



Sandokai Lecture No. 10

Tassajara June 25, 1970

*Note:* This lecture concerns the following lines of the *Sandokai*:

*Mei an ono-ono ai tai shite*

*Hi suru ni zengo no ayumi no gotoshi*

(Darkness and brightness stand with each other  
as when one footstep is forward and the other is behind)

We are still talking about reality from the viewpoint of independency. Even though we are discussing independency, we are always referring to dependency or interdependence, so you may feel as if we are always talking about the same thing, but it is not so. Dependency and independency are actually two sides of one coin.

People may say that the Japanese are very tough. But that is just one side of the Japanese personality. The other side is softness. Because of their Buddhist back-

ground they have been trained that way for a long time. The Japanese people are very kind.

We have a children's song that describes a hero called *Mo Mo Taro*, the "Peach Boy." There was an old couple who lived near the riverside. One day the old woman picked up a peach from the stream and came back to her home. And from the peach, out came *Mo Mo Taro*. He was very strong but very kind and gentle. The Japanese children sing a song about him. He is the ideal Japanese character. What do you call it? You must have some expression for it?

*Student:* Folk hero?

*Suzuki-roshi:* Yes, folk hero. Without a soft mind you cannot be really strong. If *Mo Mo Taro* did not have this side of his character, if he was not very sympathetic sometimes, he could not be really strong. A person who is strong just for himself is not so strong, but a strong person who is very kind will support people and can really be a folk hero. When we have both a soft side and a strong side we can be strong in a real way.

It is easy to fight and to win, maybe, but it is not so easy to endure without crying when you are defeated. You should be able to allow your foe to beat you. O.K.? This is very difficult. But unless you can endure the bitterness of defeat, you cannot be really strong. Readiness to be weak can be a sign of strength. We say, "The willow tree cannot be broken by snow." The weight of the snow may break a strong tree, but even though the snow will bend or twist the branches, even a heavy snow like we had the year before last cannot break the willow branches. Bamboo also bends easily. It looks quite weak, but no snow can break it. This is always true.

"*Me an ono-ono ai tai shite*": *mei* and *an*, darkness and brightness, absolute and relative, are a pair of opposites. *Ai* means "with each other", *tai* means "stand". *Ai tai* means "to face each other" or "to stand with each other". *Ono-ono* also means "each other".

"*Hi suru ni zengo ayumi no gotoshi*"; this is "like the foot before and the foot behind". *Hi suru ni* means "like", "to compare"; *gotoshi* is also "like"; *zen* means "forward"; *go* means "behind". "Like the foot before and the foot behind in walking". This is a very good way of explaining oneness or the actual function of a pair of opposites. It explains our practice, how we apply pairs of opposites like delusion and enlightenment, reality and idea, good and bad, weak and strong, in our everyday life. People who feel they are strong may find it difficult to be weak. People who feel they are weak may try to be strong. That is quite usual. But sometimes we should be strong and sometimes we should be weak. If you remain always weak or if you always want to be strong, then you cannot be strong in its true sense.

When you learn something you should be able to teach people. You should put the same effort into teaching. And if you want to teach you should be humble enough to learn something. Then you can teach. If you try to teach just because you know something, you cannot teach anything. When you are ready to be taught by someone, if necessary, then you can teach people in the true sense of the word. So, to learn is to teach and to teach is to learn. If you think you are always a student you

cannot learn anything. The reason you learn something is because you have to teach others after you have learned it.

There is no fixed moral code or standard, but you find it when you try to teach others. Then you will find a moral code for yourself. Before Japan was defeated in the war and completely surrendered, the Japanese people thought they had some teaching or moral code which was absolutely right and straight and that if they only observed that kind of moral code they would not make any mistakes. But that moral code, unfortunately, was something which was set up in the first part of the Meiji period. So after losing the war they lost confidence in their morality, and they didn't know what kind of morals they should observe. They didn't know what to do. But actually it shouldn't be so difficult to find the moral code. I said to them, "You have children. If you think of how to raise them you will naturally know the moral code for yourself." When you think the moral code is just for yourself, that is one-sided understanding. A moral code is, rather, to help others, and naturally the moral code you find to help others, or to be kind to others, will also be for yourself.

So we say, "To go heading to the east one hundred miles is to go to the west one hundred miles." When the moon is high in the sky, the moon in the water will be deep. But usually people will observe the moon above the water and will not see the moon in the water. So when you see the moon deep in the water, you should know that this moon is very high. That the moon is deep means that the moon is high. So, the moon in the water is independent and the moon over the water is independent; but the moon over the water is the moon in the water too. We should understand in this way. When you are strong, you should be strong, you should be very tough. But that toughness comes from your gentle kindness. And when you are kind you should just be kind, but that does not mean you are not strong.

