

BEGINNERS MIND

## Beginner's Mind

People say that studying Zen is difficult, but there is some misunderstanding why it is difficult. It is not difficult because sitting in the cross-legged position is hard, or attaining Enlightenment is hard, but it is hard to keep our mind pure, and to keep our practice pure in its original form. After the Zen School was established in China it developed, but at the same time it became more and more impure. But I don't want to talk about Chinese Zen, or the History of Zen this morning but I want to talk to you about Sho Shin. Sho Shin means Beginner's Mind. If we can keep our Beginner's Mind always, that is the goal of our practice.

We recited The Prajna Paramita Sutra this morning only once. I think we recited it very well. But what will happen to us if we recite it twice, three time, four times, and more? Then we will easily lose our original attitude in reciting the sutra. The same thing will happen to us in our other practices. For awhile we will keep our Beginner's Mind in our Zen practice, but if we continue to practice one year, two years, three years, or more, we will have some improvement, and we will lose the limitless meaning of the Original Mind.

In the Beginner's Mind we have many possibilities, but in the expert mind there is not much possibility. So in our practice it is important to resume our Original Mind, or our Inmost Mind which we ourselves do not know. This is the most important thing for us. The founder of our school emphasized this point. We have to remain always in our Beginner's Mind. This is the secret of Zen, and the secret of various practices such as the practice of flower arrangement, the practice of Japanese singing, and other arts. If we keep our Beginner's Mind we will keep our precepts. When we lose our Beginner's Mind we will lose all the precepts.

For Zen students the most important thing is not to be dualistic. We should not lose our Self-Satisfied state of Mind. We should not be too demanding, or we should not be too greedy. Our Mind should



be always rich, and self-satisfied. When our Mind becomes demanding, or when we long for something, we will violate our precepts, not to kill, not to be immoral, not to steal, or not to tell lies, and so on. These violations are based on our greedy mind. When our Mind is Self-Satisfied we will keep our precepts. When we, ourselves are always Self-Satisfied we have our Original Mind, and we can practice truly and we are always true to ourselves. So, the most difficult thing is to keep our Beginner's Mind in our practice. If you can keep your Beginner's Mind forever, you are Buddha. On this point, our practice should be constant. We should practice our way with the Beginner's Mind always. There is no need to have a deep understanding about Zen. Even though you read Zen literature you have to keep this Beginner's Mind. You have to read it with a fresh mind. We shouldn't say, "I know what Zen is," or "I have attained Enlightenment." We should always be big enough to be a Beginner. This is very important. And we should be very, very careful about this point. In practicing Zen you will begin to appreciate your Beginner's Mind. This is the secret of Zen practice.

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

A talk delivered in 1965  
at the Haiku Zendo branch of  
the San Francisco Zen Center  
in Los Altos. Edited by  
Marian Derby

## Limiting Your Activity

In our practice we have no special object of worship. In this respect our practice is somewhat different from the usual religious practices. If there is no purpose, or no goal in our practice we won't know what to do. But there is a way. Joshu said, "Clay Buddha cannot cross water; bronze Buddha cannot get through furnace, wooden Buddha cannot get through fire". Whatever object you have, if your practice is directed toward some particular object, such as a clay Buddha, or a bronze Buddha, or a wooden Buddha, that practice will not work. So, as long as you have some particular goal in your practice, your practice will not help you completely. Your practice will help you as long as you are directed to the goal, but when you resume your everyday life it will not work. Then, the way to practice our practice without having any goal is to limit our activity, or be concentrated on what we are doing at that moment. Instead of having some particular object, we should limit our activity. If you limit your activity to what you can do just now, in this moment, then you can express fully the Universal Nature, or the Universal Truth. When you are wandering about you have no chance to express yourself, but when you limit your expression of the Universal Nature, then you have the way to practice. This is our way.

So, when we practice zazen we limit our activity to the smallest extent. Just keeping the right posture and being concentrated on sitting is how we express the Universal Nature. Then you, yourself become Buddha; you, yourself express Buddha Nature, or True Nature, or Universal Nature. So instead of having some object of worship we just concentrate on the activity which we do in each moment. So when you bow you should just bow; when you sit you just sit; when you eat you just eat. If you do this the Universal Nature is there. We call it "one-act Samadhi", or we say in Japanese, "ichigyo-sanmai". Sanmai or Samadhi is concentration. Ichigyo is one practice.



Joshu's statement about Clay Buddha, bronze Buddha and wooden Buddha is some Buddha to which your practice is directed. This kind of Buddha will not serve your purpose completely. You will have to throw it away sometime, or you will have to ignore it. But if you understand the secret of our practice, wherever you go you are the "boss". So, wherever you go you cannot neglect Buddha because you yourself are Buddha. So this Buddha will help you completely. This kind of practice is the basic understanding of Buddhist literature and Buddhist art.

I think some of you who practice zazen here may believe in some other religion, but I don't mind whatever you believe in. Our practice has nothing to do with some particular religious belief. And for you, there is no need to hesitate to practice our practice because it has nothing to do with Christianity, or Shintoism, or Hinduism. Our practice is for everyone. Usually when you believe in some religion your thought and attitude will, more and more, become a sharp angle pointing away from yourself. But our way is not like this. In our way the point of the sharp angle is toward ourself, not away from ourself. So there is no need to worry about the differences of the religion you believe in.

One of my friends said he did not feel so good about attending Buddhist ceremonies because he believed in Shintoism. Whenever he attended Buddhist ceremonies almost all the priests treated him as if he was a Buddhist. So he had to bow exactly as they did. He said to me, "It is not fair for the Buddhists to force their way on me". I understand what he meant, but it has nothing to do with me. This is not my way. Even though you don't bow it is alright. When you sit you just sit. When you don't want to bow...(demonstrating by folding his arms and scowling stubbornly!) But if you know why we practice this kind of practice, even though we practice some particular way, you will not be bound by the practice.

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi  
Los Altos, 1965

## Everything Changes

The basic teaching of Buddhism is the teaching of transiency, or change. Everything changes is the basic teaching. And this Truth is Eternal Truth for each existence; and no one can deny this Truth; and all the teaching of Buddhism will be condensed in this teaching. This is the teaching for all of us, and wherever we go this teaching is true. This teaching is also interpreted as the teaching of selflessness because the self-nature of each existence is nothing but the self-nature of all existence. There is no special self-nature for each existence. And this teaching is also called the teaching of Nirvana. When we realize this Truth, and when we find our composure in this Everlasting Truth, which is "everything changes", we find ourselves in Nirvana. If we cannot accept the teaching that everything changes we cannot find Perfect Composure. But unfortunately, although this is True it is difficult for us to accept this teaching. We do not want to accept the fact that everything changes.

This teaching also explains why we have suffering. Because we cannot accept this Truth we suffer. So the cause of suffering is because we cannot accept this Truth. We have a contradictory nature to the Truth. This is the other side of the teaching of the cause of our suffering. Because it is difficult to accept the fact that everything changes we suffer. So the teaching of the cause of our suffering and the teaching that everything changes are two sides of one teaching. From our standpoint the teaching that everything changes is the cause of our suffering. But as the Truth it may be interpreted as everything changes. So as Dogen Zen Master says, "The teaching which does not sound like it is forcing something on you is not True Teaching." The teaching itself is True, and the teaching itself does not force anything upon you but because of our nature we accept the teaching as if the



teacher was forcing something on us. Because of our nature the teaching looks as if it was forcing something upon us. But whether we feel good or bad about it this Truth exists. If nothing exists, this truth does not exist. Buddhism exists because of each particular existence.

We should find the perfect existence though the imperfect existence. We should find perfection in imperfection. The Eternal exists because of non-eternal existence. It is a heretical view to seek for something besides ourselves. In Buddhism we do not expect something outside this world. We should find the Truth in this world, through our difficulties, and through our suffering. This is the basic teaching of Buddhism. For us, complete perfection is not different from imperfection. Pleasure is not different from difficulty. Good is not different from bad. Bad is good; good is bad. They are two sides of one coin. So Enlightenment should be in the practice. When we practice the right practice Enlightenment is there. That is the right understanding of practice, and the right understanding of our life; and there is no other way to accept this Truth. Without being aware of this Truth you cannot live in this world. Even though you try to escape from it your effort will be in vain. So this is the basic teaching of how to live in this world. And to find pleasure in suffering is the only way to accept this truth. If you think there is some other way to accept this Eternal Truth, that is your delusion. Whatever you may feel about it you have to accept it, and you have to make this kind of effort.

So until we become strong enough to accept difficulty as pleasure we have to continue this effort. Actually, if you become honest enough, or straight forward enough, it is not so difficult to accept this Truth. You can change your way of

thinking a little bit. It is difficult, but this difficulty will not always be the same. Sometimes it will be difficult and sometimes it will not be so difficult. If you are suffering you will have some pleasure in the teaching that everything changes. When you are in trouble it is quite easy to accept the teaching. So why don't you accept it at other times? It is the same thing. So sometimes you may laugh at yourself, discovering how selfish you are. But no matter how you feel about this teaching it is very important for you to change your way of thinking and accept the teaching of transciency.

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi  
Los Altos, 1966



## Birth and Death

If you go to Japan and visit Eihei-ji, just before you enter the monastery you will see a small bridge called Hanshaku-Kyo. Hanshaku-Kyo means Half Dipper Bridge. Whenever Dogen Zenji dipped water from the river he used half of it and he returned the rest of the water to the river again, without throwing it away. That is why we call that bridge, Hanshaku-Kyo, Half Dipper Bridge. In Eihei-ji Monastery when we wash our face we do not fill the basin, we just use seventy percent of the basin. And after we wash we do not empty the water away from the body. We empty the basin toward the body. This means to have respect for the water. This kind of practice is not based on an economical idea. It may be difficult to understand why Dogen Zen-ji returned half of the water after he used half of it. This kind of practice is beyond our thinking. When we feel the beauty of the river we intuitively do it in this way. That is our nature. But when your nature is covered by some economic ideas you may think it doesn't make any sense to return the water back to the river.

The other day I went to Yosemite National Park, and I saw some huge waterfalls. The first one was one thousand, three hundred, forty feet high. The next cascade was six hundred feet high. Even the last one was three hundred feet high. When I saw the highest waterfall I saw the water coming down like a curtain which was thrown from the top of the mountain. The water does not come down swiftly, as you would expect; it comes down very slowly because of the distance. And the water does not come down as one whole stream of water. It is separated into many groups. It comes down like a curtain.

I thought it must be a very difficult experience for each drop of water to come down such a high mountain, from the top to the bottom. It takes time, you know. It takes a long time for the water to reach the bottom of the waterfall. And I thought

our life may be like this. We have many difficult experiences in our life. But, at the same time, I thought, the water was not originally separated. It was one whole river. When it is separated the water has some feeling. When it is one whole river the water does not have any feeling...at least it appears this way. When it is separated in many drops it begins to have some feeling, or to express some feeling. When the water is running as one whole river we do not feel the living activity of the water, but when we dip a part of the water into a dipper, we feel the value of the water, and we experience some feeling of the water. When we are separated in this way, we have this feeling.

Before we were born we had no feeling; we were one with the Universe. This is called Mind-Only, or Essence of Mind, or Big Mind. After we are separated like the water falling down from the top of the waterfall to the bottom, separated by the wind or rocks, then we have feeling. Even the water must have feeling. This kind of fact is very valuable. Our birth and death are the same thing. When we realize this fact we have no fear of death anymore, and we have no actual difficulty in our life. If you know why we have difficulty in our life you will understand how to accept the difficulty. When you do not realize that you are one with the river, or one with the Universe you have fear. You have difficulty because you have feeling. You attach to the feeling you have without knowing just how this kind of feeling is created.

So to dip the water from the river is to feel the value of the person who uses the water. At the same time, when we become aware of individual feelings, we have the feeling of the value of the water. Because of this feeling we cannot use the water just in a material way. It is a living being. Originally



it was one with the big river. So if the water returns to the big river the water will not have any feeling to it. It will resume it's own nature. By resuming it's own nature it will have composure, and it will be very glad to come back to the original river. If this is so what feeling will have when you die? I think we are like the water in the dipper. If someone takes the water in the dipper to the original river it will be very glad. It will have composure then, Perfect Composure. It may be too perfect for us, just now, because we are so much attached to our individual existence. For us, just now, we have some fear of death, but after we resume our True Nature there is Nirvana. That is why we say "To attain Nirvana is to pass away". To pass away is not a very adequate expression. Perhaps to pass on, or go on, or join would be better. Will you try to find some better expression for death? When you find it you will have quite a new interpretation to your life. It will be like my experience when I saw the water in the big waterfall. Imagine! It was one thousand, three hundred and forty feet high!

We say, "Everything comes out of emptiness". One whole river, or one whole Mind, is emptiness. When we reach this understanding we find the true meaning to our life. When we reach this understanding we can see the beauty of the human life. Before we realize this fact everything that we see is just delusion. Sometimes we overestimate the beauty; sometimes we underestimate, or ignore the beauty because our small mind is not in accord with reality.

