

69-09-16

SUZUKI ROSHI LECTURE

September 16, 1969

I have not much chance to think about why I came to America or why I became a priest, but today when, while I was talking with Peter about something-my personal history-I had to think about why I came to America. And right now I am thinking about why I became a priest. My father was a priest and his temple was quite...not small but very poor temple. We haven't not to...we had very difficult time even though he, my father wanted to give me some better clothing, he , he haven't, he hasn't, he hasn't not much money. I know, I remember...his father making candle. When I came to America, sometimes I make candle by the left over candle, with left over candle. It is pretty, usually no one make candle to sell, but he, he made a lot of, he was making a lot of candle with iron, he made himself some, something to make candle and he sold it, not near my temple but he went Ohisa City, maybe four, five miles from my temple.

And I think that was the time when my father expelled from another temple and came to that temple. I can imagine how poor we are by that only, by that story. So even children wear *hakama*. Do you know *hakama*...a kind of skirt? Skirt-like, ceremonial...when we have celebration we would wear *hakama*. But I haven't any *hakama* so I have, I would attend the ceremony in my school without *hakama*, and I was very much, I didn't feel so good because I didn't have *hakama* to wear. But somehow he bought *hakama* and gave it to me to wear for the ceremony. And he gave the *hakama* and when I wear it that *hakama* as my friend did, my father said: "That is not the right, the correct way to wear it. You should wear like this, and you should tie *hakama* this way."

None tie *hakama* at that time in that way. Maybe that is too formal. So when I almost went out of my front gate...front gate was big gate. Even though temple was very poor but that temple, once that temple was big temple in that area so there was a big gate. As soon as I get out of the gate, I untie the *hakama*, tie of the *hakama* and tied it as my friend did, without knowing my father was watching me. He was very angry with me to have untied the *hakama* and tied it in some other way. He...I remember he was very short tempered. When I noticed he was running out of the temple with, with something. Maybe stick or something...he was running after. Of course I already started to run away from him...temple. It must be, it might be very happy for him wearing his boy new *hakama* for himself and go to school as most people wear, most people do. But you know, he was very angry. I think that is why he was so angry. After a great effort he bought a *hakama* for myself and, but at that moment, I didn't appreciate his kindness and untied the way he tied the *hakama*, and changed the style. And I think how he felt...I think I understand how he felt, but...

And background of this kind of difficulty for, for priest was the policy of Meiji government. At that time almost all the, at the beginning when he was...my father was

born, most temples, Buddhist temples destroyed, and the property which belonged to various Buddhist temples was offered to Shinto shrine. And before Meiji period, Shinto shrine and Buddhist temple was in the same site. And Buddhist rather taking care of Shinto shrine. But policy of Meiji government was to make Shintoism as a national religion. But Meiji government didn't have not much, not much power to afford various shrine so what they did was to take away the property which belonged to Buddhist temple and change the property to Shinto shrine's property. And, and so they lost all the property at that time.

There...my father told me what has happened in his time in various, in Buddhist, Buddhist temple at that time. For instance there were the big shrine called Hatta...Hatta san, near my temple. But that, all the, all the property which belonged to Hatta shrine was property of small temple near the shrine, Hatta shrine. Or that temple, Tendai temple was taking care of Hatta shrine. Not only changing the title of the property to Shinto, but also they destroyed Buddhist gate for the building, for Shinto shrine. Even Shinto shrine had Buddhist gate which is built like a Buddhist temple. Both side, there were, guardian of Buddhist..."_____." And that is not proper to, for the Shinto shrine. So they had to destroy that kind of gate. So after destroying those gates and throwing out the guardian for the temple, they made those temples into shrine, Shinto shrine. That kind of thing happened in various temples in Japan.

We Hatta san, Hata shirne, or Akiha shrine which was not Shinto shrine. Akiha san was not Shinto...Shintoism. It was famous for Buddhist temple but not now it is Shinto shrine, and there are no "_____." in those temples...shrine. After throwing out those Buddhist symbols and images, the government of the district burned it and told someone who was taking care of the shrine to make "offro"... "offro." Do you know? Offro-bath. Hot bath. And he said: "It is nice to have, to make a, to have a bath made by Buddhist-Shinto, Shintos." That, the old man who was taking care of the temple for a long time said: "It may be Buddha's mercy." You know. Buddha, or Buddha is so kind to make unusual, unusual bath for you. It was so, he was, he..."I was amazed at his mercy to make, to make you a good bath."

