

*Suzuki-roshi in the old
Tassajara zendo*



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This lecture was given by Suzuki-roshi on June 20, 1970 at Tassajara and was the eighth in a series on the *San dō Kai*, a forty-four line poem written by Sekito Kisen, the eighth Chinese ancestor of Soto Zen.

It covers the following lines: "Mei chu ni atatte an ari an sō o motte ōkoto nakare an chū ni atatte mei ari mei so o motte miru koto nakare." R. H. Blyth translates this: "Within the light there is darkness, but do not be attached to this darkness. Within the darkness there is light, but do not look for that light."

Suzuki-roshi: First I will explain the two terms *mei* and *an*, "brightness" and "darkness." Brightness means the relative, dualistic world of works, the thinking world, the visible world in which we live, and darkness refers to the absolute where there is no exchange value or materialistic value or even spiritual value. The world which our words or thinking mind cannot reach. It is opposite to the relative or dualistic world. And it is necessary for us who live in the realm of duality to have a good understanding of the absolute, which we may think of as a deity or god. But in Buddhism we do not have any particular idea about god or deity. The absolute is the absolute because it is beyond our understanding or dualistic thinking. We cannot deny this world of the absolute. Many people say that Buddhism is atheism because we have no particular idea of God. We know there is the absolute, but we know it is beyond the limit of our thinking mind, so we don't say so much about it. That is what we mean by *an*, "darkness."

Meichu ni atatte an ari. *Mei* is "sun" and "moon"; *chu* means "within" and at the same time means "middle." *Attate* means "actually." *An* is "darkness" or "utter darkness." *Ari* is a verb meaning "is." "Actually within brightness there is utter darkness." This is a literal translation.

But the literal translation doesn't make much sense. So we must understand the actual meaning of *ari*, "there is." When you say "there is something on the table, or on the earth, or in Tassajara," something on something or in something, this "there is" is different from *ari*. A part of the character for *ari* means "flesh" or "skin", so already a part of it, the way it exists, is closely related to something. So when we use *ari* there is a closer relationship between brightness and darkness, like the relationship between my skin and myself. Just "In brightness there is darkness" is a more dualistic understanding. "I have my skin," you may say, or "I have my hand," but your hand or your skin is a part of you. So actually it is not dualistic anymore. Skin is you yourself; your hands are your hands. You Americans say (I don't know why) "I have two hands." But your hands may feel funny when you say this. "Oh, we are a part of you and you say you have two hands. What do you mean? Do you mean you have four hands instead of us?" So, if possible, I think the English language should have another word for "have." Japanese people have two characters. When we say, "There is a store or a book or the table," we use another character, *zai*, and when we say, "I have two hands," we use *ari*. We say "There is, actually, two hands," or "In you there are two hands." *Ari* means there is a very close relationship between brightness and darkness. And actually darkness itself is brightness. Dark or bright is within your mind, because within your mind you have some stand or measurement of how bright or dark this room is. If it is unusually bright you may say the room is bright; if it is unusually dark you may say it is dark. But you can say, "This room is bright" and at the same time, someone else may say, "This room is very dark." Someone who came from San Francisco may say, "Oh, Tassajara is very dark," while someone who came out of a cave may say, "Tassajara is very bright, like a capital city." So the idea of bright or dark is within ourselves. Because we have some standard we say bright or dark, but actually brightness is darkness and darkness is brightness.

Even though we say utter darkness, it does not mean there is nothing in utter darkness. When you have brightness you can see many things, such as Caucasian and Japanese, and men and women, stone or tree. These things appear in brightness. But when we say "utter darkness" or "world of the absolute," which are beyond our thinking, you may think this is some world which is quite different from our actual human world, but this is also a mistake. If you understand darkness in that way, it is not the darkness which we mean when we say "darkness."

I think you are preparing some dishes for Ed and Meg's wedding. You may dish out various foods separately, putting them on different plates. This is soup, this is salad, this is dessert. That is brightness. But actually, when you eat, various foods will be mixed up in your tummy. Then there is no soup or no bread or no dessert. At that time they all work. When food is dished out on the plate, it is not yet working; it is not yet actually food; it is brightness. And when it is in your tummy, it is darkness. But even in darkness there is lettuce and soup and everything. It is the same thing, but when it is changing its form it starts to work. So in utter darkness things happen in their true sense. In brightness you feel good and you feel as if you have a big dish, but the food is not serving its own purpose yet.