To talk about it this way is quite easy, but to have the actual feeling is not so easy. By our practice of zazen, when we can sit with our whole body and mind, and with the oneness

of our mind and body under the control of the Universal Mind we can easily attain this kind of right understanding. Your everyday life will be renewed without being attached to the old erroneous interpretation of life. When you realize this fact you will discover how meaningless your old interpretation of life had been, and how many useless efforts you had been making. When you have this kind of understanding you will find the true meaning of life, and you will enjoy your life, even though you have difficulty falling upright to the bottom of the water fall from the top of the mountain. Our life should be like the water falling down from the top of the mountain.

eventually you will resume to your Own Nature. You resume to your True Nature when True Nature resumes to it's Own Nature. A monk, the disciple of the sixth patriarch, told Baso, "When a vehicle, or cart does not go, which do you hit, the horse or the cart?" Which do you hit? He couldn't answer and Nan-Gaku said, "If you try to hit the cart, the cart will not go. If you hit the horse, the horse will be angry. What will you do?" When your True Nature resumes to it's True Nature, you resume to your True Nature. Do you understand? When horse becomes horse, cart will go. When cart becomes cart, horse will go. The horse and cart are not two. Horse and cart are one. So when the horse starts to pull the cart, the cart will go. Usually we think our True Nature and we ourselves are something different, so there is a problem always. But actually you are the cart itself. Horse is cart and cart is horse. Without horse there is no cart. Without cart, there is no horse. Horse is something to pull cart. If there is no cart, horse may be a wild beast. He is not a horse. Because he pulls the cart, horse is horse.

When we express our True Nature, we are a human being. When we don't we don't know what we are. We are not an animal, because we walk by two legs. We are something different from an animal. But if we are not a human being, what are we? We may be a ghost, or we don't know what to call ourselves. There is nothing that actually exists. It is a delusion. We are not a human being anymore. But we do exist. When Zen is not Zen nothing exists. What I am talking about is not intellectual understanding. Intellectually my talk makes no sense. But you will understand what I mean. So in the Pari-Nirvana Sutra Buddha says, "Everything has Buddha Nature", but Dogen reads it in this way: "Everything is Buddha Nature". There is a difference. If you say "Everything has Buddha Nature", it means Buddha Nature is in everything. So Buddha Nature and



everything are different. But when you say, "Everything is Buddha Nature", it means everything is Buddha Nature itself. When there is no Buddha Nature everything is not everything. It is just delusion, which does not exist. It may exist, in your mind, but actually such things do not exist.

So even though you do not do anything, you are actually doing something. You are expression yourself. You are expressing your True Nature. Your eyes will express; your voice will express; your demenour will express. So the most important thing is to express our True Nature in the simplest way, in the most adequate way, and to appreciate the True Nature in the smallest existence. This is the most important thing.

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

Haiku Zendo 1965

## Zen and Excitement

My master passed away when I was thirty three, so after his death I became quite busy. I wanted to devote myself just to zen practice, but I couldn't stay at Eihei-ji monastery because I had to be the successor of my master's temple. It is necessary for us to keep the constant way. This is not some kind of excitement, but concentration on our usual every-day routine. If we become too busy and too excited our mind will become rough and rugged. This is not so good for us. So, if possible try to be always calm and joyful and keep yourself from excitement. That is the most important thing for us. Usually we become busier and busier, day by day, year after year. If I go back to Japan this summer I shall be astonished at the changes in Japan. It can't be helped. But if we become interested in some excitement this change will be accelerated; we will be lost, and we will be completely involved in busy life; but if our mind is always calm and constant we can keep our self away from the noisy world even though we are in the midst of it. In the midst of the noisy world our mind will always be calm and stable.

Zen is not some kind of excitement, but some people practice zen because of curiosity. That is a kind of excitement; it is not Zen. If you practice Zen in this way you will make yourself worse because of your Zen practice. This is ridiculous. Many people are interested in zazen just out of curiosity, and they make themselves busier and worse by practice. I think if you try to come once a week here, that will make you pretty busy. That is enough. Don't be too interested in Zen. Just keep yourself calm, and keep your constant way in everyday life. Once young people become interested in Zen they will often give up schooling, and some go to some mountain or forest where they



sit; but that kind of interest is not true interest. When I was young I didn't want to be the successor of my Master, but I had to. Because I became my Master's successor when I was so young, I had many difficulties. These difficulties gave me some experience, but these experiences were nothing compared to the true, calm, and serene way of life.

So if you continue the calm, ordinary practice your character will be built up, but if your mind is always busy there will be no time to build up your character. Even though you want to build up your character you will not be successful if you work on it too hard. It should be done little by little, step by step. Building your character is like making bread. You have to build it step by step; and moderate temperature is needed, not too much temperature or excitement, but little by little. You know yourself quite well, and you know how much temperature you need; you know exactly what you need. But if you have too much excitement you will forget your own way, and you will forget how much temperature is good for you. This is very dangerous.

Buddha says the same thing about the good ox driver. The driver knows how much load the ox can carry, and he keeps the ox from being too loaded. You know your way and your state of mind. So you know how much load you can carry. Buddha says, "Don't carry too much!" This is very good instruction. Buddha says that building character is like making a dam. If you want to make a dam you should be careful in making the bank. If you try to do it all at once the water will leak from the bank. So you have to make the bank carefully, little by little; then you will have a fine, good bank for the reservoir. This is the way, he says. This is quite true with us. So, too much excitement is not good. It appears to be a very negative way, but it is not so. It is a wise and a more effective way to work on ourselves. I find this point is very difficult for people who study Zen to understand, especially young people.

## Forgetting Ourselves

The purpose of studying Buddhism is not to study Buddhism, but to study ourselves. It is impossible to study ourselves without some teaching. If you want to know what water is you need science, and the scientist needs a laboratory, and in various ways they may study what water is. So it is possible to know what kind of elements water has, or when a wind comes, what kind of form water takes, and what is the nature of water. But it is impossible to know water itself. It is the same thing with us. It is impossible to know what "I" am. That is why we have teaching. By teaching we will understand what we, ourselves are. But teaching is not ourselves. It is some explanation of ourselves. So if you are attached to the teaching, or to the teacher, that is a big mistake. Through teaching you should know yourselves. That is why we do not become attached to the teaching, or to the teacher. The moment you meet a teacher you should leave the teacher, and you should be independent. You need a teacher so that you can become independent. So you study yourselves. You have a teacher for yourselves, not for the teacher.

Rinzai analyzed how to teach his disciples in four ways. Sometimes he talked about the disciple himself; sometimes he talked about the teaching itself; sometimes he gave an interpretation of the disciple or the teaching; sometimes he did not give any instruction to his disciples because even without being given any instruction he knew that the student is a student. Strictly speaking, there is no need to teach the student because the student himself is Buddha, even though he may not be aware of it. And even though he is aware of his True Nature, if he is



mountains, and Sekko is famous for it's water." This is Zen. It is nothing special. If you go there it is nothing special. But people think Rosan is wonderful. It is wonderful to see the range of mountains covered by mists. To see the misty mountains in Rosan is wonderful. And people say it is wonderful to see the water which covers all the earth in Sekko. It is wonderful, they may say. But if you go there you will see just water, and you will see just mountains. There is nothing special. But it is a kind of mystery that for the people who have no experience of Enlightenment, Enlightenment is something wonderful. But if they attain it, it is nothing. Although it is nothing, it is not nothing. Do you understand? For the mother who has children, having children is nothing special. But if she lost her children, how would she feel? That is zazen. So, if you continue this practice we don't know when you will aquire the power, but more and more you will aquire something...not special, but something. You may say Universay Nature, or Buddha Nature, or Enlightenment. You may call it by many names, but for the person who owns it, it is nothing, and it is something.

So I cannot express my joy in practicing zazen with you here, once a week. And while you are continuing this practice, week after week, year after year, your experience will become deeper and deeper, and the experience you obtain, will cover everything you do in your everyday life. The most important thing is when you practice zazen, it is necessary to forget all ideas of gaining, and all dualistic ideas. In other words, just practice zazen in a certain posture. This is a very good point. Don't think about anything. Just remain on your cushion without thinking, without expecting anything. Then you, or your True Nature will resume to it's Own Nature, and

## The Joy of Giving

The precept today is "The joy of giving". Everything is something which was given to us. Every existence in nature, every existence in the human world, every cultural work that we create is something which was given to us, or which is being given to us, relatively speaking. But actually everything is originally one, so it may be better to say we are giving out everything; it is the same thing. Relatively speaking everything is something given to us, but actually we are giving everything, or expressing everything. Moment after moment we are creating something. This is the joy of our life. But this "I" which is always giving out something is not the small "I"; it is the Big "I". The Big "I", or the Big Self is giving out various things. This is actually our joy when we become one with the Big Mind. Even though you do not realize the oneness of the Big Mind, when you give something you feel good because, at that time, you feel at one with it. When we give something we feel better than when we take something. But giving and taking are not different. Relatively speaking you take something, but originally it is the act of giving.

We say, "dana prajna paramita". This is to give. To give is one of the six ways of living. The second is sila prajna paramita, or precepts, then there is kshanti prajna paramita, or endurance, virya prajna paramita, zeal or constant effort, dhyana prajna paramita or zen, and prajna paramita, or wisdom. These are the six ways of living. But actually the six prajna paramitas are one, but we observe the one from various sides, so we count six prajna paramitas. Dogen Zenji says, "To give is non-attachment". Not to attach to anything is to give. Although the things we have are originally ours there is the truth "to give". To give the treasure of a penny, or a piece of leaf is dana prajna paramita. To give one line of teaching, or one word of teaching is dana



prajna praramita. The material offering and the teaching dana offering are not different. Dogen Zenji also says, "To produce something, and to participate in human activity is also prajna paramita. To provide a ferry boat for people, or to make a bridge for people is dana prajna paramita.

Of course every existence in nature is something which was created or given to us, according to Christianity. That is perfect giving. But according to Christianity we are also created by God, and so the created thing has some ability to create something which was not given. For instance, we create airplanes and freeways. We create many things, but when we repeat, "I create; I create; I create," soon we will forget who is the "I" which creates the various things. We will soon forget about our God. This is the danger of our human culture. So, to create is actually to give. It is not to create and own something for people, as everything was created by God. This point should not be forgotten. But because we forget all about who is doing the creating and the reason for the creation, we become attached to the material value, or the exchange value. But this kind of material value is of no value, absolutely no value, in comparison to the absolute value which was created by God. It is no value at all. But even though it has no value to each one of the small individuals, it has absolute value in itself. So we say, "non-attachment to material value." But in order to be aware of the absolute value, everything we do should be based on the awareness of absolute value, not on material or selfish, self-centered idea of value. This is dana prajna paramita, to give.

When we sit in the cross-legged posture we resume our fundamental activity of creation. There are, perhaps, three steps in creation. The first step is to be aware of ourselves after we finish zazen. When we sit we are nothing; we are just sitting. We do not even realize what we are; we just sit. But when we

stand up we are there! That is the first step in creation. You are there! When we are there everything is there; everything is created all at once. When you act you give. When you create something such as food, or tea, this is the second kind of creativity. The third kind is to create something within ourselves, such as education, or culture, or artistic creativity, or to provide some system for our society. These are cultural creations. So there are three steps. But if you forget the most important one (holding up three fingers and then hiding one) these (the two remaining fingers) are children who have lost their parents. Your creation means nothing. Usually everyone forgets zazen. They don't practice zazen. They forget all about God. God is someone who helps these two children. Yes, they are creating, but God does not help the activity. How is it possible for Him to help when He does not realize who He is? That is the problem. That is why we have so many problems in this world. It is exactly like children who do not know what to do when they lose their parents. So these three steps are said to be done by dana prajna paramita, to give, or to create, or perfect creation.

So if you understand dana prajna paramita you will understand how we should live in this world, and how we create many problems for ourselves. Of course, to live is to create some problems. That we are born into this world is the first step of creation. If you do not appear in this world your parents have no difficulty. Because you appear in this world you create some problems for your parents. But that is all right. Everyone creates some problems. That is quite all right; but those problems should be solved, or dissolved.

When we die everything is over. Even though we do not die, day by day we should forget what we did; this is non-attachment. And we should do something new. To do something new we should know our past and future. This is all right, but we should not keep anything which we did. We should only reflect on what we did. That's all. And we must have some idea of what we should do in the future, but the future is the future; the past is the past; now we should work on something new. This is our attitude; and this is



is how we should live in this world. This is dana prajna paramita, to give something, or to create something for ourselves. So to do something through and through is to resume to our true activity of creation. This is why we sit. If we do not forget this point everything will be carried on beautifully, But once we forget this point, the world will be filled with confusion.

## The Treasure of Life

A Zen poem says, "After the wind stops I see a flower falling. Because of the singing bird, I find the mountain calmness." When something happens in the realm of calmness, we find the calmness. Before anything happens to the calmness, we do not feel the calmness. There is a Japanese saying which says, "For the moon there is the cloud. For the flower there is wind." Usually we find it very difficult to live in the Evanescence of Life. But in the Evanescence of Life we can find the Joy of Eternal Life. When you see part of the moon covered by a cloud, or a tree or a weed, you will find the roundness of the moon. When you see the clear moon with nothing covering it you do not feel the roundness as you do when you see it through something else.

