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LECTURE

by

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A famous Chinese Zen Master, Yakusan, did not give lectures for a long time, so his students asked him to give a lecture. So he came to the lecture hall and mounted the altar. And after sitting on the altar for a while, he went back to his room without saying anything. So his attendant asked him why he didn't say anything. Yakusan said, "I am a Zen Master. If you want to listen to a lecture, you should go to some other master, like a Buddhist philosopher or someone who knows many scriptures. But I am a Zen Master and you should know that," he said.

When we say to "make some effort," it usually means to make effort with some goal or aim. For many hundreds of years, especially after the renaissance, we human beings have been involved in how to make our lives easier and happier. So we are involved in scientific research mostly in a materialistic way. We mostly understand "to make effort" in this way. But to make effort to study something does not mean like that of the student who asked Yakusan to give a lecture.

While I was in bed for two or three months, I found it very difficult to place my body on the bed. I tried various ways, but it was pretty difficult. To lie in bed looks a very easy thing, but when you stay in bed a long time, it is not so easy.

How to find yourself, physically and mentally, is not such an easy thing. But when you are involved in something you forget that point. You are always running after something, to get something, to gain something without finding yourself in the right position. Of course, we must work as long as we live in this world, which is organized in a very materialistic way. But more important is to find ourselves physically and mentally in the right position.

You may say that sleeping in bed is not work. But it is most important work for us in the true sense. To walk on the floor is very important work. You will find out how hard it is when you can hardly walk. To go to the restroom is a very important thing. If you cannot go to the restroom, what will happen to you? It may be the most important thing, but you may not think that it is so important. These activities, like cooking something in the kitchen, cleaning your mouth when you get up, or to get up at the right time in the right way...proper attention to those activities is mostly ignored. Zen students put emphasis, or pay attention to those things. And moment after moment, to find ourselves physically and mentally, is how to attain liberation.

What we do when we sit in a cross-legged posture like this is to pay attention to our posture. It means that we find ourselves moment after moment. (What will be the best position right now?) That is how we make effort. So why we do zazen is not actually to attain enlightenment. To sit to attain enlightenment is a kind of heretical practice. To seek for some other thing in zazen without paying attention to your posture or your state of mind is to be involved in gaining idea, forgetting our present mental and physical situation. This is not true zazen. What we do looks very formal but it is not actually formality in its usual sense. When we pay attention in our vicinity moment after moment, naturally we will be formal and we will also be very careful in how we treat things, in how we act and how we do things.

So in this sense, to bow to Buddha or to drive your car doesn't make any difference. When we have this kind of life, we have complete freedom because we are always in the midst of the cosmic being without being involved in anything else. We are boss of everything. We are doing things for ourselves. Each one of us is doing things for each one's sake, and we are independent from everything. That is complete freedom, complete liberty.

So each one of us must have our own domain, or castle and we always try not to disturb other's lives, but to help other practice. That is true relationship, one to another. We treat things so as not to destroy their nature of being, so we treat things very carefully. Everything has its own Buddha Nature, so we should respect everything and treat everything in that way. That is our attitude toward things.

But usually, forgetting all about the true nature of things, we abuse them for our own sake. This is very shallow, very egotistical, self-centered way of treating things. But mostly it is quite usual for people to use things in that way. It is even usual to treat our friends in that way. Our right effort should be carried out incessantly without any gap forever. This is what we mean by right effort. Even Buddhist priests have been involved in this kind of activity for a long time and are beginning to realize this and have become aware of their wrong effort.

I think the quality and nature of our effort must be directed in a way that will give a quite different meaning. You will realize exactly what Buddha meant when he said that you should make great effort to attain liberation and to continue our sincere effort, our true effort. And so he explains mostly about our wrong effort, what it is that we are doing, and what kind of desires we will have through our wrong effort. He points out what is wrong with us. That is Buddha's teaching. And actually, what is right effort is very difficult to explain. It is also hard to realize our mistakes and to begin to find out how to behave. How to make our right effort will be our practice, and the way we behave should always be related to the time and the place in which we live. On each situation we must find out how to live and how to practice our way. This is right effort. First of all we should know that we and most people are involved in wrong effort.

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