So that *Kendai*...means "Governor"...Hayashi...his name was Hayashi. Hayashi, Governor Hayashi was scared of that statement, or scared of him and in one week he became a blind man, I don't know why. But people say that is because Hayashi the government, Governor acted very severely for the Buddhist. That is why he became a blind. And he believed. Since then he became afraid of power of Buddhism and he went to Abayama. Abayama is small, not small but pretty big old, old Buddhist temple where there is no Shinto shrine. So he went to Abayama to pray for his eyes. There was hot baths in that shrine everyday he...he stayed at that temple taking hot baths there and prayed for his eyes. I don't know what has happened to his eyes but people remember. People...this is the famous story which people tell with each other. In this way, Buddhist temple at that time had a very difficult time.

My father told me this kind of story once in a while. As I was very young, I was very

much impressed by that story, by that kind of story. As I haven't not much, I, as I couldn't have usual life as my friend had, naturally my friend sometimes making fun of me, you know. I have no money to go to barber, or my father didn't have money to buy clipper. So he would shave my head with his razor; this is the most, this is the less expensive way: to shave. Whenever I appeared in shaved head, my friend making...would make fun of me, slapping my head and feeling my naked head. So my life at school was not so happy. So I was rather stay...I was rather stay in classroom than play with my friend in school yard.

I think that is the time when I made up my mind to be a priest, I guess. But not usual priest. I wanted to be an unusual priest to, with, you know, to tell them what is Buddhism and what is the truth, or good enough to give some lecture to them. So I determined to be a good priest. And my teacher would, used to tell me how to be a great man. "Unless we have difficult time, no one can be a great man." So the people in that district...there is no, there was no great man in that area because the people in that area, _____Prefecture, do not like to go to Tokyo and study hard. People at that, in that area stay always. Anyway, doesn't have enough courage to go out of the country or state or prefecture. So if you, he said: "If you want to, want to be successful, you should go out of this state or prefecture." So I determined go out of the _____Prefecture. So I decided anyway to leave my home and I was thinking about where should I go. But once in a while, maybe twice or three times a year, a priest, my father's disciple, would visit my father. So I know him pretty well. And I liked him so much.

So I asked him to take me to his temple and he was amazed. So I asked my father to go to my, to go to _____Prefecture to go with him. So my father also agreed with it and I went to my Master's temple when I was thirteen years old. I had of course, very difficult time at my teacher's temple. I was too young to follow the training of that temple. When I was there, when I arrived at my teacher's my Master's temple, one hundred days of training were going on. There were seven or eight monks and they had, they had their special training, getting up pretty early and reciting...practicing zazen, reciting sutra.

At that time I saw famous Zen Master Oka Sota (?) and his disciple Oka Kuka (?) and those famous teachers were there. I was fortunate to see them even though I, I didn't know they were so famous. But training was very strict. Oka Sota Roshi was the...did not become an Archbishop but under him we have many noted scholars and monks and Zen masters. He is, maybe, one of the most important persons in our Soto history in Meiji period. Yasutani Roshi's grandteacher is Oka Roshi and my, of course my Master's teacher is Oka Roshi. And Eto...Professor Eto's teacher was Oka Roshi. And there are numberless powerful teachers under him, appeared under him. So I think I was lucky to be there. And I was encouraged by, by them. But difficult thing is to get u as they get up.

Although they didn't say: "You should get up," because I was so young, so they, they didn't say: "You should get up." But I tried to get up anyway. Sometimes I was too

sleepy so I was listening to their reciting sutra in bed: *Kan ji zai bo satsu gyo Hannya Haramita*. It is quite easy to recite sutra if you listen to it when you are quite young, you don't need any instruction as you haven't, don't, you don't have...without telling you how to recite *Prajna Paramita Sutra* almost all of you can recite it.