When you sit in zazen you do not feel anything. You just sit. You are in the complete calmness of your mind. But in your everyday life you will be encouraged by the calmness of your sitting. So actually you will find the value of Zen in your everyday life, rather than while you sit. Even though you find the value of Zen in everyday life, you should not neglect zazen. Even though you do not feel anything when you sit, if you do not have the experience of Zen you cannot find anything. You just find weeds or trees, or clouds...clouds without moon. That is why you are always complaining about something. But for Zen students a weed which most people do not care for is a treasure. In this way we have the art of life. Whatever you do, that is the art of life...for a Zen student.

So when you practice zazen you should not try to attain something. You should just sit in the complete calmness of your mind. You should not rely on anything. Your body should be straight, and your spine should be straight, without leaning over or leaning against something. You should just keep your body



straight. It means that you do not rely on anything. You just sit. In this way, physically and mentally you will obtain complete calmness. When you rely on something, or when you try to do something in zazen, it is dualistic. That is not complete calmness. **This calmness is a very valuable experience.** And this experience will encourage your effort in your everyday life. In our everyday life we usually try to do something, or try to change something into something else, or we try to attain something. But trying to attain something is already the expression of our true nature. Trying to change something into some other thing is the art of life. We should find out the meaning of our effort itself, before we attain something.

So Dogen said, "We should attain Enlightenment before we attain Enlightenment." Before we attain Enlightenment we should attain it. When you try to do something itself, it is Enlightenment; it is the expression of your True Nature. It is not after attaining Enlightenment that we find the true meaning of Enlightenment. When we are in difficulty, there we have Enlightenment. When we are in distress, there we have Enlightenment. So Dogen says, "Before we attain Enlightenment, we should attain Enlightenment." When we are in defilement, we should have composure. Composure will be experienced only in our defilement. This point is very, very important.

By continuing this kind of effort you can improve yourself. But if you just try to attain something, or to make some contrivance to acquire something, you cannot work on it properly because you have no technique. You lose yourself in your effort. That is why you cannot achieve anything, and you just suffer in your difficulties. But if you do it in an appropriate way you can make some progress, and then whatever you do, even though it is not perfect will be based on your Inmost Nature, and you will achieve it little by little.

Dogen says, "You should attain Enlightenment before you attain Enlightenment." Which is more important, attaining Enlightenment or attaining Enlightenment before you attain Enlightenment? Which is more important, to make your effort to save a million dollars, or to enjoy your life in your effort, little by little, even though it is impossible for you to save a million dollars? You can enjoy your everyday life. Which is more important, to be successful, or to find some meaning in our effort to be successful? If you do not realize this point you cannot even practice zazen. But if you have this point you will have the True Treasure of Life.

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

Haiku Zendo, Los Altos, Calif.

1965



## Believing in Nothing

I discovered that it is necessary, absolutely necessary to believe in nothing. We have to believe in something which has no form, or no color, something which exists before all forms and colors appear. This is a very important point. No matter what god we believe in, if we become attached to it, our belief will be based, more or less, on a self-centered idea. If this is so it will take time to attain perfect belief, or perfect faith in it. But if we are always prepared for accepting everything we see as something appearing from nothing, and if we know there is some reason why some form, or color, or phenomenal existence appears, then, at that moment, we will have perfect composure.

When you have a headache there is some reason why you have a headache. If you know why you have a headache you will feel better. But if you don't know why you may say, "Oh, I have a terrible headache! Maybe it is because of my bad practice. If my meditation or zen practice were better I wouldn't have this kind of trouble." If you understand conditions in this way you will not have perfect faith in yourself, or in your practice, until you attain perfection, and I'm afraid you will have no time to attain perfect practice, so you may have to keep your headache all the time. This is a rather silly kind of practice. This kind of practice will not work. But if you believe in something which exists before you had the headache, and if you know the reason why you had the headache, then you will feel better, naturally. To have a headache will be alright, because you are healthy enough to have a headache. If you have a stomachache your stomach is healthy enough to have pain. But if your stomach becomes accustomed to it's poor condition you will have no pain. That's awful! You will be coming to the end of your life from your stomach trouble.

So it is absolutely necessary for everyone to believe in nothing. But I don't mean voidness. There is something, but that something is something which is always prepared for taking some particular form, and it has some rules, or theory, or truth in it's activity. This is called Buddha Nature, or Buddha Himself. When we personify this existence we call it Buddha; when we understand it as the ultimate truth we call it Dharma; and when we accept the truth, and act as a part of the Buddha, or according to the theory, we call ourselves Sangha. But even though we have three Buddha forms it is one existence which has no form or color, and it is always ready for taking form and color. This is not just theory. This is not just teaching of Buddhism. This is the absolutely necessary understanding of our life. Without this understanding our religion will not help us. We will be bound by our religion, and we will have more trouble because of our religion. If you become the victim of Buddhism I may be very happy, but you will not be so happy. So this kind of understanding is very, very important.

While we were practicing zazen this morning we heard the rain dropping from the roof, in the dark. I think soon we will see the wonderful mist coming through the big trees, and later, when the people start to go to work, we will see the beautiful mountains. But some people, will be annoyed if they hear the rain when they are lying in their beds in the morning. They will not know that later they will see the beautiful sun rising from the east. If our mind is concentrated on ourselves we will have this kind of worry. But if we accept ourselves as the embodiment of the truth we will have no worry. We will think, "Now it is raining, but we don't know what will happen in the next moment. By the time we go out it may be a beautiful day, or a stormy day. Since we don't know, lets appreciate the sound of the rain now." This kind of attitude is the right attitude. If you understand yourself as a temporal embodiment of the truth, you will have no difficulty whatsoever.



You will appreciate your surroundings, and you will appreciate yourselves as a wonderful part of Buddha's great activity. Even through difficulties you will acquire some experience. This is our way of life.

Using the Buddhist terminology we should begin with Enlightenment, and proceed to practice, and then to thinking. Usually thinking is rather self-centered. In our everyday life our thinking is 99 percent self-centered. "Why I have suffering, or why I have trouble". This kind of thinking is 99 percent of our thinking. For example, when we start to study science we become sleepy or drowsy quite soon, but we are very much interested in our self-centered thinking.

So Enlightenment should be first. By Enlightenment I mean to believe in nothing, or to believe in something which has no form or no color, and is ready to take form or color. By some immutable truth that is our Enlightenment. Our activity, and our thinking, and our practice should be based on this Enlightenment.

## Nothing Special

I don't feel like speaking after zazen. I feel the practice of zazen is enough. But if I should say something I think what I shall talk about is how wonderful it is to practice zazen in this way. Our purpose is just to keep this practice forever. This practice started from beginningless time and it will continue for endless future. Strictly speaking, for a human being, there is no other practice than this practice. There is no other way of life than this way of life. Zen practice is the direct expression of our True Nature. Of course, whatever we do is the expression of our True Nature, but without this practice it is difficult to realize what is our life. As long as you think, "I am doing this, or I have to do this, or I must attain something special", actually you are not doing anything. When you give up, or when you do not want to, or when you do not do anything, you do something. When you do not do anything with some gaining idea, you do something. Actually what you are doing is not for the sake of something. You feel as if you are doing something special, but actually it is the expression of your True Nature, or it is the activity to appease your Inmost Desire. It is our human nature to be active always. To do something is our human nature, and it is the Universal Nature for every existence. So, in this way, just to practice zazen is enough. But so long as you think you are practicing zazen for the sake of something, that is not True Practice.

If you continue this simple practice every day you will obtain some wonderful power. Before you attain it, it is some wonderful power, but after you attain it, it is just power. It is not something special. It is just you yourself... nothing special. As a Chinese poem says, "If you go there, it is nothing special. However Rosan is famous for it's misty



attached to the awareness of his True Nature, that is already wrong. When he is not aware of it he has everything, but when he becomes aware of it he thinks that what he is aware of is himself, so it is a big mistake. Sometimes teaching without teaching, as when you do not hear anything from the teacher, but just sit is not sufficient, so the purpose of practice in this place is to study ourselves. To be independent we study. We need a teacher because it is impossible to study ourselves by ourselves. By some means you have to study. But you should not make a mistake. You should not take what you have learned here for yourself. The study you make here is a part of your everyday life, a part of your incessant activity. In this sense there is no difference between the practice here and the activity you have in everyday life. So to find the meaning of your life here is to find the meaning of your everyday activity. To be aware of the meaning of your life you practice zazen.

When I was at Eihei-ji Monastery everyone was just doing what they should do. That's all. It is the same as waking up in the morning. That's all, that we did at Eihei-ji Monastery. When we had to sit, we sat. That's all. When we had to bow to Buddha we bowed to Buddha. That's all. And when we were practicing we did not feel anything special. We did not even feel that we were leading a monastic life. For us, the monastic life was the usual life, and the people who came from the city were unusual people. When we saw them we felt, "Oh, some unusual people came". We thought we were quite usual. But once I left Eihei-ji, and then came back, after being away for some time, and I heard the various

sounds of practice, or heard them reciting the sutra, I felt a deep feeling. There were tears flowing out of my mouth, and eyes, and nose. It is the people who are outside of the monastery who feel it's atmosphere. Those who are practicing actually do not feel anything. I think that is true for everything. When we hear the sound of the pine trees on a windy day, perhaps the wind is just blowing, and the pine tree is just standing in the wind. That's all that they are doing. But the people who listen to the wind in the tree will write a poem, or will feel something unusual. That is, I think, the way everything is.

So, to feel something about Buddhism is not the main point. Whether that feeling is good or bad is out of the question. We don't mind whatever it is. Buddhism is not good or bad. We are doing what we should do. That is Buddhism. So it is just like eating breakfast and going to bed. This is Buddhism. Of course some encouragement is necessary, but that encouragement is just encouragement. It is not the true purpose of practice. It is just medicine. When we become discouraged we want some medicine. When we are in good spirits we do not need any medicine. You should not mistake medicine for food. Sometimes medicine is necessary, but medicine should not become our food.

So, of Rinzai's four ways of practice, the perfect one is not to give any student any interpretation of himself, or not to give him any encouragement. If we, ourselves are our bodies, the teaching may be our clothing. Sometimes we talk about our clothing; sometimes we talk about our body. But body or clothing is actually not ourselves. We ourselves are the Big Activity. We are



just expressing the smallest particle of the Big Activity, that's all. So there will not be any need to talk about ourselves. So that we may realize this fact, there is teaching. We should talk about ourselves, but actually there is no need to talk about ourselves. We are already talking about the Big Existence, including ourselves. So to talk about ourselves is to correct the misunderstanding we have when we are attached to the temporal form or color of the Big Activity. So it is necessary to talk about what our body is and what our activity is so that you may not make any mistake about them. So to talk about something is to forget about yourself.

Dogen Zen-ji says, "To study Buddhism is to study ourselves." So to study ourselves to to forget ourselves. When you forget the temporal expression of your True Nature it is necessary to talk about Buddhism, or else you will think the temporal expression is it. But this is not it. This is it, but this is not it. For awhile, this is it, for the smallest particle of time, this is it. It is not always so. It is not it. So that you will realize this fact, it is necessary to study Buddhism. But the purpose of studying Buddhism is to study ourselves, and to forget ourselves. When you forget yourself, you will actually be the True Activity of the Big Existence, or Reality. When we realize this fact, there is no problem whatsoever in this world. And you can enjoy your life without having any problems, or difficulties. This is how we study Buddhism, and the purpose of this practice is to be aware of this fact.

## The Swinging Door

When we practice, our Mind always follows our breathing. When we inhale, the air we take comes into the inner world. When we exhale the air we exhale goes out to the outer world. The inner world is limitless, and the outer world is also limitless. Our throat is like a swinging door. The air comes in and goes out...like this (demonstrating a swinging door). What we call "I" is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale. It just moves; that's all. So when we practice zazen there is nothing, no "I", or no mind, or no body, just a swinging door. We say "inner world or "outer world", but actually this is one whole world. This is our practice. So when we practice zazen, that which exists is the movement of the breathing, but we are aware of the movement of our breathing. We should not be absent minded. We should always be aware of the movement. But to be aware of the movement does not mean to be aware of our self-nature. We are aware of our Universal Nature, or Buddha Nature. This kind of activity is very important, because our understanding, or interpretation of life is usually one-sided.

Our usual understanding of life is dualistic...you and I, this and that, good and bad. But actually these are the awareness of the Universal Existence. You means to be aware of the universe in the form of you, and I means to be aware of the universe in the form of I. You and I are just swinging doors. This kind of understanding is necessary. This is not actually understanding; it is the true experience of life thru Zen practice. So when you practice zazen, actually there is no idea of time or space. You may say, "We started sitting at a quarter to six in this room". We have some idea of time (a quarter to six), and some idea of space (in this room), but actually what we are doing is just sitting and being aware of the Universal Activity. That is all. This moment the swinging door will be



like this (demonstrating), and the next moment the swinging door will be like this (demonstrating). One after another each one of us repeats this activity. Here there is no idea of time or space. Time and space are one. When the door swings like this (demonstrating) you may say, "This is time", but at the same time "This is space", so actually it is not necessary to interpret, or to explain our life by the ideas of time and space.