So when you don't know what you are doing, actually you are acting fully, with a full mind. When you are thinking, you are not yet working on it. When we start to work, both the dark side and the bright side are there. When you are practicing the Buddhist way, there is a bright side and a dark side, and the relationship between darkness and brightness is this *ari* relationship, like the relationship between skin and body. You cannot actually say which is my skin and which is my body.

"An sō o motte ō koto nakare." "You should not meet someone with darkness." *Nakare* means "not," "do not." *Motte* means "with." *Sō* means "characteristic"; *an so* means "dark side" or "dark outlook;" *ō* means "to meet" or sometimes "to treat"; "to meet and treat" someone like your friend. The someone is implied.

This character *ō*, "to meet, to encounter" means like clouds meet a mountain. Here is a mountain, Tassajara mountain; there are clouds, and the clouds from the ocean will meet the mountains. This kind of relationship is *ō*. You should not meet people with the understanding of darkness. If you meet your friend with your eyes shut, ignoring how old he is or how handsome he is, ignoring all his characteristics, you will not meet your friend. That is just one-sided understanding, because in the darkness there is brightness. Even though the relationship between you and your friend is very intimate, still your friend is your friend and you are you. Maybe the relationship will be one like husband and wife. Husband is husband and wife is wife; that is real relationship. So, don't meet your friend without the understanding of brightness or duality. A close relationship is dark because, if your relationship is very close, you are with the other person, but still you are you and your friend is your friend.

The next sentence is, *"An chū ni atatte mei ari mei so o motte miru koto nakare."* "Within darkness there is brightness, but you should not see others with the eyes of brightness." The third line repeats the same thing as the first in a different way. In darkness, even when we are in intimate relationship, there is man and woman, which is the brightness, the duality of man and woman. "But you should not see others with the eyes of brightness only," because the other side of brightness is darkness. Darkness and brightness are two sides of one coin.

We are liable to be caught by preconceived ideas. If you experience something bad with somebody you will think, "Oh, he is a bad person, he is always mean to me." But it cannot be so. You are seeing him with just brightness. You should know why he is mean to you. It is easy for him; if he were just a stranger, he could not be angry with you. Because the relationship is so close, so intimate, it is more than a relationship between two persons. It is just one. So when he is angry, you will be angry. When one is angry, the other will be angry; if you understand in that way you understand the other side of brightness, which is darkness. And even though you become angry he will not feel so bad. "Oh, he is so angry with me because he is so close to me." When you think he is bad it is difficult for you to change your idea of him. Sometimes he is bad, but now you don't know whether he is good or bad. You have to see.

So we should not cling to the idea of darkness or brightness; we should not cling to the idea of equality or differentiation. But most people once they have a grudge against someone, find it almost impossible to change their relationship. But if we are Buddhists we should be able to switch our minds from bad to good and from

good to bad. If you are able to do so, bad does not mean bad, good does not mean good anymore. But at the same time, good is good and bad is bad. Do you understand? In this way we should understand the relationship between us. There is a poem:

The mother is the Blue Mountain
and the children are white clouds.
All day long they live together
and yet they do not know
who is the mother and who are the children.

The mountain is the mountain and the white clouds are white clouds floating around the mountain like children. There is the blue mountain and there are the white clouds, but they don't know that they are white clouds or blue mountain. Even though they don't know, they know well, so well, that they don't know.

That is the experience you will have in your zazen practice. You will hear insects and the stream. You are sitting and the stream is running and you hear it. Even though you hear it you have no idea of stream and no idea of zazen. You are just on the black cushion. You are just there like a blue mountain with white clouds. This kind of relationship is fully explained in these four lines:



Tassajara

Within brightness actually there is darkness
But you should not meet someone with darkness.
Within darkness actually there is brightness
But you should not see others with the eyes of brightness.

The translation goes: "Within brightness there is darkness. Don't be attached to the darkness. Within darkness there is brightness. Don't see with . . . I forget.

QUESTIONS:

Student A: Roshi, are you talking about Blyth's translation? He said the same thing.

