at all for him and for us too, if we understand what he meant with it.

So forgetting all about what he said in Shobogenzo, I want to give you the idea of our practice-- what is our practice. In his statement he says:

Mind is buddha--itself is buddha. And it is buddha. And buddha is buddha.

“Mind and itself” and “is buddha” is the same thing. It is another name of our practice. Usually, if we say, “mind itself is buddha,” it means whatever we think or whatever we do, that is our practice. But we have already seen that that is not true understanding. That is just intellectual, materialistic, and mechanical understanding of our practice. Our practice is a living being. It has lived for three thousand years, not only from Buddha to us, but also before Buddha, and after we are dead, because it is being itself. So that is why each is Buddha--that what is, is Buddha.

By “mind” he [Dogen] does not mean our mind, which is supposed to have a mental function. By “mind” he means in which many things exist, and each existence exists as one of many. That is what he meant by mind.

“Itself” means “things itself.” Things itself is not just what we understand or just what we observe, or some image you have in your mind. [Tape interrupted for unknown period-- probably very brief.] --is something before we observe it, and which exists forever, and which has existed from endless beginning. This kind of mind--this kind of things is things itself. So itself is and being is equal [?]. Being is true. The Buddha is true, of course, but if you say “Buddha” you will have some [laughs]--extra fancy idea about Buddha, so [laughs] Dogen Zenji says, “Buddha is Buddha, that's all.”

This is so-called, after all, non-attachment. So sometimes we call this, “Our way is the way of nothingness.” “Way of nothingness” means “way of non-attachment.” So actually this is practice itself. Without practice, we cannot have actual understanding of “mind itself is buddha.”

Here are some precise topics as a reference to our understanding of the way. We have studied already the Blue Cliff Record and model subject Number 29.¹ There is a story about Daizui² and

some monk:

[MAIN SUBJECT]

Attention! A monk asked Daizui: "When the great thousand (universe) and--"

Excuse me.

"When the great thousand (universe) altogether and utterly perishes in the kalpa fire, is it doubtful what will happen? Does the self perish, or does it not perish?"

Daizui replied: "It perishes."

The monk said: "If so, following the universe will it perish?"

Daizui said: "It will follow on and perish."

This is the subject. And later, someone asked the same Zen master:

"I heard you said, self will perish when this earth perishes. Is it true or not? Does it perish?" he asked.

He answered: "It doesn't."³

[Laughs, laughter.] He said. So the monk who asked him was very lost, because he said the self does not perish even though the great universe perishes in conflagration--kalpas fire.⁴

But sometimes we say it perishes, and sometime we say does not perish. For someone who thinks it will perish, we will say it wouldn't [laughs, laughter]. For someone who thinks it wouldn't perish, we say it will [laughs, laughter], because he thinks in intellectual realm, whether this earth--whether our essence of mind or our true self will vanish or not. This is a cause of trouble.

When we become attached to what we see or what we think, there is a problem. Without knowing, what we see or what we think is just in terms of thinking or word or name. It is just a name--"great universe" or "self" or "kalpa fire." They are not originally different. They are the many names of one true existence.

Without self, there is no kalpa fire. Without earth there is no universe. Without man there is no earth. So originally they are one of the many. We say "many," but even many does not exist in that way. Many is also some tentative conception of our mind. It is just a conception: "many." But actually there is nothing. What actually exists is something. Something exists [laughs], no particular thing does not exist. Everything is just a name of one unknown being.

So, you may say, "It will perish; that is all right. Originally it does not exist." You say your self-nature, but [laughs] that is just your understanding. So it doesn't actually exist. So, before he said it perishes, it perishes. It doesn't exist, so it's all right even though he says it perishes. But it does not mean vacuity. Something exists, actually. Something unknown--something which has no name or no form or no color exists. So it will not perish. This is right.

So in this way, we attain non-attachment by repeating this kind of mental training. We will understand, in its true sense, what we mean by those words. And our practice takes place in the realm of true activity, not just a partial activity of thinking or doing something tentatively without using all of your energy, without concentration. In this way, you cannot have true experience of reality.

