



Suzuki Roshi at Tassajara

Purely Involved Helping Others

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I want to discuss with you how to apply practice to your everyday life. Whether you are a lay person or a priest, we are all Bodhisattvas. We are taking Bodhisattva vows and we are practicing the Bodhisattva way. As you know, the Bodhisattva way is to help others as you help yourself, or to help others more, before you help yourself. That is the Bodhisattva way. When you try to figure out the relationship between zazen practice and your everyday life, you will see how important this point is. When you forget this point you cannot extend your practice to your everyday life, because as Buddhists we should see things "as it is." That is the most important point.

When you practice zazen you don't see anything, or think about anything. But even though you are not seeing or thinking, you are actually one with everything. We see things, not with our physical eye, but with our true eye. Even though you don't see, hear, or think, at that

time you are already one with everything and you have perfect understanding of everything. That is our practice.

But in your everyday life you have to think, you have to see, and you have to act. So you should know whether or not you are actually seeing things as it is. But it is hard to see things as it is because of our rose-colored glasses. Because of our rose-colored glasses, everything we see is rose-colored and we think that is the way things actually are. There is no way to solve this problem with our thinking mind. If you know the point of our practice, you will not rely on your thinking mind or your physical eyes too much. Whether you are seeing or not seeing, hearing or not hearing, thinking or not thinking, you are one with everything anyway. This point is more important than the way you feel. Even though you have various feelings which you can't ignore, whatever your feelings are, your friend is your friend, your teacher is your teacher and it is the same with your husband, wife and children. So you always have something around you to work on—especially when, as a Buddhist, the purpose of life is mostly to help others. So, whatever it is, you have to work on it. In Japanese that is called *ichi gyo zammai*, to be purely involved in the activity you do moment after moment.

Usually we feel that we have lots of choice in our life. You may even think you can change your wife or husband (chuckling). But I don't know whether that is possible or not. You may think in that way or feel in that way, but actually your wife or husband is just what you have. Someone said an interesting thing, something like, "It may be better to wait until I feel it is right to do something." That makes sense I think, but it is too passive. To be patient is pretty good, but there must be something one can do instead of just waiting. It may be better to work on it. Moment after moment, if you work on it faithfully, your true life will start. If you are just waiting for things to change or if you take too much time to make up your mind, you have no time to live in this world. You will be as old as I am now and pretty soon you will die. So work on what you have now, before trying to change your way or your circumstances.

Even though you make your best effort to have a good family life, you may fail. We don't know. But through that effort, even though you fail to help your family, you may actually be helping many people around you. You may think you are helping only your husband or your wife but it is not so. If you give your friends or your neighbors that same kind of warm feeling, that is how you actually help people. Things happen in that way.

Now I have many students. If I am helping only one student it looks like I cannot help the rest of the students. But I don't think so. To help

*Jordan Thorn
uses part of
a day off at
Tassajara to
work on a
rakusu. He was
Shuso for the
1996 winter
practice period.*



one student is to help the rest of the students in a true sense; and if you will only let me do so, I can do it. But most likely you won't allow me to do so, so I have to make an appointment. Someone has a difficult time making my appointments. That is not what I want to do actually. Whatever you do, if you do it with your warm heart, sincerely, it means that I can help you and I am also helping the rest of the students.

Windbell, the name of our Zen Center publication, comes from Dogen Zenji's famous poem about the wind bell: "It's whole body is its mouth. From whichever direction the wind may come—east, west, south or north, it doesn't care. All day long it rings without knowing what it is doing, ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling." All day long you are doing something. You are busy, you are helping others always, without being involved in north, south, east or west, good or bad, strong or weak, good sound or bad sound. That is actually our practice, isn't it?

When you sit without any idea of discrimination, just sit, then you are you and your practice includes everything, then you are helping people. This is the feeling with which you practice zazen. In this way you work on what you should do. So if your Bodhisattva mind is not strong enough you may think, "I am not doing things so well. It may be better if I do it some other way." But when your Bodhisattva mind or Way-seeking mind is very strong you do not discriminate. There is a big difference between the two.

If you want to see things as it is you must have good practice and good strong Bodhisattva mind and be ready to accept your surroundings as it is in either prosperity or adversity. You should manage your life like a sailing ship crossing the ocean; however the wind blows you have to manage your boat. Some Zen master said, I think it was a woman, to

drive the wave and follow the wave, follow the wave and drive the wave. It means that we have to have unusual skill in managing things. Following but driving. Driving but following. Where you are completely with your surroundings that kind of activity will appear, it will be your own. That kind of power or skill comes from real zazen practice with right spirit.

I think that most of you have a wrong idea about freedom, or things as they are. When you say freedom, or things as they are, it is not the same as what I mean. You are not seeing things as they are because you have some special glasses and you see things through them. Each person has different glasses. So the harder you try to manage our group the more you fall into confusion because you stick to your own understanding. If you see things without the glasses, if the picture you have is things as they are, usually everyone will agree with what you see, and you are able to agree with someone else's understanding. When you realize that you can't agree you should sometimes take off your glasses. "Oh, but I need these glasses (laughing), as a teacher I must have them, so excuse me, I must wear them. Maybe so. Still if you know what kind of glasses you wear you can easily agree without being attached to your special glasses.

If you are always looking through the glasses of a student, a teacher, or an officer, things become very difficult. If you have this understanding, many good virtues will result: humbleness, soft mind, or clear understanding, or sometimes sharp judgment.

We Japanese like bamboo very much. Bamboo is not something expensive. It is a very common plant and it also has a very good nature. If you want to cut it, it will split in two all the way down very evenly. It will split exactly into four. No matter how long it is it will split evenly from tip to root. No other plant will split so nicely. That is the nature of bamboo.

If you have the wisdom to see things as it is, whatever it is, you can split it right in two, as Nansen cut the cat right in two. Whack! The students were all amazed. Oh! They didn't have time to criticize him for killing the cat or violating the precepts. Whack! It happened in that way and they realized the problem was all gone. That kind of activity or wisdom will appear only when you see things as it is, without trying to see, or when you can solve the problem without trying to solve the problem. How you can do it is just to sit.

In China there were famous scholars. They studied many things and learned many things. Afterward, they rinsed their ears to get rid of what they had learned. When you have this kind of practice, even though you study thousands of books you will still be able to hear without partiality.

You will have that kind of freedom. How? First of all you have to have Bodhisattva mind. Next, you should be concentrated on what you do, and your life must be based on pure practice, *shikan-taza*. It is not such a difficult thing actually, but because of your glasses, or because you create many ideas, you have too much choice. When you do not have too much choice, you can do your best in your adversity. It's better to spend your time, whether you like it or not, in some kind of situation which you may not like. The experience you have in that kind of situation is very pure. Something you feel you did which was good, may not be so good. But something you did whether you liked it or not, just because you had to do it will be very good. That experience will help you when you feel it in your blood.

Think about this point. If you are a sincere student, people will want to do what you are doing because you like it. I don't think that is so good. If you like Zen Center too much you should leave. If you don't like it, stay here (laughter). But anyway, since you have freedom, you may not stay. That is the trouble you have here in America. So, my way of encouraging people is a little bit different. That is why my students say the more they work, the more I become discouraged. I must always be difficult with you, as you know. It is very difficult for me to be difficult with you. But I am trying to be difficult. I think that is the best way to help you.



Anbo Stuart Kutchins enjoys the rarity of snow at Tassajara during the 1996 winter practice period.