

71-01-03

SUZUKI-ROSHI LECTURE

January 3, 1971. San Francisco.

Last Sunday I talked about our surroundings, which is the civilized and busy world, the world of science and of technique. Although I couldn't talk fully about those things, I tried anyway. And I talked about why we practice zazen. But I did not talk about the self-who practices zazen. What the self is is a big problem, you know. Unless we understand what the self is, unless we reflect on whether our everyday life is self-centered or a life of selflessness, we cannot have right practice, the practice of settling oneself on the self. those are Katagiri's Sensei's words-to settle oneself on the self. You cannot understand what it means.

Most people, I think, especially the people who are here, have a pretty good perspective on our surroundings, our modern life. But I don't think you understand what the self is fully. If I classified you, I think there are two kinds of students at Zen Center. One type is a student who practices a hermit-like practice, and the other is more radical and intellectual. So one type of people practice something more like individual practice, but instead of going deep into the mountains, they come to Zen Center. They come to Zen Center because there they will be free from the busy world. it is a kind of hermit-like practice. But still they don't forget the self, they don't know how to be free from the self. Their practice is still based on a gaining idea: to have some trance or attainment. Instead of using LSD, they practice zazen. That is not our practice, actually, but you can practice that kind of practice in Zen Center too. Our practice is quite different from that. I think those who work hard in Zen Center, staying everyday here and watching our everyday activity don't understand fully what our practice is. It is not easy to understand-it needs more study, and we need more practice until you understand this practice or settling oneself on oneself.

Of course, zazen practice is a kind of human experience which is quite different from the experience you have in modern life. So we must know, maybe, what kind of life we have in this actual society, in this so-called "civilized world." "To settle oneself on oneself"-that "oneself" is not universal self. The purpose of our practice is not to settle oneself on universal self. this point is very important. Modern life in the world of science or technique is already based on universal self-the experience you have in the scientific world can be repeated over and over again. the truth which is true to one person will be at the same time true with someone else. this kind of experience is universal experience. This kind of communication between people is based on universal self.

That kind of truth is maybe scientific truth. But there something is still missing. Universal self will create some natural role, we say, but it is not actually a natural role. it is based on universal self. Universal self cannot always be at the same time individual experience, cannot create individual experience. Actually, something you experience is only true with you, it cannot be true with someone else. even though you think the

experience you had is true for someone else, at that time you are actually forcing your experience on others. In that way, when you live in universal self, you will lose your actual self, or big self.

It is very strange, you know-when you talk about big self, you are really talking about universal self. it is the opposite to me: Universal self is not true self. It may be scientific truth, which is based on universal self. It looks like you can repeat your experience over and over again. When that kind of person has some kind of *kensho*, he wants to repeat it again. If he loses it, he feels very sorry. But true enlightenment experience cannot be repeated again. Only scientific facts can be repeated over and over again. So the more you emphasize big self, the more you lose the true self. That is actually what we are doing.

We can discuss something with people, we can discuss Zen Center rules. But that is just rules, just a picture of our Zen Center life. Actual Zen center life is not to follow the formality, or to follow the rules, that is not the true practice which we mean. Our practice is to settle oneself on the self, which means to always have new, fresh experiences with your true self. But even so, as long as you live in Zen Center, you should follow our rules.

And while following our rules, or in its wide sense, living in this actual life of science, the point of practice is how to develop our practice. We know how we can develop Dogen's practice in Zen Center, in group practice like this. Our practice is individual practice; at the same time it is group practice. And our practice is hermit-like practice, and at the same time, our practice can be practiced in this modern world. This is the characteristic of Dogen's practice. That is the true meaning of settling oneself on oneself. Even though you are in this modern society, you should not lose your fresh experience moment after moment. We should not be caught, or we should know the fresh vitality within ourselves.

Yesterday two teachers came to me and talked about their experience. I was very interested in it. Both of them were good teachers. But what they said was that sometimes they find students very lazy in responding to them. it is so because they lose true self. that is why when students find their teacher like a machine, they will never give him a good response. When they are real teachers, when they are based on real self, when they are settled on true self, they quickly respond to them. It is not just a matter of being in good condition. I know how it happens. Even though you are sick, students give you a very good response. when a teacher is sick, they will worry about him very much and give him very good responses.

there is a point which we must understand. For instance, even though we observe ceremonies very formally and strictly, if that is just a formal ceremony, the people who practice it will not enjoy the ceremony, and people who attend that ceremony will not be interested in it. When I was at Eiheiji, the abbot was Kitano Zenji. When he came, we had a special feeling with our practice. He observed our ceremony very strictly, with good spirit, but he was so old that when he bowed it looked like it would be impossible

to stand up again. he had a very difficult time standing up again. He almost looked like a sick person who was going to die. He stood up with joy, but actually it was a terrible effort for him. That is very strong, fresh activity. It is not just formality based on his spirit of Zen.

We practice zazen in the zendo, but we understand that it is a rare opportunity to sit in the zendo. Morning after morning we feel in that way. We don't practice Zen to establish Zen Center or to observe the formality of Zen Center. We do not practice zazen to attain something or to have a special experience about Zen. To go back to the life of activity which is the foundation of all our activity, and to settle every activity we take on that activity of practice is the purpose of practice. Fujiyama (?) Roshi wrote a comic, and on the person's head are various activities you have in your mind. In that picture you lose yourself in this mundane world. And many people are losing themselves in religion-they cannot find out true self in religion. maybe they practice and they believe in religion to lose themselves, so that they can forget all about our modern world. But in that picture, his head and his body is sitting. To settle oneself, to settle all those activities on zazen is our practice. I couldn't explain it so well, but the point is to practice true zazen every morning, and to organize or to feel yourself in everyday life. Whatever life it may be, Zen Center life or city life or life in the deep mountains, you should not forget the true foundation of your life. That is actually our practice.

Maybe it is necessary to explain what universal self is more. This is very important for Zen center, because Zen Center is becoming bigger and bigger. And now Zen Center looks like a kind of company, but there is some difference. If you know clearly what the framework of our society is now, you will understand the difference between Zen Center and some company in San Francisco. Maybe because you don't know what the framework of our society is, you don't know what our practice is. You hate it-that's all-you don't like it. That is good. But before you hate it, you should know what it is. So it is necessary for us to study more, to talk more about the framework of our society in the modern world, and what kind of mistake we have been making from 1800, after the industrial revolution. I talked about Japanese militarism, you know, but it was not only Japan-that kind of idea was going around all over the world. That was our life after 1800. At that time we had already started to lose ourselves, and we lost the foundation of zazen practice.

Perhaps it maybe useless to explain it, but our understanding about it is a little bit different from the usual understanding of our modern world. Anyway, I think we should try hard to extend our practice in our organization, and in our everyday life or city life.

Thank you very much.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 71-01-03