So, what is the transmitted way? The answer is to practice or to lead our way--to live in this world with people, with all existence. As long as this universe exists, this is our transmitted way.

So we say our teaching exhausts all the means of attaining it. All living beings should exhaust themselves in this practice. And actually, whether they are aware of it or not, they are exhausting their life to this practice. But when you consciously do, that is our pleasure. But when you are not conscious of it, our life is just a dream.

And, if you try to get out of it, as I said last night,⁵ you will drown [laughs]. Or, you will have more trouble because you try to escape from it. It is like a butterfly which is caught by a cobweb [laughs]. The more it struggles, the more it will be stuck to the cobweb. You will have more entanglement in your life as a butterfly which is caught in a cobweb. But if it keeps still, accepting the circumstance under which it is caught, then there may be some chance [laughs] to get out of it. A spider may think, "Oh, some leaf." [Laughing, laughter.] "Oh, this is some leaves. No good. Let me stay behind the tree." Then a butterfly may be saved. But if you try to get out of it, you will struggle more. And if the butterfly knows the scheme of the cobweb, it can enjoy it. It is like a hammock [laughs, laughter]. We should be wise enough to know how everything is, and how everything works, and how we should live. This is our practice. Then everything will help you. But if you have no right understanding of your life, you will just struggle. You will struggle just to exhaust yourself. This is our practice.

So in our practice, it is necessary to put ourselves in the right situation, and to arrange our surroundings in right order. This is maybe what Reverend Katagiri⁶ was talking about this morning. This is a very, very important point. I said to arrange, but it is not even to arrange. Things returning itself by necessity. There is some reason, when something exists in this world. So by necessity things exist in this world.

So according to the necessity--or to ignore the reason why things exist is to make useless struggle. Things are going in the current of dynamic change. This dynamic change sometimes may be our plan. We make some plan of our life according to this dynamic change of the reality. If you have a beautiful fancy plan of your life, if it doesn't accord with the dynamic change of the universe, it [laughs]--it is just a painted plan--a paper plan [laughs].

So, there is no pleasure of creating things, but creative effort is there. Because actual practice is both creative and--what should I say? Things are, on the one hand, expressive. When it is expressive, it is creative. Everything is free because everything is the center of the world. It doesn't exist in its true sense as a one of many. One is many at the same time. When we realize this, to express itself or to create itself is to give yourself your true function: that is creativity. And it is not bound by some other thing. And it is not caused by your past experience. It is a quite new event to you. It is one side of reality, or one side of our practice.

On the other hand, it takes place in the realm of dynamic change. So in dynamic change there is no idea of time, even, or space, even. So, it looks like things are going under some regulation. It looks like that because of your idea of time and idea of space. But what is idea of space? What is idea of time? The idea of time or space is just a shadow of dynamic change of reality. So here you have creativity and--I don't know what to say [laughs]. Please find out appropriate word: creativity and--not "formality" or--causality.⁷

Causality. When we say "causality," you will have a kind of view of life like determinism. You will believe in your fate before you are born. But that kind of view of life is based on mechanical, material, a poor miserable understanding of life. Actually, such a thing does not exist. There is no reason why we should be chained or we should be bound by such an illusion of time or space. Time is time of space; space is space of time. There is no [laughs] time only. When we say "time," space follows. So some adjective is necessary. So it's better to say, "Time of space." [Laughs.] Like object of. "Time-like space," or "space-like time" is more appropriate. And time-like space or space-like time is nothing but the dynamic change of our world, or dynamic determination of all existence. With nothing who determines, it is automatic change of things.

Our practice is based on this kind of understanding. So we do not find any description in our practice, even though we are just observing some formality, but actually it is not so. People are ignoring the rules of things, or try to ignore the causality or old-fashioned way of life. But no development, no life exists without their former life. Because you have former life, you have this life. Because you have parents, you are here. You cannot ignore your former type of life. So development takes place. Your life is just... I forgot the most important part [laughs]--I think you must have understood it. It doesn't come out [laughter]. This is how people suffer [laughter]. Anyway [laughter], you have understood before I say something. It is very discouraging [laughter].