Suzuki-roshi: That was Masunaga's translation. A translation cannot be perfect. For instance, there are no words for *ari*. *Ari* means darkness. But brightness doesn't mean anything if it also means darkness. That is why I said them together: "brightness—darkness". Which is it? But there is brightness and darkness. There should not be any question on this point, but if you have some question please ask me... if you want to get hit!

Student B: Roshi, what about focus? You said, "The clouds don't know they're the children of the mountain," and vice versa, but then we humans unwrap our *oryoki* bowls, we focus on that without listening to the stream. It is a difficult activity.

Suzuki-roshi: No. It is the same activity.

Student B: For me it is difficult.

Suzuki-roshi: That is why you get stuck. When you really focus on it there is brightness and darkness together, but when you are thinking about it there are two sides. Now you are asking a question. When you are asking a question you are thinking, so it is hard for me to answer your question. I may have to be very angry with you. That is the only way. If you get hit you will probably stop thinking about it.

Student C: Roshi, why do we shave our heads?

Suzuki-roshi: So that your thinking mind can go as smoothly as this (rubbing his shaved head with his hand.) Bright—dark—very smoothly; and to get rid of ornaments. We should not have anything which is not necessary.

Student D: The *Diamond Sutra* says that we suffer misfortune in this life because of sins or mistakes committed in past lives, and that by suffering these misfortunes now, we will work out these mistakes or make retribution for them, atone for them and open the way for enlightenment. It seems like a very heavy load. I didn't understand it. It added a new dimension to my problem.

Suzuki-roshi: It will help. Because you suffer now does not mean that someone makes you suffer but that your suffering is caused by you yourself. If you understand in that way you will have no complaints. But at the same time, if you understand your life just from the viewpoint of suffering, the dualistic reason why we suffer, you are already caught by the idea of karma. We should be free from that

kind of one-sided view. Even though we say "karma", karma doesn't exist. But if karma doesn't exist then you may say, "Whatever I do, it's all right." That means that you are caught by the idea of darkness. The other day we discussed about why we kill earwigs. We have to kill them, but that doesn't mean that it is all right to kill them. It is not all right. We should understand our activity from both sides. If you don't feel so good about it you should make more effort. You should find out how to protect the vegetables without disturbing the earwigs. But you should not waste too much time or your practice will suffer. Anyway, you have to continue to find some good ideas one after another. That is our way.

Student E: Roshi, what is the difference between understanding things from both sides and not understanding them at all?

Suzuki-roshi: There is no need to talk about not understanding at all. There are not two truths, but the truth which you understand in our mind may not be true in your actual activity or feeling, because your actual life does not go as easily as the way you understand it. We know, "This is the perfect truth," but for us it is not true because we cannot act in that way. So there are two ways of understanding truth. One is the intellectual truth which is called *hon bunjo*. *Hon* means "fundamental"; *bun* means "Judgement"; "the truth which is always true" whether we understand it or not. We say "understand", but that understanding is just intellectual understanding. Whether we understand it or not, whether Buddha appears in the world or not, the truth is the truth. And the other way is: for Buddha it was true, but we cannot accept the truth as it is, so for us it is not true. That is the truth in our practice. From the viewpoint of practice, the truth is not always true, so we should not mix up the two kinds of truth; the truth which is always true with the truth which is true for Buddha but not for beginners. Does it make sense?

Student F: Is that why Buddha stressed the difference between *sama samadhi* and *samadhi*?

Suzuki-roshi: I don't understand sanskrit, so...

Student F: *Samadhi* is "truth", and *sama* is "equanimity" or "rightfulness." Although many people of the religions in Buddha's time had attained *samadhi*, Buddha did not accept this *samadhi* until it was set round with equanimity. Is that what you just said?

Suzuki-roshi: Yes. To stress some picture is not our way. We put more emphasis on our actual life. That is why we must practice. That all of us have Buddha nature is true whether Buddha said it or not. But unfortunately, for most of us it is not true. I don't know why.

Student G: When one comes to see the darkness in the light and the light in the darkness, do they finally become the same thing or do they always remain separately darkness and light?

Suzuki-roshi: Yes, the same thing, but our lazy mind separates darkness from brightness, and we seek for darkness. To plunge into the bright brightness, to find darkness in brightness, to find Buddha nature in perfect zazen is our way. Whether you are sleepy or not, good students or bad students, you should sit. That is the only way to have darkness in your bright dualistic practice.