But to me at that time layman was my enemy, who would make fun of monks and Buddhists and young, young trainee. At that time, as the policy of government was like, was like that, the policy of government at that time: how to make weaker; how to make Buddhism weaker and how to make Shinto powerful as a national religion. That was the fundamental religious policy of Meiji government. Maybe that is why in Meiji government we have a pretty good priest. They were well trained priest by wrong policy of Meiji government. You know, they were so,,, anyway. Buddhists at that time suffered a lot, directly or indirectly. But until I understand this kind of history or policy of Meiji government, I was rather angry with people, at least who treated me so badly.

I think, I think that is the reason why I became priest, you know. And this reason also is the reason why I came to America. After I studied why we had so difficult time, I could solve the...some antagonism towards people. I have no more antagonistic feeling against them. But how to make them understand Buddhist way was my next problem, which is, which I found almost impossible. So I gave up. I almost gave up. So I decided to go abroad.

Or if, if I cannot go to somewhere like America, I thought I would go to Hokkaido where there is not much people who knows what is Buddhism. But when I asked...after my schooling, after I finished my schooling, I ask my Master to go to America and he said: "No." "Then how about Hokkaido,;" I said. And he was furious and mad at me so I knew there must be some reason why. And I knew that he loved me very much so I thought I should give up my former notion...notion of going abroad.

But my heart didn't change. So after finishing what my teacher told me, I came to America. But it was...maybe I was already too old to come. And as I gave up study of language I almost forgot all the English I studied at school. But anyway I arrived at San Francisco ten years ago. And, and so I feel very happy to be here, you know. To have many unknown students who don't know much about Buddhism. You think Buddhism is some thing good...some good teaching and that makes me very happy. If you have some preconceived idea about Buddhism like some Japanese people, I don't think you would be Buddhist. Partly because of misunderstanding.

So naturally I was, and I maybe, very critical with old style Buddhist. I was always curious about why people does not like Buddhism, you know. So I was also very critical with Buddhist way. I have had very negative feeling about Buddhist, Buddhist way in one side. But on the other hand I know what was true Buddhism.

I haven't not much time to study Buddhism in some scholarly way, or I haven't not much time to practice even zazen because I was busy in everyday life of, everyday activity of, everyday activity of the priest. So what we wanted to establish...what I

wanted to establish here is some...Buddhism in some pure form even though it may be difficult. But it is much...you will be happy even though it is difficult to study something pure and something original, forgetting all about bad, demoralized, so-called-it "traditional" Buddhist way. The Buddhist way we have in Japan is outcome of various elements like government policy. Some people use, have used Buddhist power for himself. Some ruler of the...some of our rulers tried to (lost in tape turnover)...for the Buddhist. And some of the bad side of Buddhism is created by Buddhist rulers or Buddhist...they created...they destroyed Buddhism by themselves, sometimes.

So there is no wonder why in Japanese people has, haven't not much good feeling about Buddhism. But here not much people knows what is Buddhist way so it is easier to restore the Buddhism in its original form. But now I regret that I didn't study so hard. More deeply, more widely. I didn't study Buddhism. But I think you will study our way more freely and more deeply and more widely. That is my hope, you know. I ...I don't think I can do it but my successor will achieve it.

This kind of feeling is the feeling most monks and priests in my age may have. Not only me but also almost all the priests in my age will have it. And the feeling I have...I had will be the feeling almost all the young priests may have, even in, in nowadays. So I, I hope you will have various supporters. If you become sincere enough and pure enough to study Buddhism for sake of Buddhism...not for sake of yourself or sake of fame or with some gaining idea. If you study it for the sake of Buddhism or for sake of truth you will have many supporters. Not only American people but also Japanese people will support you. That is, I think quite sure. Even though you are not so successful right now, in five or ten days I think, you will have many friends, I think. That is quite sure.

Do you have some question? Hai.