But anyway, if you do it with sincerity, if you devote yourself through-and-through what you are doing, there is a way. So thinking should follow our activity. So practice is first, thinking is next. Enlightenment is maybe third [laughs, laughter], or before practice. So in this way, we will go round and round and round. Practice, teaching, enlightenment-- where do we go? Practice? Because you haven't attained enlightenment, you practice. You practice, so you have teaching, and the teaching will lead you to enlightenment and practice, and teaching and enlightenment go round and round and round. You cannot say which is what. It is the same thing as asking, "Which is first--egg or hen?" It is simultaneous, actually.

This is, we say, *gyoji dokan*.⁸ Actually, there is no teacher and no student. When I am talking, you understand more than I say. So you are teacher. Which is teacher? I don't know. But, to me you are student. To you, I may be a boy disciple or boy teacher [laughing], who will be a great father to you some day. So we don't know which is teacher, which is your father. We don't know.

So we say *ego-enden*.⁹ *Ego* is intercourse or interrelationship; countless relationships between us. The relationships we have are very, very complicated. Here you are student--to me you are student. To your wife you are husband, and to your boy you are father. And there may be many and many relationships, actually. So we say--Dogen Zenji says, "Ivy and vine over ivy and vine."¹⁰ So our practice looks like very simple, but the more you are attentive to our practice, the more you will find out the true meaning and depth of our practice.

So in realm of formality, there is great creativity. It looks quite simple, but it is not actually so. "Vine and ivy" if you take it in a bad sense, it is entanglement of your life. But if you understand it, it will encourage your creativity. It will encourage your freedom, even. It means you have various ways to go. Because you have idea of self it is entanglement. But, if you have no idea of self and follow around entanglement--accept entanglement just as relationships between many things, and you are one of the many: if you have this kind of understanding, you have innumerable ways of life in this moment.

This is the transmitted way from Buddha to us, and in this way actually—since human beings appeared in this world, we have lived in this way. This is fundamental understanding of our practice.

Thank you very much.

We have some five or six minutes more, so let's take ten minutes' rest [laughs, laughter]. Thank you very much.

¹ Suzuki-roshi is reading from R.D.M. Shaw's translation of *The Blue Cliff Records* (London: Michael Joseph, 1961, p. 112).

² Dasui Fazhen (Daizui Hoshin): 878–963. Dharma successor of Guishan Da'an (Isan Daian). He also studied with Dongshan Liangjie (Tozan Ryokai) and Guishan Lingyou (Isan Reiyū). He appears in *Blue Cliff Records* 29 and in *Book of Serenity* 30 (the same case).

³ This is Daizui's answer in *Book of Serenity* 30.

⁴ Four kalpas are thought to succeed each other infinitely: the third kalpa cycle is one in which destruction or dissolution takes place. It is followed by the void. The kalpa fire refers to one of the elements (fire, water, and wind) that bring destruction.

⁵ Lecture SR-66-08-18B.

⁶ Dainin Katagiri-roshi (1928-1990): Japanese Soto Zen master who was Suzuki-roshi's close colleague in the early years of San Francisco Zen Center.

⁷ It sounds like Suzuki-roshi is settling on "causality" as an acceptable term.

⁸ Phonetic only: spelling not verified. Gyoji means "constant practice."

⁹ ego-enden (Jap.): free mental penetration of two conceptions; a mind of non-attachment. Ego by itself means "mutual interpenetration" or "mutual interdependence" (as in the Sandōkai—see especially SR-70-06-03).

¹⁰ Suzuki-rōshi pronounced it "vein," but he is probably referring to a vine, as in Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō "Kattō": "Branches or fruit are both dependent on and independent of vines and ivy" (revised from Yūhō Yokoi, *The Japanese English Zen Buddhist Dictionary*, p. 108). See also SR-66-08-15C, SR-66-08-15D, and 66-08-18B.

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