
an early morning talk

by Reverend Shunryu Suzuki, Roshi

Each Thursday morning and evening, Reverend Suzuki travels down to Los Altos to hold zazen and to speak to the Peninsula Chapter of Zen Center. The group meets at the home of Marion Derby, where they have recorded on tape a number of Reverend Suzuki's talks. These have been transcribed and hopefully will appear in a book or pamphlet form available for sale to the public before long. One of these addresses, which he gave early one Thursday morning last fall, is the following.

The purpose of my talk is not to give you some intellectual understanding, but just to express my appreciation of our Zen practice. To sit with you in this way is a very unusual experience. Of course, whatever we do is unusual because our life itself is so unusual. As Buddha said, "To appreciate your human life is as rare as soil on your finger nail". You

know the soil on your nail is such a small speck. Our human life is rare and wonderful... and when I sit I want to remain in this way forever, but I encourage myself to have another practice, for instance, to recite the sutra, or to bow. And when I bow I think, "This is wonderful!" But I have to change my practice again to recite the sutra. So the purpose of my talk is to express my appreciation...that's all. Our way is not to sit to acquire something; it is to express our true nature. That is our practice.

If you want to express yourself, your true nature, there should be some natural and appropriate way of expression. Even swaying right and left, before or after sitting, is an expression of yourself. It is not preparation for practice, or relaxation after practice; it is part of the practice. So we should not do it as if it were preparing for something else. It is a part of your practice...not preparation. To cook, or to fix some food, is not preparation according to Dogen; it is practice. To cook is not to prepare food for someone; it is to express your sincerity. So when you cook you should express yourself in your activity in the kitchen. You should allow yourself plenty of time; you should work on it with nothing in your mind, and without expecting anything. You should just cook! Even cleaning is not preparation for rituals. Cleaning itself is practice. We clean, and then we observe rituals, and then we clean up again. That is also an expression of our sincerity. That is a part of our practice; that is our way. So we should always appreciate what we are doing. There is no preparation for something else.

The Bodhisattva's way is called "single-minded way" or "one railway track thousands of miles long". The railway track is always the same. If the railway track becomes wider or narrower it may be disastrous. Wherever you go the railway track is always the same. That is the Bodhisattva's way. So, even if the sun were to rise from the west, the Bodhisattva has only one way. There is no other way. His way is to express his nature and his sincerity.

We say railway track, but actually there is no railway track. Sincerity is the railway track. The sight we see from the train will change, but we are always running on the same track. And there is no beginning or no end to the track...beginningless and endless track. This is the Bodhisattva's way, and this is the nature of our Zen practice. So there is no starting point nor goal...nothing to attain...just to run on the track is our way.

But when you become curious about the railway track, danger is there. You should not see the railway track. If you see the track you will become dizzy. You should just appreciate the sight you will see from the train. That is our way. There is no need for the passengers to be curious about the railway track. Someone will take care of it; Buddha will take care of it. But sometimes we try to explain the railway track because we become curious if something is always the same. We wonder, "How is it possible for him (the Bodhisattva) to be always the same? What is his secret?" But there is no secret. Everyone has the same nature as the railway track. This is our practice. So it is necessary to sit in this way. But just to sit is not our way. Whatever you do, it should be an expression of the same activity.

There were two good friends, Cho-Kei and Ho-Fuku. They were talking about the Bodhisattva's way, and Cho-Kei said: "Even if the Arhat (enlightened one) were to have evil desires, still the Tathagata (Buddha) does not have two kinds of words. I say that the Tathagata has words, but no dualistic words." Ho-Fuku said: "Even though you say so, your comment may not be perfect. I ask you, what are the Tathagata's words?" Cho-Kei said: "I don't try to talk to a deaf ear." Ho-Fuku said: "Now I find that you do not understand the actual Tathagata's words." Cho-Kei asked: "What is your understanding of the Tathagata's words?" Ho-Fuku said: "We have had enough discussion, so let's have a cup of tea!" Ho-Fuku did not give Cho-Kei an answer because it is impossible to give a verbal interpretation of our way, but as a part of their practice these two good friends discussed the Bodhisattva's way, even though they did not expect to discover a new interpretation. So, Ho-Fuku answered: "Our discussion is over. Let's have a cup of tea!" That's a very good answer, isn't it?

So now I should say, "I am hungry, so let's have breakfast!" My talk is over; your listening is over. That is our way. There is no need to remember what I say; there is no need to understand what I say. You understand; you have full understanding within yourself. There is no problem. But something has to go on the track. We have a railway track, and we have some passengers, and so we should have a train...so...(getting up)... Train starts for the dining room!