You may say, "I must do something this afternoon", but actually there is no "this afternoon". We do things one after the other. That's all. There is no such time as "This afternoon", or "one o'clock", or "two o'clock". At one o'clock you will eat your lunch. To eat lunch is one o'clock. You will be some place, but some place cannot be separated from one o'clock. For someone who actually appreciates our life, it is the same. But when we become tired of our life we may say "I shouldn't have come to this place. It may have been much better to go to some other place to have lunch. This place is not so good." Or you may say, "This is bad, so I shouldn't do this", but actually you say "I should not do this", but you are doing not-doing in this moment. So there's no choice for you. If the time comes the place will follow, so there's no choice for you. When you separate the idea of time and space you feel as if you have some choice, but actually you have to do something, or you have not-to-do something. Not-to-do something is doing something. Good and bad are only in your mind. Bad is something not-to-do for a Zen student. So we should not say, "This is good, or this is bad." Instead of saying bad you should say not-to-do! Not-to-do is bad. But if you think, "This is bad", it will create some confusion for you. So in the realm of pure religion there is no confusion of time and space, or good or bad. All that we should do is just do something. Do something! Whatever it is, we should do something, including not-doing something. We should live on this moment. So when we sit we concentrate on

our breathing and we become a swinging door, and we do something we should do...we must do. This is Zen practice. In this practice there is no confusion. If you establish this kind of life you have no confusion whatsoever. And if you want to become pure and one with the activity of inhaling and exhaling your mind should be pure and calm enough to follow the activity. If you think, "I breath", "I" is extra. There is no you to say I. This is enough. When your mind is pure and calm enough there is no idea of "I".

A famous Zen Master, Tozen, said, "Blue Mountain is father of White Cloud. White Cloud is son of Blue Mountain. All day long they depend on each other, without depending on each other. White Cloud is always White Cloud. Blue Mountain is always Blue Mountain." This is a pure, clear interpretation of life. There may be many things like White Cloud and Blue Mountain; man and woman, teacher and disciple. They depend on each other. But White Cloud should not be bothered by Blue Mountain. Blue Mountain should not be bothered by White Cloud. They are quite independent, but dependent. This is how we live, and how we practice zazen.

When we become ourselves, purely, in it's true sense, we just become a swinging door, and we are purely independent, and dependent to everything. Without air, we cannot breath. Each one of us is in the midst of myriads of worlds. We are in the center of the world, always, moment after moment. So we are quite dependent, and independent. If you experience this kind of experience you have absolute independence; you will not be bothered by anyone. So when you practice zazen your mind should be concentrated on your breathing. This kind of activity is the fundamental activity of the Universal Being. Without this experience, or this practice, it is impossible to attain the Absolute Freedom.

A Lecture delivered by Shunryu Suzuki  
Teshi in Los Altos, 1965



## No Trace

When we practice zazen our mind is calm and quite simple. But usually our mind is very busy and complicated. When we do something it is difficult to be concentrated on what we do because before we act we think, and this thinking leaves some trace. And the thinking not only leaves some trace, but also it gives us some particular notion to do something. That notion makes our activity very complicated. When we do something quite simple we have no notion, but when we do something in relation to other people, or in society, we have many convenient ideas for ourselves, and that makes our activity very complicated.

American people, I think, are very good in this respect. Most of you are quite simple. When you do something you usually have a very good attitude in what you do. Most people have a double or triple notion in one activity. Because they want to catch too many birds they find it difficult to be concentrated on one activity. You will not catch any birds if you try to catch too many birds. We say, "To catch two birds with one stone." That is the usual way. That kind of thinking is to have a shadow of the thinking. The shadow is not actually the thinking. It means that you have a trace of the thinking or the activity. Even if it is one trace it is not good because

you will be attached to the trace. Then you may say, "This is what I have done!" But actually it is not so. In your recollection you may say, "I did such and such a thing in some certain way", but actually it is not so. When you think in this way you limit the actual experience of what you have done. So if you attach to the idea of what you have done, it will create some selfish ideas.

Usually we think what we have done has been good, but it is not actually so. When we become old we are often very proud of what we have done. When others listen to someone proudly telling something which he has done, others will feel funny because they know this person's recollection is one-sided. They know that what he has told them is not exactly what he did. Moreover, if he is proud of what he did that pride will create some problem for him. While he is repeating what he did his personality will be twisted more and more, until he becomes quite a disagreeable person. This is leaving a trace of the thinking, or activity. We should not forget what we did, but it should not leave a trace. To leave a trace is not the same as to remember something. In its true sense it is quite a different matter. It is necessary to remember what we have done, but we should not become attached to what we have done in some special sense. This is called attachment, or trace of the activity. So we should not have any trace of the activity, or we should not have any shadow of the activity.



When you do something you should do it with your whole body and mind. You should be concentrated on what you do. When you do something you should do it completely, like a good bon fire. You should not be a smokey fire. You should burn yourself completely. If you do not burn yourself completely, a trace of yourself will be left in what you did. Then your bon fire will not be completely changed into ashes. You will have something remaining which is not completely burned out. Zen activity is activity which is completely burned out, with nothing remaining but ashes. This is the goal of our practice. That is what Dogen meant when he said, "Ashes do not come back to firewood." Ash is ash. Ash should be completely ash. The firewood should be firewood. When this kind of activity takes place one activity covers everything.

So our practice is not a matter of one hour or two hours, or one day or one year. If you practice zazen with your whole body and mind, even for a moment, that is zazen. So moment after moment you should devote yourself to your practice. You should not have any remains after you do something. But this does not mean to forget all about it. If you understand this point all the dualistic thinking and all the problems of life will vanish.

When you practice zen you become one with zen. There is no you or no zazen. When you bow, there is no Buddha or no you. One complete bowing takes place, that's all. ~~that~~ is

Nirvana. When Buddha transmitted our practice to Mahakasyapa he just picked up a flower with a smile. Only Mahakasyapa understood what he meant; no one else understood. We don't know if this is a historical event or not, but it means something. It is a demonstration of our traditional way. Some activity which covers everything is true activity, and the secret of this activity is transmitted from Buddha to us. This is zen practice, not some teaching taught by Buddha, or rules of life which were set up by him. The teaching, or the rules should be changed according to the place, or according to the people who observe them, but the secret of this practice cannot be changed. It is always true, and we should live in this way always because in Buddhism we have no idea of any world which is completely different from this world. The old world is the extension of this world and the future world should be the extension of our present world.

So for us there is no other way to live in this world. I think this is quite true, and this is easy to accept, easy to understand, and easy to practice. If you think of what is happening to this world, or to human society, you will find out how true is the Truth Buddha left us. The Truth is quite simple, and practice is quite simple. But even though it is quite simple we should not ignore it. We should discover great value in this simple Truth. Usually if it is too simple we say, "Oh,



I know that! It is quite simple. Everyone knows that." But if we do not find it's value it means nothing. It is the same as not knowing. The more you understand our culture the more you will understand how true our teaching is. But for the people who are too attached to our culture, it is better to be critical of our culture. It means they are coming back to the simple truth left by Buddha. Our approach is just to be concentrated on simple practice, and simple understanding of life, but for some it is necessary to criticize our culture. These are two approaches. But anyway we should not attach to some fancy ideas, or to some beautiful things. We should not seek for something good. The Truth is always near at hand, within your reach.

## The Buddhist Bow

Bowing is one of the important practices in Zen. By the bow we can eliminate our selfish, self-centered ideas. My master had a callous on his forehead because he bowed, and bowed, and bowed, so many times. He knew that he was a very obstinate, stubborn fellow. So he bowed, and bowed, and bowed. The reason he bowed was because he always heard his master's scolding voice. He joined our order when he was thirty. For a Japanese priest, joining the order at the age of thirty is rather late. So his master always called him "You-lately-joined-fellow". This means a priest who joined the order when he is old. When we join the order when we are young it is easier to get rid of our selfishness. But when we have very stubborn, selfish ideas it is rather hard to get rid of them. So my master was always scolded because he joined our order so late. Actually his master was not scolding him. His master loved him very much because of his stubborn character. When he was seventy my master said, "When I was young I was like a tiger, but now I am a cat!" He was very pleased to be like a cat. "Now I am a cat", he said. Bowing helps to eliminate our self-centered ideas. Actually this is not so easy, but even though it is difficult to get rid of them it is a very valuable practice. The result is not the point, but the effort to improve ourselves is valuable. There is no end to our practice.

We have four bows; "Although sentient beings are innumerable, we bow to save them; although our evil desires are limitless, we bow to get rid of them; although the teaching is limitless we bow to receive it; although our wisdom is innumerable, we bow to practice it."



to study; and although Buddhism is unattainable we should attain it". If it is unattainable, how can we attain it? But we should! That is Buddhism. Because it is possible we will do it is not Buddhism. Even though it is impossible, we have to do it if it is our True Nature. Whether it is possible, or not, it not the point. If we want to do it, we have to do it, even though it is impossible. So, whether it is possible to get rid of our self-centered ideas or not, is not the point. We have to try to get rid of them. When we make this effort there is appeasement; there is Nirvana. There is no other way to attain calmness of your mind than to try to do it. Before you determine to do it you have difficulty, but if you start to do it there is no difficulty; there is appeasement; there is calmness of your mind. So real calmness of your mind should be found in activity. Calmness of your mind does not mean to stop your activity. In our activity there is true calmness. We say, "It is easy to have calmness in inactivity, but it is hard to have calmness in activity, but calmness in activity is true calmness".

After you have practiced for awhile you will realize that it is not possible to make rapid, extra-ordinary progress. Even though you try very hard, you cannot make rapid progress. The progress you make is always little by little. It is like going through fog. You don't know when you get wet, but if you just walk through fog you will get wet little by little. It is not like a shower. When you go out in a shower you will know when you get wet. You may say, "Oh, this is terrible!", but actually it is not so bad. When you

get wet in a fog it is very difficult to dry yourself. This is how we make progress. So actually there is no need to worry about your progress. Just to do it is the way. It may be like studying a foreign language. By just repeating over and over you will master it. You cannot do it all of a sudden. This is how we practice, especially in the Soto way. We make progress little by little. Or we do not even expect to make progress. Just to do it is our way. The point is to do it with sincerity in each moment. That is the point. There should be no Nirvana outside our practice.



## Repetition

Indian thought before Buddha was based on the idea of elements. Their religious practice aimed at making the physical element weaker and the spiritual element more powerful. Human beings are an accumulation of spiritual and physical elements so the only way to make the spiritual element freer was to make the physical element weaker because the physical element usually binds the spiritual element. So they practiced asceticism. But the practice of asceticism will make our practice more and more idealistic because there is no limit to the effort of making our physical power weaker. This effort will continue until we die. If we die it will be the end of the war. But according to Indian thought, even if we die we will return in another life, and we will continue our struggle. We will repeat it over and over again. And we will repeat our efforts over and over without attaining Perfect Enlightenment. And even if you think you can make your physical strength weak enough to free your spiritual power, it will work only so long as you practice asceticism. If you resume your everyday life your weak body will be of no use, and so you will have to build it up again, and then you will have to repeat the same process over and over again. We laugh at them, but actually some people continue this kind of practice even today. But however hard we may practice this way, it will not result in any gain.

Buddha's way was quite different from this kind of practice. Buddha was not interested in the elements of which being was composed. At first he practiced asceticism, and he also observed the Brahman's Hindu way of practice also. But Buddha was not so interested in metaphysical existence, and he was not so interested in the theology or philosophy, but he was more aware of how he, himself existed in this moment. That was his point.

You make bread from flour. How flour becomes bread was Buddha's main interest. If you put it in the oven, how the dough becomes bread was his interest. So how we become Enlightened

was his interest. The Enlightened person is some perfect, desirable character, for himself and for others. That is the ideal character. How human beings become god was Buddha's interest. How various sages in the past became sages was his main interest. So our way is to put the dough in the oven over and over again and see how it becomes bread. Once you know how the dough becomes bread you will understand Enlightenment. So how this physical body becomes a sage is our main interest. We are not so concerned about what flour is, or what dough is. A sage is a sage. Metaphysical explanations of human basic nature are not the point. So this kind of practice cannot be too idealistic. Actual practice is repeating over and over again until you find out how to become bread. That is our way. So there is no secret in our way. Just to practice zazen and put ourselves into the oven is our way.

This traditional way from Buddha to us, through the Chinese way resulted in various unique cultures. You can see the characteristics of Buddhist culture in China and Japan. Painting and language are good examples. The Japanese language is a combination of phonetic signs and Chinese characters, or symbols, such as "mountain" or "river". So according to the person who writes the character, the character expresses some unique nature. Even though the character itself will have the same meaning, the feeling changes according to the person who writes the character. In Japan we emphasize feeling or esthetic meaning. So we say, "Mountain is mountain; river is river". That is true. But mountain is not mountain. In your language if I say, "Mountain is mountain" it means nothing. Subject and predicate should not be the same. There must be some difference, and the difference cannot be expressed in the statement "Mountain is mountain." But we understand "Mountain is mountain". That is good enough for us. The intention of the statement is involved between



mountain and mountain. Mountain is mountain. The most important thing is hidden. It doesn't take the form of a statement.

When we paint something the blank place contains the true meaning. So we are not so much concerned about the character itself. The meaning of the character covers all the space, and the character is already something expressed; but in the space there are many things which are not expressed yet, so the secret is in the blank space rather than that which is written in the corner of the paper.