Question: Is there any abstention without repression? (Roshi: Without what?)
Repression. (Roshi can't hear...Will you repeat your question?) What I am interested in is the...well I don't know how to...well like in this Christian thing it gets a little schizoid...well like in this culture, you know what I mean. Now my question is like well the way you see Buddhism in terms of abstention. Is ...through the activity of abstention is there inevitably repression, the word "repression" meaning the denial of a rightful energy of your organs?

Roshi: (Laughing) I think I understand what you mean. That we, we have to do it is to know more about our organic power. Or to know more about our desires or tendency. That is the study of human nature, maybe. And you, you can say Buddhism is a kind of study of human nature. That is Buddhism. To know human nature is to know, to understand Buddhism. As Dogen Zenji said: "To study Buddhism is to study ourselves ...to study yourself or ourselves." So if you study yourselves you will...it means that you are already studying Buddhism. And top study Buddhism, to study ourselves' human nature means to have deeper understanding...deeper and more balanced...more right understanding of each of our human nature which is analyzed in various ways. But

usually we think we have so much desires and so many numbers of ideas, you know. But it is not so. One desire will include everything. To know one desire means to know, should be to know various desires we have. To have this kind of understanding for each one of our desires is another way of studying our desires, you know. Do you understand?

For instance, there is nature of man and nature of woman. But if you understand what is woman, nature of woman fully, you will understand what is the nature of man and what is fundamental nature of human nature. This kind of understanding is more advanced and more deeper understanding of some special nature of human being. The Buddhists understand things in that way...not only understand some special nature, but also we understand various nature in term of inter-relationship. This kind of thing is what I am talking always, so I think you may understand it, what I mean. So without controlling some special desire, with more deeper understanding of it, we act and we extend our desire. Not some special desires but all desires we have. In short, more harmonious way.

And that is not...that is more than harmony of desires which you will acquire by our practice.

Tonight I wanted to talk about something like this. Like "polishing tile." You know story of "polishing tile"? Or...the Nangaku said: "When a cart doesn't go...which is better: to hit a cart or to hit the horse?" Or he said: "If you want to practice zazen, zazen has...not to sit, you know." If you want to achieve Buddhahood there is no special, there is no special type in Buddhahood. That kind of statement express the truth which we have before you analyze our activity. "this is zazen practice, this is everyday practice, this is zazen and this is not zazen, or this is Buddhahood and this is not Buddha." I think we must study this point more. Do you have some other question?

Question: Roshi, you said we should study this point more. How should we study it?

Roshi: Slap! (hitting table) Like this! Do you understand? How you study is...if you, if you become really a member of Zen Center that is how you study. If you are completely involved in our activity, that is how we study. I think we can do it, even though we don't know what will happen to us. We may starve to death in Tassajara. But I don't think so, as if we determined to study Buddhism, you can study. And you will have chance to study. Some, some questions? Hai.

Question: You have talked before about how we should be an obstacle to our practice...

Roshi: It means that when you...Buddhism is not something else. Buddhism is yourself. When there is some obstacle, you will, because of the obstacle you will see it. You will see what is right. You know if there is no obstacle there is no right. You cannot see. Because of something...because of the Moon, we can see sunbeams by the reflection of it. Because of the Moon we can see the sunbeams. So when you find yourself as an obstacle of the truth that is negative expression of reality. maybe you feel as if you

are...you cannot be a Buddhist, you know. You will be...you feel as if you are obstacle of truth. But you, you yourself is already a part of Buddha...you are Buddha. It means that. So don't be disturbed. Don't be discouraged by your practice. Just...you practice it...there is Buddhism. I cannot explain so well but the words: "That we are obstacle of truth" is very good way to express it, to understand it. One more question please. Hai.

Question: (The question though I can't hear it well, is to ask if the negative feeling about Buddhism in Japan helped influence Roshi to become a priest).

Roshi: Yes. Helped us, you know. Because of that I, you know, Buddhist had firm confidence...;or not confidence but fixed their mind to study it completely. And they have chance to check up what is Buddhism. When we are spoiled by people we have no chance to study ourselves. I thought there must be some reason why they didn't like Buddhism. Or something wrong with, with our way, maybe I thought in that way. I think for Buddhism that is very good.

Thank you very much.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 69-09-16
