



Be Kind With Yourself

*By Shunryu Suzuki Roshi
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I WANT YOU TO HAVE THE ACTUAL FEELING of true practice. Although I practiced zazen when I was young, I didn't know exactly what it was. I had some feeling of practice, but it was pretty difficult to talk about. Sometimes I was very impressed by our practice at Eiheiji and other monasteries. When I saw some great teachers or listened to their lectures, I was very moved. But it was difficult to give order to those experiences.

The Way is to have full experience, full feeling in every practice. I thought I did my best, but I didn't make enough effort. My practice was what we call "stepladder" Zen. "I understand this much now, and next year," I thought, "I will understand a little bit more, and a little bit more." That kind of practice doesn't make much sense. If you try stepladder practice, maybe you will realize that it is a mistake.

If we don't have some warm, big satisfaction in our practice, that is not practice. Even though you sit, trying to have the right posture and counting your breath, it may still be empty zazen because you are just following instructions, and you are not kind enough with yourself. You should be very kind with yourself. Do not count your breathing just to avoid your thinking mind, but to take the best care of your breathing. Just to follow your breathing doesn't make sense. If you are very kind with your breathing, one breath after another, you will have a refreshed warm feeling in your zazen.

Perhaps we are not kind enough with ourselves. We understand our practice, but we understand by following some instructions. You think that if you follow the instructions given by some teacher, then you will have good zazen, but it is not so. The purpose of instruction is for you to be able to be kind with yourself. When you have a warm feeling for your body and your breath, then you can take care of your practice, and you will be fully satisfied. When you are very kind with yourself, naturally you will feel this way.

A mother will take care of her child even though she has no idea of how to make her baby happy. Similarly, when you take care of your posture and your breathing, there should be some warm feeling in it. When you have a warm feeling in your practice, that is actually a good example of the great mercy of Buddha. And whether you are a priest or lay person, this practice will extend to your everyday life. When you take the utmost care of what you do, then you feel good.

Tozan Ryokai attained enlightenment many times. Once when he was crossing a river, he saw himself reflected in the water and said, "Don't try to figure out what you are. If you try to figure out what you are, what you understand will be far away from you—you will not have even an image of yourself." Actually, you are in the river. You may say that it is just a shadow or a reflection, but if you see carefully with warm-hearted feeling, that is you.

You may think you are very warm-hearted, but when you try to understand how warm, you cannot actually measure the temperature of

your feeling. Yet when you see yourself in the mirror or water with warm feeling, that is actually you. And whatever you do, you are there.

When you do something, Manjusri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, is there. When you have good practice in your everyday life, there is Manjusri and there is the true you, the real you. When you do things with your warm-hearted mind, that is actual practice, that is how to take care of things.

Some of you are monks and some are not monks, and each of you will go your own way. Those who are not married and those who have already married have their own ways of extending practice to their everyday lives. Although our situations are different, practice is just one—and you meet Manjusri. Even though he is one, he is everywhere, with everyone and with all things. Whatever you do, whatever practice you are involved in, there is Manjusri. The secret is not to forget



Abbess Blanche Hartman shares a hug with Kosho McCall before his shuso ceremony at City Center. Zachary Smith (right) served as benji.

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These people all attended Koshi Jack McCall's shuso ceremony which concluded the winter 1999 practice period at City Center.

the true mercy of Buddha who takes care of everything. If we lose this point, whatever we do, it won't make any sense.

So we put emphasis on warm heart, warm zazen. The warm feeling we have in our practice is, in other words, enlightenment or Buddha's mercy, Buddha's mind. It is not a matter of just counting or following your breathing. Counting breaths is tedious. So maybe it is better to just follow our breathing. This is easier and less of a disturbance to our practice. The point is, one after another, inhaling and exhaling, take care of your breathing, in and out, just as a mother watches her baby. If a baby smiles, its mother may smile. If a baby cries, its mother is worried. That kind of close relationship, being one with your practice, is the point. I am not talking about anything new—the same old things!

When your practice improves, and you have good control over your desires and everyday life, then you will have big freedom from everything. That is the goal of our practice both for priests and for lay people.

Take care of your practice. Be very kind with yourself.