This kind of understanding is something like putting dough into the oven. It appears to be a vague and purposeless practice. We may not be so interested in cooking the same thing over and over again every day. But Buddha was very much interested in how dough became perfect bread. So he made it over and over again until he became successful in making bread. That was his practice. So his practice covered the whole paper, not just the corner of the paper. How one sheet of paper became a work of art was his way. So whether you use black ink or color is not the point. If you can produce something beautiful, that is art. There is no danger in repeating this kind of practice.; there is no harm in it. It will help your everyday life, but it is rather tedious. If you lose the spirit of repetition it will become quite difficult, but it will not be difficult if you are full of strength and vitality. We cannot keep still; we have to do something anyway. So if you do something you should be very observant, and careful, and alert. This is our way.

So this kind of way is not an idealistic way. If an artist becomes too idealistic he will commit suicide because between his ideal and his actual ability there is a great gap. So he will become despairing and commit suicide because there is no bridge long enough to go across the gap. That is the usual spiritual way. But our spiritual way is not so idealistic. In some sense we should be idealistic; at least we should be interested in something very good; something which tastes good and looks good. That is our way.

## Zen Experience

There are many people in this country who are interested in Buddhism, but very few people are interested in the pure form of Buddhism. Most of them are interested in studying the teaching of Buddhism, or the philosophy of Buddhism. They compare Buddhism to another religion, and <sup>the</sup> they understand intellectually how Buddhism is good for intellectual mind. But whether Buddhism is philosophically deep, or good, or perfect, is not the point. To keep our practice in it's pure form is our purpose. Sometimes I feel there is something blasphemous when people talk about how Buddhism is perfect as a philosophy, or teaching, without actually knowing what it is.

To practice zazen with a group is the most important thing for Buddhism, and for us, because this practice is the Original Way of Life. Without knowing the origin of things we cannot appreciate the result of our effort. Our effort must have some meaning. To find the meaning of our effort is to find our Original Source of effort. We should not be concerned about the result of our effort before we know the Original Source of our effort. If the origin is not clear and pure, all our effort will not be pure, and so the result of our effort will not satisfy us. When we resume our Original Nature, and starting from the Original Nature, make our effort incessantly, we will appreciate the result of our effort, moment after moment, day after day, year after year. This is how we should appreciate our life. Those who are attached to the result of their effort only, will not have any chance to appreciate their effort, because the result of their effort will not come for ever. But if your original intention is good, all



that you do is good, and you will be satisfied with whatever you do.

Zazen practice is the practice in which we resume our Pure Way of Life, beyond any gaining idea, or beyond fame and profit. By practice we just keep our Original Nature as it is. There is no need to intellectualize about what our Pure, Original Nature is, because it is beyond our intellectual understanding. And there is no need to appreciate it because it is beyond our appreciation. So, just to sit, without any idea of gain, and with the purest intention, to remain as quiet as our Original Nature, is our practice.

Here, in this zendo there is nothing fancy. Once a week we just come and sit, and after communicating with each other we go home and resume our own everyday activity, as a continuity of our Pure Practice, enjoying our True Way of Life. This is very unusual. Wherever I go people ask me, "What is Buddhism?" with their notebooks ready to write down my answer. You can imagine how I feel. But here we just practice zazen. That's all we do. And we are happy in this practice. For us there is no need to understand what is Zen. We are practicing zazen. So, for us there is no need to know what Zen is intellectually. This is, I think, very, very unusual for American society.

In America there are many patterns of life and many religions, so maybe it is quite natural to talk about what are the differences between the various religions, and to compare one religion to another religion. But for us there is no need to compare Buddhism to Christianity. Buddhism is Buddhism; and Buddhism is our practice. We don't even

know what we are doing when we just practice with a pure mind. So we cannot compare our way to some other religion. Some people may say, "Zen Buddhism is not religion". Maybe this is so, or maybe Zen Buddhism is religion before religion. So it might not be religion in the usual sense. But it is wonderful, and even though we do not study what it is intellectually, or even though we do not have any cathedral or fancy ornaments, it is possible to appreciate our Original Nature. This is quite unusual. This kind of experience will be found when you practice Zen without any idea of gaining something.



## Mistakes in Practice

There are several poor ways of practice which you should understand. Usually when you practice zazen you become very idealistic and you set up some ideal or goal which you strive to attain or fulfill. But as I have often said, this is very absurd because when you become idealistic in your practice you have some gaining idea within yourself, and by the time you attain your ideal or goal your gaining idea will create another ideal. So as long as your practice is based on a gaining idea, and you practice zazen in an idealistic way, you will have no time to attain your ideal. Moreover you will be sacrificing the meat of your practice. Because your attainment is always ahead you will always be sacrificing yourself for some ideal. This is very absurd; it is not adequate. Even worse than this idealistic attitude is to practice zazen in competition with someone else. When you do this you are in very bad shape. This is a poor, shabby kind of practice.

Our way puts an emphasis on shikan taza, or just sitting. Actually we do not have any particular name for our practice, but when we practice zazen we just practice it, and whether we find joy of practice or not, we just do it. Even though we are sleepy, and we are tired of practicing zazen, repeating the same thing day after day, even so, we continue our practice. Whether or not someone encourages our practice we just do it. Here, especially when you practice zazen alone, without a teacher, I think you will find some way to tell whether your practice is right or wrong. When you are tired of sitting, or when you are disgusted with your practice, or when you are discouraged with your practice, you should recognise a warning signal. You

become discouraged with your practice when your practice has been idealistic. Because you have some gaining idea in your practice, and your practice is not pure enough, or your practice is rather greedy, you become discouraged with your practice. So you should be grateful that you have a sign, or warning signal to show you the weak point in your practice. At that time, forgetting all about your mistake, and renewing your way of practice, you can resume your original practice. This is a very important point.

So as long as you continue your practice you are quite safe, but as it is very difficult to continue you must find some way to encourage yourself. But it is difficult to encourage yourself without becoming involved in some poor kind of practice, so to continue our pure practice by yourself may be rather difficult. This is why we have a teacher. With your teacher you will correct your practice. Of course you will have a very hard time with him, but even though you find it hard you will always be safe from wrong practice.

Most Japanese Zen Buddhist priests have had a difficult time with their master. When they talk about the difficulties they have had you may think that without this kind of hardship you cannot practice zazen. But this is not true. Whether you have difficulties in your practice or not, as long as you continue your practice you have pure practice in it's true sense. Even when you are not aware of it, you have it. So Dogen Zenji said, "Don't think you will be aware of your own Enlightenment." Whether or not you are aware of it, you have your own True Enlightenment within your practice. If you see people involved in various practices you can compare your practice with theirs, and then you will feel true gratitude for our way.



Another mistake will be to practice for the sake of the joy you find in your practice. When your practice is involved in a feeling of joy it is not in very good shape. Of course this is not poor practice, but compared to the true practice it is not so good. In Hinayana Buddhism practice is classified in four ways. The best way is just to do it without having any joy in it, not even spiritual joy. This way is just to do it, forgetting your physical and mental feeling, and forgetting all about yourself in your practice. This is the fourth stage, or the highest stage. The next highest stage is just to have physical joy in your practice. At this stage you find some pleasure in practice and you will practice because of the pleasure you find in it. In the second stage you have mental and physical joy, or good feeling. These two middle stages are stages in which you practice zazen because you feel good in your practice. The first stage is the stage where you have no thinking, and you have no curiosity in your practice. These four stages also apply to our Mahayana practice. The highest stage is just to practice it.

If you find some difficulty in your practice that is the warning that you have some wrong idea in your practice, so you have to be careful. But don't give up your practice; continue it, knowing the weakness of your practice. Here we have no gaining idea in our practice. Here we have no fixed idea of attainment. You don't say, "This is Enlightenment," or "That is not right practice". Even in wrong practice, when you realize it, and continue it, that is right practice. Our practice cannot be perfect. But without being discouraged by it, we should continue it. This, in short, is the secret of practice.

And if you want to find some encouragement in your discouragement, getting tired of it is the encouragement. You encourage yourself when you get tired of it. When you don't want to do it, that is the warning signal. It is like having a tooth ache when

your teeth are not good. When you feel some pain in your teeth you go to the dentist. That is our way.

Yesterday someone whom I met in New York came to see me. He had been working with U Thant for 18 years and he had practiced various ways of meditation. He told me about his experiences and he asked me which of the kinds of meditation was like our way. When I told him which one he was very glad to hear it. He said, "I thought that this was the best kind of practice." And we talked about the conflict in our world. The cause of conflict is some fixed idea or one-sided idea. So when everyone knows the value of pure practice we will have no conflict in our world. He agreed with me. This is the secret of my practice and Dogen Zenji's way. He repeats this point in his "Shobogenzo".

If you understand the cause of conflict is some fixed, or one-sided idea you can practice various ways, and you can find the meaning of the various practices without being caught by them. If you do not realize this point you will be easily caught by some particular practice, and you will say, "This is Enlightenment! This is perfect practice! This is our way!" The rest of the ways are not perfect. This is the best way!" This is a big, big mistake. There is no particular way in true practice. In this understanding you should find your way, and you should know what kind of practice you have now. Knowing the advantage and disadvantage of some special practice, you can practice it. If you have a one-sided attitude you will ignore the disadvantage of the practice and you will emphasize the good part of it. But eventually you will discover the worst side of the practice, and you will be discouraged when it is too late. This is very silly. We should be very grateful to the ancient teachers to point out this mistake.



## Existence and Non-existence

If you want to understand Buddhism it is necessary for you to forget all about your preconceived ideas. To begin with you must give up the idea of substantiality or existence. Usually our view of life is firmly rooted in the idea of existence. For us everything exists; what we see and what we hear exists. Of course the bird we see and hear exists, but what I mean by it's existence and what you mean by it's existence may not be exactly the same, because my view of life is based on the view of existence and non-existence at the same time. It exists and it does not exist. So sometimes we say that a view of life based on existence alone is a heretical view. If you take things too seriously, believing something exists permanently, you are called a heretic. Most people may be heretics.

We say true existence comes from Emptiness. Something which appears from Emptiness is true existence. This idea of existence is very difficult to explain. Many people may feel the emptiness of the modern world by actual experience, and these days most people have begun to feel, at least intellectually, the emptiness of the world, or the self-contradiction of our culture. In the past the Japanese people had a firm confidence in the permanent existence of their culture and their traditional way of life, but since they lost the war they have become very skeptical. Some people may think this skeptical attitude is awful, but from the true religious viewpoint it is better than their old attitude;

because as long as we have some hope in the future we cannot be really serious with the moment that exists right now. If you have a firm conviction of your future existence you may say, "I can do it tomorrow, or next year," and you may believe in a certain way of life that exists today will exist tomorrow. But there is no certain way that exists permanently. If we do not find our way day by day we will not be able to make our way in it's true sense. So some idea of perfection, or some perfect way which is set up by someone is not the true way for us. Each one of us makes his own way. When each one of makes his own way, his own way will become their own way. This is a mystery.

When you understand one thing you understand everything. When you try to understand everything you will not understand anything. The best way is to understand yourself, and then you will understand everything. So when you try hard to make your own way you will help others, and you will be helped by others. Before you make your own way you cannot help anyone, and no one can help you. So to be independent in it's true sense we have to forget everything which we have in our mind, and discover something quite new and different moment after moment.

We say true understanding will come out of Emptiness. So when you study Buddhism you should have a general house cleaning of your mind. You must take everything out of your room, and clean your room thoroughly. If it is necessary you may bring everything back in again. This is how to study Buddhism. One by one you should bring the things back in. But if they are not



necessary there is no need to keep them.

We see the flying bird. Sometimes we see the trace of the flying bird. Actually you cannot see the trace of the flying bird, but sometimes we feel as if we can see the trace of the flying bird. This is also good. If it is necessary you should bring back<sup>IN</sup> the things you took out of your room. But before you put something in your room it is necessary for you to take out something. If you don't, your room will become crowded with old, useless junk.

We say, "Step by step I stop the sound of the murmuring brook." When you work along the brook you will hear the water running. The sound is continuous, but you must be able to stop it if you want to stop it. This is freedom; this is renunciation. One after another you will have various thoughts in your mind, but if you want to stop your thinking you can stop it. So when you are able to stop the sound of the murmuring brook you can see the trace of the flying bird. Then you will appreciate the feeling of your work. But as long as you have some fixed idea, or you are caught by some habitual way of doing things you cannot appreciate things in their true sense.

Before you acquire absolute freedom you have to acquire absolute freedom. That is our practice. Our way is not always heading in one direction. Sometimes we go east; sometimes we go west. To go one mile to the west means to go one mile to the east. Usually if you go one mile to the east it is opposite to going one mile to

the west. But if it is possible to go one mile to the east that means it is possible to go one mile to the west. This is freedom. Without this freedom you cannot be concentrated on what you do. You may think you are concentrated on something but before you obtain this freedom it will not be true concentration. You will have some uneasiness in what you are doing because you are bound by some idea of going east or west. So your activity is in duality or duality. As long as you are caught by duality you cannot attain absolute freedom and you cannot concentrate. Concentration is not to try hard to watch something. In zazen if you try to look at one spot you will be tired in about five minutes. This is not concentration. Concentration means freedom. So your effort should be directed at nothing. You should be concentrated on nothing. In zazen practice we say your mind should be concentrated on your breathing, but the way to keep your mind on your breathing is to forget all about yourself and just to sit and feel your breathing. If you are concentrated on your breathing you will forget yourself, and if you forget yourself you will be concentrated on your breathing. So actually there is no need to try hard to be concentrated on your breathing. Just do as much as you can and eventually, if you continue this practice, you will experience the true existence which comes from Emptiness.