Women are not physically as strong as men. Because they are physically weaker they are often stronger than men. Actually we don't know who is strong. When we are completely independent, when we have a completely independent nature which is our own, we have absolutely equal strength with everyone. When you are comparing which is stronger, you or I, then you don't have real strength. When you are completely independent, one with your own nature, then it means you are an absolute power in a relative situation. When women and men are too much involved in competition with each other, they are not so strong. When women become completely women (and men become completely men) they have absolute power. Do you understand this point?

So brightness and darkness, although they are a pair of opposites, have equality at the same time, "as when one footstep is forward the other is behind." This is a very good metaphor to explain the relationship of absolute and relative.

When you walk, the step forward immediately becomes the step behind. Then, is a step with your right foot the step before or the step behind? Which is it? Which is brightness and which is darkness? It is difficult to tell. "Like the foot before and the foot behind in walking."\*

But when you are actually walking, there is no foot behind or no foot before. If you stop walking and think about it, the right foot may sometimes be the foot

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\* R.H. Blyth translation.

before and the left foot may be the foot behind; there is brightness and darkness. But when your feet are actually walking, when you are actually practicing our way, there is no brightness or darkness, no foot before or foot behind. If I say that you should just sit zazen without thinking, you may think that we should not have any thoughts and you will be caught by the idea that the right foot is the foot before and the left foot is the foot behind. Then you cannot walk any more. If you forget all about the left foot or the right foot you can walk. Actually when you are walking, you have no idea of left foot or right foot. But if you are (self-consciously) aware of right foot or left foot, you cannot walk, you cannot run.

As I said, when you chew your food there is no rice, or no pickle, or no soup. And after you mix the food in your mouth, it will be digested in your tummy, and it will serve its purpose. Even so, we should serve one thing after another, and dessert should come last. There is some order. But even though there is some order you should chew your food and mix it, or else the food will not serve its purpose. It is necessary to think about it, to have some recipe, but it is also necessary to mix everything up.

This is a very good interpretation of reality, and a good suggestion of how we practice our way, and of what kind of activity is going on in our everyday life. With this line the interpretation of reality from the light of independency is finished.



*Tassajara garden, 1988*

#### QUESTIONS

*Student:* Roshi, when you say “independency”, I’m a little confused as to whether you mean “independent” or “interdependency.”

*Suzuki-roshi:* I mean the idea of independency and dependency. “Interdependence” is more like “dependency”.

*Student:* Roshi, in English we have "independent" and "independence", but no word "independency".

*Suzuki-roshi:* Oh! "Independence". Excuse me. "Independence" may be the noun, but to me it does not fit so well.

*Student:* We have a noun "dependency" so we can have "independency".

*Suzuki-roshi:* But you have "independency"?

*Student:* Now we have "independency"!

*Suzuki-roshi:* "Independent" is too strong. If you are "independent", Bam! (striking the table with his stick). That's all! You don't care about anything. That is not what we mean. When you are independent you are in a very vulnerable and weak or dangerous situation.

*Student:* Isn't this idea that people get of their independence a delusion?

*Suzuki-roshi:* Yes. When they think, "I am independent," it is not true. You are dependent on everything.

*Student:* I can't figure out how you can tell the difference between what a woman is supposed to be and what a man is supposed to be. Like if a woman competes with a man then she's weak, but how do you know what a man or a woman is supposed to be like in the first place?

*Suzuki-roshi:* I don't mean weak. If men and women compete and are compared with each other by setting up some standard or categories, sometimes the man will be stronger and sometimes the woman will be stronger. Anyway, you cannot always be strong. But when you become a woman (or a man) absolutely, you have absolute value always, and no one can replace you.

*Student:* Roshi, I have some trouble with the relevancy of your lecture. I'd like to say one more thing about it, but I don't know what. I can't quite see what it's all about. I know what it's all about when you are talking about opposites and things like that.

*Suzuki-roshi:* The purpose of what I am saying is to open some different approach to your understanding of reality. You are observing things from just one side or the other; and you stick to some understanding from just one side. That is why I am talking in this way. It is necessary. Strictly speaking Buddhists have no teaching. We have no god or deities. We don't have anything. What we have is nothingness, that's all. So how is it possible for Buddhists to be religious? What kind of composure do we have? That will be the question. The answer is not some special idea of God or deity, but rather, this kind of understanding of the reality we are always facing. Where are we? What are we doing? Who is he? Who is she? When we understand "he" and "she" in this way, when we observe things in this way, we don't need any special teaching of God because everything is God for us. Moment after moment we are facing God. And each one of us is also God or Buddha. So we don't need any special idea of God. That may be the point.