## The Secret of Control

To live in the realm of the Buddha Nature means to die as a small being, moment after moment. When we lose our balance we die, but at the same time when we lose our balance we grow. If we are in perfect balance we cannot live as a small being. Whatever we see is changing, losing it's balance. The reason everything looks beautiful is because it is out of balance, but it's background is always in perfect harmony. This is how everything exists in the realm of the Buddha Nature, losing it's balance against a background of perfect balance. So if you see things without realizing the background of Buddha Nature everything appears to be in the form of suffering. But if you understand the background of existence you realize that suffering itself is how we live, and how we extend our life. So in zen sometimes we emphasize the imbalance or disorder of life.

One of the exercises of the ancient Japanese painters who were influenced by the zen spirit was to arrange a series of dots on a piece of paper in artistic disorder. It is rather difficult to arrange dots out of order. Even though you try to do it usually what you do is arranged in some order. It is almost impossible to arrange your dots out of order. This is a kind of practice which can be applied to your everyday life. Even though you try to put people under some control, it is impossible. You cannot do it. So if you want to control people the best way is to encourage them to be mischievous. Then they will be in control

in it's wider sense. To give your sheep or cow a large, spacious meadow is how to control people. So first let them do what they want, and watch them. This is the best policy. To ignore them is not good; that is the worst policy. The second worst is trying to control them. The best one is to watch them, just to watch them, without trying to control them.

As you practice zazen, if you want to obtain perfect calmness you shouldn't be bothered by the various images you will find in your mind. Let them come and let them go. Then they will be under control. But this policy is not so easy. It looks easy, but it requires some special effort. How to make this kind of effort is the secret of practice. Suppose you are sitting under some extraordinary circumstances. If you try to calm down your mind you will be unable to sit, and if you try not to be disturbed your effort will not be the right effort. The only effort you can make is to count your breathing, or to be concentrated on your inhaling and exhaling. We say concentration, but to concentrate your mind on something is not the true purpose of zen. The true purpose of zen is to see things as they are, to observe things as they are, and to let everything go as it goes. This is to put everything under control in it's widest sense. In other words, zen practice is to open up our small mind. So to control your mind is just an aid to help you realize the Big Mind. If you want to discover the true meaning of zen in your everyday life you have to understand the meaning of controlling your mind, the meaning of keeping



your mind on your breathing, and the meaning of keeping your body in the right posture. This is rather difficult to explain, but your study should become more subtle and careful. We have to experience the true meaning of zen.

Dogen Zenji said, "Time elapses from present to past." This is absurd, but in our practice sometimes it is true. Time goes from present to past. \_\_\_\_\_ was a famous samurai who lived just before the Kamakura period. He was faithful to his brother until he was killed in the northern part of Japan. Before he left he had to bid farewell to his wife, and soon after she was caught by his brother. She said, in a poem, "Just as you unreel the thread from a spool, I want past time to become present." When she said this, actually she made the past time present. In her mind the past time was already present. So as Dogen Zenji said, "Time elapses from present to past". This is not true in our logical mind, but in our actual life, when we make past time present there we have poetry, and there we have human life.

So when we experience this kind of truth it means we have found the true meaning of time, which constantly elapses from past to present, and present to future. If this is true, at the same time it is also true that time elapses from future to present, and from present to past. A zen master said, "To go eastward one mile is to go westward one mile." This is vital freedom. We should acquire this kind of perfect freedom.

But perfect freedom is not found without some rules. If there are no rules, there is no freedom. As long as you have rules you have freedom. To try to obtain freedom without being aware of the rules means nothing. In Japanese we say\_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ means nothing. To acquire perfect freedom is the reason we practice zazen. It looks as if there is no need for us to practice anything, or there is no need for us to have any rules, (as some young people may say), but it is absolutely necessary for us to have some rules. But it does not mean always to be under control. This is the secret of our life.



## Wonderous Enlightenment

When you are practicing zazen don't try to stop your thinking. Let it stop by itself. If something appears in your mind let it come in, and let it go out. It will not stay long. When you try to stop your thinking it means you are bothered by it. Don't be bothered by anything. It appears as if something comes from outside your mind, but actually it is only the waves of your mind, and if you are not bothered by the waves, gradually they will become calmer and calmer. In 5, or at most 10 minutes, your mind will be completely serene and calm. At that time your breathing will become quite slow, while your pulse will become a little faster. We don't know why this is so, but it has been demonstrated scientifically.

It will take quite a long time before you find your calm, serene mind in your practice, but even though you find waves in your mind those are waves of your own mind. Nothing comes from outside your mind. Nothing outside yourself can cause any trouble for your mind. You make the waves in your mind. If you leave your mind as it is it will become calm.

Usually we think of our mind as receiving impressions and experiences from outside, but that is not the true understanding of our mind. According to our understanding the mind includes everything. Nothing comes from outside. Our mind has everything; when you think something comes from outside it means only that something appears in your mind.

If your mind is related to something that mind is a small mind, a limited mind. If your mind is not related to anything else, there is no dualistic understanding in the activity of your mind and you understand that activity as just waves of your mind. The mind which is not related to anything else is the Big Mind.

Everything is included within your mind. This is called Essence of Mind. This is the religious feeling. This mind is pure, and even though you <sup>HAVE</sup> wave waves in your mind it is pure mind like clear water with a few waves. You have some security in your feeling when you understand your mind in this way, and your mind does not expect anything from outside, so it is always filled; and even though your mind has waves in it it is not a disturbed mind; it is actually an amplified mind. Whatever you experience is amplified in your mind. You may find various meanings in your own mind, but these are not disturbances of your mind.

Do you understand the difference between the two points of view, between the mind which includes everything, and the mind which is related to something else? Actually they are the same thing, but the understanding is different, so your attitude toward your life will be different according to which understanding you have.



The activity of our mind is to amplify through various experiences the activity of your mind. You know when you feel something; it is your feeling. If you have something good for breakfast you will say, "this is good". Something good will be supplied as an experience which you have experienced sometime before. Even though you do not remember when you had the experience, you feel as if you have experienced it long before. This is how we accept things. So this mind is not different from the mind which is related to something. With this mind we sit, so we can sit with the Big Mind. This practice is called practice with Original Enlightenment, or Wonderful Enlightenment.

## Constancy

The message for us on the calendar today is "Cultivate your own spirit". This is a very important point, and this is how we practice Zen. Of course, giving a lecture, or reciting the sutra, or sitting is Zen; each of these activities should be Zen. But if your effort or practice does not have the right orientation it will not work at all. Not only will it not work, but it may spoil your pure nature. Then the more you know about Zen the more you will become spoiled. Your mind will be filled with rubbish; your mind will be stained.

It is quite usual for us to gather various pieces of information from various sources, and we may think if we do this that we know many things, but actually we won't know anything at all. Our understanding of Buddhism should not be just <sup>the</sup> gathering of many pieces of information. Instead of gathering knowledge you should accept knowledge as if you were hearing something which you already knew. This is called emptiness, or omnipotent self, or knowing everything. When you know everything you are like a dark sky. Sometimes a flashing will come through the dark sky and then you will forget all about it. After the flashing passes there is nothing left but the dark sky. Even if all of a sudden a thunderbolt breaks through the sky will not be surprised. But when the lightning breaks through we will see a wonderful sight. When we have emptiness we are always prepared for watching the flashing.

In China Rosan is a famous place for it's misty scenery. I haven't been to China yet, but there must be beautiful mountains there; and white clouds or mist may come and go through the mountains. It must be a very wonderful sight. Although it is wonderful a Chinese poem says, "Rosan is famous for it's hazy sight on a rainy day. Seko, (the great river) is famous for it's tide, coming and going. That's all." That's all, but it is splendid. This is how we appreciate things.



We should not receive various pieces of information just as the echo of ourselves, but we should not be surprised at whatever we may see or hear. If you accept things as an echo of yourself it makes no sense. So when we say, "Rosan is famous for its misty sight" it does not mean to appreciate the mountains by recollecting some scenery we have seen before. "It is not so wonderful. I have seen that sight before, or I have painted much more beautiful paintings. Rosan is nothing." This is not our way. We appreciate everything with new feelings. We do not accept things as an echo of ourselves.

So even though you have various pieces of knowledge, if you accept the knowledge only as if you were collecting something familiar to you, then as a collection it may be very good, but this is not our way. We should not try to surprise people by our wonderful treasures. This is not our way at all. We should not be interested in something special. If you want to appreciate something fully you should forget yourself even, and you should accept it like the lightning flashing in the utter darkness of the sky.

Sometimes we think it is impossible for us to understand something unfamiliar to us. Some people may say, "It is almost impossible to understand Buddhism as our cultural background is quite different from the Oriental cultural background. "How is it possible to understand Oriental thought?" they may ask. Of course Buddhism cannot be separated from its cultural background. This is true, but if a Japanese Buddhist comes to the United States he is no longer a Japanese. I am living in your cultural background. I am eating nearly the same food as you eat, and I am communicating with you in your language. Narrow minded people may say that it is impossible for the Westerner to understand Buddhism, but it is possible. Even though you do not understand me completely I want to understand what you are talking about. I may understand more than anyone who can speak and understand English. This is true. If I can understand

several words in a long sentence it is all the better, but even <sup>IF</sup> ~~though~~ <sup>COULD NOT</sup> I ~~cannot~~ understand English at all I think I <sup>COULD</sup> ~~can~~ communicate with people. So, in this way there is a possibility as long as we exist in the utter darkness of the sky, and as long as we live in emptiness.

I have always said that we must be very patient if we want to understand Buddhism, but I have been seeking for a better word for patience. I think it is better to say constancy. Constancy is better than patience. To be forced for some time is patience, but constancy means the constant ability, or possibility to accept things. In constancy there is no particular effort involved, but only the constant ability which we have to accept. For people who have no idea of emptiness this ability may appear to be patience, but people who know, even if only intuitively the state of emptiness, will be able, in everything they do, even though it is very difficult, to dissolve their problems by constancy. This is what we mean by "ning" in Chinese or Japanese. So I think it is better to interpret "ning" as constancy. This is our way of practice, and our way of continuous practice. So even after we attain Enlightenment it is necessary for us to have another Enlightenment, and one after another we have to have Enlightenment, if possible, moment after moment. That is Enlightenment before you attain Enlightenment, and after you attain Enlightenment.



## The Traditional Spirit of Zen

The most important things in our practice are our physical posture, and our way of breathing. We are not so concerned about a deep understanding of Buddhism. As a philosophy Buddhism is a very deep, and wide, and firm system of thought, but Zen is not concerned about philosophical understanding. We emphasize practice. We should understand why our physical posture and breathing exercise is important. Instead of having a deep understanding of the teaching we need a strong confidence, or we may say a kind of faith in our teaching that originally we have Buddha Nature. Our practice is based on this faith. Originally we have Buddha Nature. If this is so the reason we practice zazen is that we must behave like Buddha. You may think the reason we practice zazen is rather strange, but if you compare other practices, or training to our practice you will understand our practice better.

Before Bodhidharma came to China there were many people who were interested in Zen practice, and there were many writings which looked like Zen. Almost all the famous stock words were originated before Bodhidharma came to China. For instance there was the term, sudden Enlightenment. Sudden Enlightenment is not an adequate translation, but tentatively I will use the expression. Enlightenment comes all of a sudden to us. That is True Enlightenment. Before Bodhidharma, people thought that after a long preparation, sudden Enlightenment would come. This Zen practice

was a kind of training to gain Enlightenment. Actually many people today are practicing zazen with this idea. But this is not the traditional understanding of Zen. The traditional understanding of Zen, from Buddha to our time, is that when you start zazen, there is Enlightenment, even without any preparation. That is the traditional understanding of Zen. Whether you practice zazen or not, you have Buddha Nature. Because you have Buddha Nature in your practice there is Enlightenment. That is our practice. The point we emphasize is not the stage we attain, but the strong confidence we have in our Original Nature, which is nothing different from Buddha Nature, and to practice Zen with the same sincerity as Buddha. To transmit our way is to transmit our spirit from Buddha. That is the most important point we have. So we have to harmonize our spirit with the traditional way, or we have to harmonize our physical posture, or activity with the traditional way. That is the main point in our practice. You may attain some stage, of course, but the spirit should not be based on an egoistic idea.

The traditional understanding of our human nature in Buddhism is without ego. Our egoistic ideas are delusion. When we have no idea of ego we have Buddha's view of life. Because of our ego centered ideas our Buddha Nature is covered by delusion. So our spirit should not be based on egoistic ideas. At least we should try to give up our egoistic ideas. We are always creating



some egoistic ideas and are following the egoistic ideas, and we repeat this process over and over again, and our life is occupied by egoistic ideas completely. This is called karmic life, or karma. The Buddhist life should not be karmic life. The purpose of our practice is to cut off the karmic spinning mind. So our practice should be quite different from our karmic practice. If you are trying to attain Enlightenment, that is a part of your karma. You create karma; you are driven by karma, and wasting your time on your black cushion. That is a repetition of your karma, according to Bodhidharma's understanding of our practice. Forgetting this point, later, many zen masters emphasized some stage which we will attain by our sincere practice.

But more important than the stage which you will attain is the sincerity, or true understanding of practice, and the right effort for our traditional practice. This point is very important. When you understand this point you will understand how important it is to keep your posture right. When you do not understand this point the posture and the way of breathing are just a means to attain Enlightenment. If this is so, it may be better to take some drugs instead of sitting in the cross-legged position. It would be much better. If our practice is only a means to attain Enlightenment we haven't any way to attain Enlightenment. We will lose the meaning of the way to the goal. But when we believe in our way firmly, we have already attained Enlightenment. When you believe in your way Enlightenment is there. But when you can't believe in the

meaning of the practice which you are doing in this moment, you cannot do anything. You are just wandering around the goal... with your monkey mind. You are looking for something always, without knowing what you are doing. If you want to see something you should open your eyes. Instead of opening your eyes you are trying to look at something with your eyes closed. That is actually what we are doing when we do not know the important point which Bodhidharma emphasized. We do not slight the idea of attaining Enlightenment, but the most important thing is this moment, not some day. We have to make our effort in this moment. This is the most important thing for our practice.

Before Bodhidharma the study of Buddha's teaching resulted in a deep and lofty philosophy of Buddhism, and people tried to attain the high ideal which they formed by the intellectual study of Buddhism. This was a mistake. Bodhidharma discovered that it was a mistake to create some lofty idea, or deep idea, and then try to attain it by practice of zazen. If that is our zazen our zazen is nothing different from our usual activity, or monkey mind. It looks like a very good, and very lofty, and very holy activity, but actually there is no difference between it and our monkey mind. That is the point that Bodhidharma emphasized.

Before Buddha attained Enlightenment he made all possible efforts for us, and at last he attained a thorough understanding of the various ways. You may think Buddha attained some stage



where he was free from karmic life, but it is not so. Many stories were told by Buddha about his experiences after he attained Enlightenment. He was not at all different from us. Even after he attained Enlightenment he continued the same effort we are making. But his view of life was not shaky. His view of life was stable, and he watched everyone's life, including his own life. He watched himself, and he watched others with the same eyes that he watched stones or plants, or anything else. He had a very scientific understanding. That was his way of life after he attained Enlightenment. When his mother-country was going to be conquered by a neighboring, powerful country he told his disciples his own karma, of how he suffered when he saw that his mother-country was going to be conquered by the neighboring king. If he had been someone who had attained perfect Enlightenment in which he had no suffering, there would be no reason for him to suffer when his mother-country was going to be conquered.

When we have the traditional spirit to follow the truth as it goes, and practice our way without any egoistic idea, then we will attain Enlightenment in it's true sense. And when we understand this point we will make our best effort in each moment. That is true understanding of Buddhism. So our understanding of Buddhism is not just an intellectual understanding. Our understanding, at the same time, is the practice. Through practice we can understand what is Buddhism, not by just reading or contemplation of philosophy. So when you understand Buddhism thoroughly, even in an intel-

lectual way, you will find out how difficult it is to express  
 yourself in writing, or speaking about it. It is very difficult.  
 That is why Zen becomes more and more poetic. It is not possible  
 to express it in an intellectual way. When you give up your  
 photography you will use some brush or ink. That is why Zen  
 monks become more and more artistic, because they know it is  
 impossible to express zen in an intellectual way. It is almost  
 impossible to talk about what Buddhism is. Just to do it is the  
 direct way. KKKKK! If you do not understand it we will use  
 this one on you! (Flourishing his Nyoï or staff) What is it?  
 This is the best way to communicate. Our way is very direct.  
 But this is actually not Zen, you know. It is not our traditional  
 way, but when we want to express it we find it easier to express  
 it this way. But the best way will be just to sit without saying  
 anything. Then you will have the full meaning of Zen. Even  
 though you use this one (Nyoï) it will not be enough. If I use  
 it until I lose myself, or you die, still it will not be enough.  
 The only way is to sit without saying anything. Here we have the  
 full meaning of the traditional spirit of Zen.



## The True Teaching

To walk, to stand, to sit, and to lie down are the four activities, or four ways of behavior in Buddhism. Zazen is not one of the four ways of behavior, and according to Dogen Zenji the Soto School is not one of the many schools of Buddhism. The Chinese Soto School is one of the many schools of Buddhism, but according to Dogen, his way was not one of the many schools. If this is so you may ask why we put emphasis on the sitting posture, or why we put emphasis on having a teacher. The reason we put emphasis on the sitting posture, or zazen is because zazen is not just one of the four ways of behavior. Zazen is the practice which is one of the innumerable activities which was started even before Buddha, and which will continue to the eternal future. And at the same time this activity includes many activities which were started before Buddha, and which will continue to the endless future. So this sitting posture cannot be compared to the other four activities.

Usually people put emphasis on some particular position, or on some particular understanding of Buddhism, and they think, "This is Buddhism!" But we cannot compare our practice with the practices people normally understand. Our teaching cannot be compared to other teachings of Buddhism. This is why we should have a teacher who does not attach to any particular understanding of Buddhism. This is the original teaching of Buddha. The original teaching of Buddha includes all the various schools. So as a Buddhist,

our traditional effort should be like Buddha's effort. But usually, if we have no teacher, and if we take pride in our own understanding, we will lose the original characteristic of Buddha's teaching which includes all the various teachings.

Because Buddha was the founder of the teaching, people tentatively called his teaching Buddhism, but actually Buddhism is not some particular teaching. Buddhism is just Truth which includes various truths in it. Zazen practice is the practice which includes the various activities of life in it. So actually we do not put emphasis on the sitting posture only. How to sit is how to act. We study how to act by sitting, and this is the most basic activity for us. So that is why we practice zazen in this way. Even though we practice zazen we should not call ourselves the Zen School. We just practice zazen, taking our example from Buddha; that is why we practice. Buddha taught us how to act through our practice; that is why we sit.

To do something, or to live in each moment means to take the temporal activity of Buddha's activity. To sit in this way is to be Buddha himself, as the historical Buddha was. The same thing applies to everything we do. Everything is Buddha's activity. So whatever you do, or whatever you do not do, Buddha is in that activity. Because people have no such understanding of Buddha, they think what they do is the most important thing, without knowing who it is that is actually acting. People think they are doing various



things, but actually Buddha is doing everything. Each one of us has his own name, but those names are the many names of one Buddha. Each one of us will take many activities, but those activities are all Buddha's activities. Without knowing this people put emphasis on some activity, for instance, zazen practice. When they put emphasis on zazen it is not true zazen... There is a big difference in our understanding of our practice. We sit in the same way, but if you understand this sitting posture as one of the four postures that is the wrong understanding. This posture is Buddha's posture. This understanding is the right understanding of the zazen posture. If you practice in this way it is Buddhism. This is a very, very important point. So Dogen Zenji did not call himself a Soto teacher, of a Soto disciple. He said, "Other people may call us the Soto School, but there is no reason for us to call ourselves Soto. You should not use the name of Soto". There are many schools of Buddhism in Japan, but Dogen's way was not to be one of the schools which divided Buddhism into many parts.

Originally each school should not be a separate school. It should just be one tentative form of Buddhism. But as long as the various schools do not accept this kind of understanding we tentatively use the name Soto School, until all the schools give up calling themselves by their particular names. I want to make this point clear. Actually we are not the Soto School at all. We are just Buddhists. We are not Zen Buddhists; we are just

Buddhists. If we understand this point we are truly Buddhists.

Buddha's teaching is everywhere. Today it is raining. This is Buddha's teaching. People think their own way is Buddha's way, without knowing what they are hearing, or what they are doing, or where they are. So religion is not any particular teaching. Religion is everywhere. We have to understand our teaching in this way. We should forget all about some particular teaching which is good or bad. There should not be any particular teaching. Teaching is in each moment, in every existence. That is the true teaching.



## The Double Moon

Dogen Zenji says, "Even though it is midnight, dawn is here; even though dawn comes, it is night time". This kind of statement, or understanding is the understanding transmitted from Buddha to the Patriarchs, and from the Patriarchs to Dogen, and to us. We call ~~nighttime daytime; daytime nighttime~~. Nighttime and daytime are not different. The same thing is sometimes called nighttime, and sometimes called daytime. Nighttime and daytime are one thing.

Zazen practice and everyday activity are one thing. We call ~~zazen everyday life; everyday life zazen~~. But usually we think, "now zazen is over, and we will go about our everyday activity." but this is not the right understanding. They are the same thing. We have no where to escape. So in activity there should be calmness, and in calmness there should be activity. So calmness and activity are not different.

Each existence depends on something else. And, strictly speaking, there is no particular existence. They are many names of one existence. Sometimes people put the stress on oneness, but this is not our understanding. We do not emphasize any point particularly. Oneness is valuable, and variety is also wonderful. Sometimes people may ignore the variety, and emphasize the one absolute existence, but this is one-sided understanding. In this understanding there is a gap between variety and oneness. Oneness and variety are the same thing. So, oneness should be appreciated in each existence. That

is why we emphasize everyday life rather than some particular state of mind. We should find the reality in each moment, and on each phenomenon. This is a very important point.

Dogen Zenji says, "Although it is so (although everything has Buddha Nature) we love flowers and we don't care for weeds". That we do not care for weeds is also Buddha's activity. That we are attached to some beauty is also Buddha's activity. We should know that. If you know that, you may attach to something. So in hate there should be love; in love there must be hate. Love and hate are one thing. We should not attach to love only. We should accept hate. We should accept weeds, even though it doesn't matter how we feel about them. If you do not care for them, don't love them; if you like them you should love them. Love and hate are not different; but usually you criticize yourself for being unfair to your surroundings. This is a very subtle difference between the usual way of accepting things and our way of accepting things. They look exactly the same, but there is a subtle difference. We have been taught that there is no gap between nighttime and daytime. There is no gap between you and I. This means oneness, but we do not emphasize even oneness. So, if it is one there is no need to emphasize one.

Dogen says, "To learn something is to know yourself; to study Buddhism is to study yourself." That you learn something is not to acquire something which you did not know before. You know something before you learn it. There is no gap between I, before we know something, and I after we know something. There is no gap between the



ignorant and the foolish. A foolish person is a wise person; a wise person is a foolish person. But usually he is foolish and I am wise; I was foolish, and now I am wise. How can we be wise if we are foolish? So there is no difference between the foolish man and the wise man. There is no difference at all. This is the understanding transmitted from Buddha to us. It is so, but if I say this people may think that I am emphasizing oneness. This is not so. We do not emphasize anything. We want to know things just as they are. If we know things as they are, there is no where to point at; there is no way to grasp anything; we cannot pick up anything. We cannot put emphasis on any point. But still, Dogen says, "A flower falls, even though we love it; a weed, which we do not care for will come up. Even though it is so, this is our life."

In this way our life should be understood. Then there is no problem. Because we put emphasis on some particular point, we always have trouble. We should accept things just as they are. This is how we understand everything, and how we live in this world. This kind of experience is something beyond our thinking. In the thinking realm there is a difference between oneness and variety, but in actual experience, variety and unity (or oneness) are the same. Because you create some idea of unity, or variety, and because you are caught by the idea, you have to continue the endless thinking, but actually there is no need to think. Emotionally we have many problems, but these problems are not actual problems; they are something created; they are problems pointed out by our self-centered ideas, or views.

Because we point out something, there are problems. But actually it is not possible to point out some particular thing. Happiness is sorrow; sorrow is happiness. There is happiness in difficulties; difficulties and happiness are not different. Even though they are not different, they are different--the way we feel is different. But actually they are the same. This kind of understanding is the understanding of the double moon.

## Emptiness

In the Prajna Paramita Sutra the most important point is, of course, the idea of emptiness. Before we understand the idea of emptiness everything exists substantially for us. But after we realize the emptiness of things everything becomes real--unsubstantial. When we realize that everything we see is a part of the emptiness, then we have no attachment to any existence; we realize that everything is just a tentative form or color. When we realize this truth we realize the true meaning of each tentative existence. When we first hear that everything is a tentative existence most of us will be disappointed; but this disappointment comes from the wrong view of man and nature. It is because our way of observing things is deeply rooted in our self-centered ideas that we are disappointed when we hear that everything is a tentative existence. But when we actually realize this truth we will have no suffering.

This sutra says, "Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara observes everything is emptiness, thus he forsakes all suffering." It is not after he realized this truth that he relieved the suffering of people. To realize this fact is to be relieved from the suffering. So realization of the truth is the salvation itself. We say "to realize" but the realization of the truth is always near at hand; it is not after we practice zazen that we realize the truth; even before we practice zazen realization is there. It is not after we understand the truth that we attain enlightenment. To realize the truth is to exist here. So it is not a



matter of understanding or of practice. It is an ultimate fact. In this sutra Buddha refers to the ultimate fact that we face always. This point is very important. This is Bodhidharma's zazen. Even before we practice it enlightenment is there. But usually the practice of zazen and enlightenment are two different things. Here is practice (holding up his glasses) and when we use the practice (putting on his glasses) we see enlightenment. This is the wrong understanding. The glasses themselves are enlightenment, and to put them on is also enlightenment. So whatever you do, or even though you do not do anything, enlightenment is there, always. This is Bodhidharma's understanding of enlightenment.