*Student:* Roshi, that sounds very good to me, but then how come we take vows? Like when Ed and Meg got married, you said that they should take refuge in the triple treasure (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) and observe the ten cardinal precepts.



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*Suzuki-roshi:* No! You are just trying to argue with me. You need precepts but actually it isn't possible to violate precepts. You cannot. But you feel as if you are. If you feel in that way, you should accept your feelings and if you accept your feelings then you have to say, "Excuse me," or "I'm sorry" or something. That is also quite natural. "Don't kill" is a dead precept. "Excuse me" is an actual working precept, which is not one foot behind or one foot forward. Do you understand? If you read the precepts and say, "O.K., I will do it", that is precepts. And when you have violated a precept you may say, "Oh, excuse me." That is quite natural.

*Student:* I do feel natural about some of the precepts, for instance, that I shouldn't say nasty things about people. But to take harmful drugs or intoxicants seems natural. But if all the precepts were natural, and if I just wanted to do things that way, then that's different.

*Suzuki-roshi:* We take vows and observe precepts and we read sutras. But even though you read scriptures and observe precepts, without right understanding they will be the precepts of either brightness or darkness, and when you are caught in this way or rely too much on precepts or scriptures, they are not Buddhist precepts or scriptures.

*Student:* Suppose I take a precept that says I won't speak ill of others. If I don't follow the precept, it seems like there is no reason for it at all, and if I do follow it, it seems like I'm being caught by it. I just don't understand. If precepts are not rigid they don't seem to be of any use at all, and if they are rigid they don't seem to be consistent with the Sandokai. I have always wondered about that part in the Meal Sutra where we say, "to stop all evil and practice good," and I asked you about it, and you said that we should just pay attention to what we are doing. If that is so, why don't we just say that? Why don't we say, "I practice zazen in my everyday life," and not be caught by words? Why go through this "good and evil" stuff?

*Suzuki-roshi:* If you feel in that way, you might also say, "It is quite natural for me to be born and live in this world." But is it natural? You have already pre-

sumed something which you shouldn't presume. That may already be a big mistake. Why did you come here?

*Student:* When I came here they didn't ask me about precepts. They just wanted to know if I had \$2.50 a day.

*Suzuki-roshi:* Good bargain! It cannot be so simple. So anyway, you should say, "Oh! I'm sorry." When you are born you cannot say so. Now you can. So you should say, "I am sorry to be your daughter or your son. Excuse me. I have caused you a lot of trouble." That is actually precepts.

*Student:* Roshi, sometimes I feel this way about listening to lectures. At one time I was just walking along and someone came and said, "Did you realize that when you are walking, one foot is ahead and the other is behind?" No! For a long time that amazed me. I wondered why he ever asked me a question like that, and I thought about it a lot. It was a very strange thing and it occupied my attention. Then, after a long time, I found that I was just walking again and didn't think so much about it. But one day as I was walking, another man came up and said, "Did you realize that when you are walking, one foot is ahead and the other is behind?" And I feel right at that point now. I still don't understand it at all, but I still have to deal with it somehow. Half of me says "What's the relevance of it?" because it doesn't bother me any more, and the other half says, "Yes, but it's still happening like that every time I take a step."

*Suzuki-roshi:* Just to think of your life, only as a personal practice, doesn't make much sense. But if you see what we human beings are doing, you will see that this is exactly how we cause trouble for ourselves. Right foot or left foot, Rinzai or Soto, America or the Soviet Union, peace or war; if you understand in this way it is a big problem and the way to solve it is to walk on and on and on.

*Student:* Do I understand you to say that the problem is, how to be aware of all these polarities and precepts without being conscious of being aware? Consciousness fixes things and that is not real either. It fixes the chain.

*Suzuki-roshi:* Yes, when the chain is fixed it cannot move. But still you should move. Time does not wait for you, so you should go on and on following the reality. If you think about this point you will already have started to walk. But if you just remain thinking about it, it doesn't work and you are not walking forward. If you think, "The world is going on and on, we are becoming older and older, today will not come again, and tomorrow I have to go somewhere," you have already started to walk. You cannot think the same thing always, you cannot always stop and think, so anyway you should go on and on, making your best effort. And when you make your best effort, actually you are walking. Sometimes your foot may be behind and sometimes it may be ahead. Sometimes you feel as if you are doing something good and sometimes you feel as if you are doing something bad. But in that way you are going on and on and on. You have to accept it. If you have to accept it, and if you have to live in each moment, then you are actually living in each moment. Then you should do something, say something. "Say something!" the Rinzai master shouts. "Say something now!" (hitting the table). What do you say? That is the point.