You cannot practice true zazen because you practice it; if you don't--you have enlightenment. Because you do it you cannot practice true zazen. If you don't--there is enlightenment, and there is true practice. When you do it you create some concrete idea of you, or I, and you create some particular idea of practice or zazen. So here is you (pointing to the right side) and here is zazen (pointing to the left side). So zazen and practice become two different things; and if the combination of practice and you is zazen it is the zazen of a frog. For a frog this is zazen: (sitting in zazen posture). When a frog is hopping that is not zazen. This kind of misunderstanding will vanish if you really understand emptiness. Emptiness means everything is always here.

One whole being is not an accumulation of everything. One whole being is always here. It is impossible to divide one whole existence into parts. It is always here and always working. This is enlightenment. So actually there is no particular practice. In the sutra it says, "There are no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, or body, no mind..." and so on. This no mind is true mind which includes everything.

The important thing in our understanding is to have a smooth, free thinking way of observation. We have to think and to observe things without stagnation. We should accept things as they are without difficulty. Our mind should be soft enough to understand things as they are. When our thinking is soft that thinking is called unperturbable thinking. This kind of thinking is always stable. This kind of thinking is called mindfulness. Thinking which is divided in many ways is not true thinking. Concentration should be present in our thinking. This is mindfulness. Mindfulness means concentration of thinking. Whether you have an object or not your mind should be stable, and your mind should not be divided. This is zazen. Your thinking should not be one-sided.

It is not necessary to make an effort to think in a particular way. We just think with our whole mind, and see things as they are, without any effort. Just to see, and to be ready to see things with our whole mind is zazen practice. Even if we are prepared for thinking there is no need to make an effort to think. This is called mindfulness. Mindfulness is, at the same time, wisdom. By

wisdom we do not mean some particular faculty, or some particular philosophy. It is the readiness of the mind that is wisdom. So wisdom could be various philosophies, and various teachings, and various kinds of research or studies. But we should not become attached to some particular wisdom such as that which was taught by Buddha. Wisdom is not something to learn. Wisdom is something which will come out of your mindfulness. So the point is to be ready for observing things, and to be ready for thinking. This is called emptiness of your mind. Emptiness is nothing but the practice of zazen.



## The Buddhist Bow

### Part II

After zazen we bow to the floor nine times. Bowing is an important practice for us. But as long as you have dualistic ideas you will be unable to bow in it's true sense. To bow is to give up ourselves. To give up ourselves means to give up our dualistic ideas. So there is no difference between zazen practice and bowing. Usually to bow means to pay our respect to something which is more respectable than ourselves. We pay our respect by bowing. But to pay our respect in this sense means to give up our dualistic understanding.

Actually when you bow to Buddha you should have no idea of Buddha; you just become one with Buddha. When you bow to Buddha you are already Buddha himself. When you become one with Buddha, or one with everything that exists, or when you realize the true meaning of being, forgetting all about your dualistic ideas, everything becomes your teacher, and everything can be an object of worship. So here you have no idea of man and woman, or teacher and disciple.

Sometimes a man will bow to a woman; sometimes a woman may bow to a man. Sometimes the disciple bows to the master, sometimes the master bows to the disciple, and sometimes the master and disciple bow together to Buddha. It is important for the master to bow to the disciple. A master who cannot bow to his disciples cannot bow to Buddha. Sometimes we may even bow to cats and dogs.

Before you can bow to cats and dogs you cannot bow to Buddha in it's true sense.

When you have everything in your Big Mind, everything has the same value, and everything is Buddha himself. There is no distinction between man and woman, or heaven and earth. Everything is Buddha himself; the dualistic relationship between everything is dropped off. In your practice you accept everything just as it is, treating everything with the same respect as a Buddha. Here you will obtain Buddhahood. Then Buddha bows to Buddha, and you bow to yourself. This is the true bow. Actually, however, in our practice there is no Buddha even.

It is necessary for you to practice our way with firm, conviction. Without firm conviction your bow will become dualistic. When you are just yourself you can bow to everything in it's true sense. When you have the Big Mind you can bow. So bowing is a very serious practice. Without the Unpeturbable Mind you cannot bow. You should be prepared to bow even in your last moment. When you cannot do anything except bow, you should do it. This kind of conviction is necessary when you bow. When you bow with the true spirit all the precepts are yours, and all the teaching is yours, and you possess everything within your Big Mind. This is the true meaning of the bow.

Sen No Rikyu was the founder of the Japanese tea ceremony. He committed hara-kiri at the order of Hideyoshi, his lord. Just before he took his own life he said, "When I have this sword there is no Buddha, or no patriarchs." These were his final words. He meant that when we have this sword, or this spirit, or this Big Mind, there is no dualistic world any more. The only thing which exists is this spirit. This kind of spirit was always present in Rikyu's tea ceremony. He never did anything in just a dualistic way. He was ready to die in each moment. So in one ceremony after another he died, and he renewed himself. This is the spirit of the tea ceremony. This is how we bow to Buddha. At this time we give up our mind and body, and we become one with the Big Mind or the Unpeturbable Spirit.



## Posture

This morning I would like to explain a few things about the posture we take. When you sit in the full lotus position your left foot is on your right side, and your right foot is on your left side. When we cross our legs like this, even though we have a right leg and a left leg, they have become one. This expresses the oneness of the duality. Not two, and not one. This is the most important teaching, not two and not one. Our body and mind are not two and not one. If you think your body and mind are two, that is wrong; if you think your mind and body are one, that is also wrong. Our body and mind are two and one. This is known as the oneness of the duality. Usually if it is not one it is more than one. If it is not singular it is plural. If it is not plural it is singular. But in the actual experience of life our life is not only plural, but also singular. Each one of us is independent and dependent.

After some years we will die. That will be the end of our life. But if we just think that it is the end of our life, this will be the wrong understanding. And if we think that we do not die, this is also the wrong understanding. We die, and we do not die. This is the right understanding. Some people may say that our mind or our soul exists forever, <sup>that our physical</sup> but people may say body will die. But this is not exactly right because both mind and body have their end, but at the same time they exist eternally. And even though we say mind and body, they are actually two sides of one coin. This is the right understanding. So when we take

this posture it symbolizes this truth. When I have the left foot on the right side of my body, and the right foot on the left side of my body I don't know which is which. So either may be the left side or the right side.

It is important to keep your spine straight. Your ears and your shoulders should be on one line and you should pull down on your shoulders and push up toward the ceiling with the back of your head. At first you will find some difficulty in breathing naturally when you try to keep this posture, but by the time you get accustomed to it you can breath naturally and deeply. You should pull your chin in. This is very important. If you sit with your chin tilted up you will never gain strength in your posture. When your chin is tilted up you are dreaming. Put your strength in your diaphragm, or as we call it in Japanese, "hara". It is very important for your physical and mental balance to always concentrate your strength in your "hara". Your hands should form the "cosmic modra". With the palms up, place your left hand on top of the right hand with the tips of the fingers placed at the base of the fingers of the opposite hand. With your thumbs lightly touching form an oval. With your thumbs placed at the height of the naval, and your arms held freely and easily, as if you held an egg under each arm pit, you will be in the correct position for zazen.

The most important point is to own your physical body. If you slump you will lose your body; your mind and body will be wandering somewhere else. This is not the way. We must exist

right here. The key point is this. You must have your body and mind. Everything should exist in the right place. When everything exists in the right place, in the right way, there is no problem. If this microphone exists somewhere else it won't serve it's purpose. So everything should be located in the right place in the right way. When we have our body and mind, everything else will exist in the right place, in the right way. And when you do things in the right way, at the right time, everything else will be organized. When the boss is sleeping everyone is sleeping. When the boss does something right everyone will do everything right, and at the right time. That is the secret of Buddhism.

So try to always keep the right posture, not only when you practice zazen, but in all your activities. Take the right posture when you are driving your car, and when you are reading. If you read in a slumped position you cannot stay awake long. Try. You will discover how important it is to keep the right posture. This is the true teaching. It is a kind of food for your brain. Of course it is necessary to take some food for your brain, but it is more important to be yourself by practicing the right way of life.

Buddha studied many religions, but he was never satisfied with philosophy or asceticism, or some metaphysical existence. But when he found the right practice of religious life, he found that everything that exists has Buddha Nature. That was his Enlightenment. Enlightenment is not some good feeling, or some particular state



of mind. You must believe that the state of mind that exists when you sit in the right posture is, itself, Enlightenment. If you are not satisfied with the state of mind you have in the zazen posture, it means your mind is still wandering about. Our mind and body should not be wobbling or wandering about. So in this posture there is no need to talk about the right state of mind. You already have it. This is the conclusion of Buddhism.

## The Quality of Being

The purpose of zazen is to attain the freedom of our being, physically and mentally. According to Dogen zenji every existence is a flashing into the vast phenomenal world, and each existence is another expression of the quality of the being. I saw many stars when I was in the car this morning. The stars I saw were nothing but the light from the heavenly bodies which had traveled many miles, but for me the stars are not speedy beings, but calm, steady, and peaceful beings. We say, "In calmness there should be activity; in activity there should be calmness." Calmness and activity are not different; they are the same thing. They are just different interpretations of one fact. There is harmony in our activity, and where there is harmony there is calmness. This harmony makes the quality of the being, but the quality of the being is nothing but the systematic speedy activity of the being. Because there is some harmony in the speedy activity there is some quality.

When we sit we feel very calm and serene, but actually we don't know what kind of activity is going on inside our being. Because there is complete harmony in our physical systematic activity we feel the calmness in it. So for us there is no need to be bothered by calmness or activity, stillness or movement. Movement is nothing but the quality of the being, and the quality of our calm, steady, serene sitting is the quality of our Immense Activity. When you do something you fix your mind on the activity with some confidence, so the quality of your state of mind is the activity itself. When you are concentrated on the quality of your being you are prepared for the activity.

"Everything is just a flashing into the vast, phenomenal world" means the freedom of our activity, or our being. So if you sit in the right manner, with the right understanding, you

attain the freedom of your being, even though your being is just a temporal existence. This temporal existence does not change, does not move, and is always independent from other existences. In each moment we may change to something else, and strictly speaking, there is no connection between I-myself yesterday and I-myself in this moment; there is no connection, whatsoever. Dogen zenji says, "Charcoal does not become ashes. Ashes have their own past and future. Charcoal and red hot fire are quite different existences. Ashes are ashes, and they are independent existences because they are a flashing into the vast phenomenal world. Even though we say, "Charcoal is black", that is also a flashing into the vast phenomenal world. So charcoal is independent, and red hot charcoal is also independent; ashes are independent, and firewood is also independent; everything is independent of each other. So where there is black charcoal there is no red hot charcoal.

Today I am sitting in Los Altos. Tomorrow morning I shall be in San Francisco. There is no connection between "I" in Los Altos, and "I" in San Francisco. I am quite different beings. Here we have freedom of existence. That freedom will be acquired by the idea of Dogen's that each existence is a temporal flashing into the vast phenomenal world. And there is no quality between you and me; when I say "you" there is no "I"; when I say "I", there is no "you". You are independent, and I am independent; each exists in a different moment. But this does not mean we are quite different beings. We are the same being; we are the same, and different. It is very paradoxical, but actually it is so. Because we are independent beings each one of us is a flashing into the vast phenomenal world. So when I am sitting, there is no other person, but this does not mean I ignore you. I am completely with every existence in the phenomenal world. So when I sit, you



sit--everything sits with me. When you sit everything sits with you. That is our zazen. And everything is just a quality of your being. I am a part of you. I am a quality of your being. So in this practice we have absolute liberation from everything else. If you understand this secret there is no difference between zen practice and your everyday life. You can interpret everything as you wish.

A wonderful painting is the result of the feeling in your fingers. If you have the feeling of the thickness of the ink in your brush, the painting is already there, before you paint. When you dip your brush into the ink you know the result of your drawing--or else you cannot paint. So before you do something the being is there, the result is there. Even though you look as if you are sitting quietly, all the activity is included, the result of your sitting is there already. You are not resting at all. All the activity is included within you. That is your being. So all the results of your practice are included in your sitting. This is our practice, our zazen.

Dogen zenji became interested in Buddhism when he saw the smoke from the incense stick, and he felt the evanescence of our life. The feeling of the evanescence of life resulted in his deep philosophy, and later he attained Enlightenment. He said, "There is no body or no mind." When he said "no body or no mind" all his being in that moment became a flashing into the vast phenomenal world. He felt the evanescence of life; he felt lonely when he saw the smoke from the incense stick, but that lonely feeling became stronger and stronger, and that feeling resulted in his understanding of existence which is just a flashing into the vast phenomenal world, and which includes everything, which covers everything, and which has immense quality in it. Even though it is just a flashing into the phenomenal world it includes all the phenomenal

world, and it is an absolute independent existence. That was his Enlightenment. So, starting from the lonely feeling of the evanescence of life he attained the most powerful experience of Enlightenment. He said, "I have dropped off my mind and body." Because you think you have body or mind, you have lonely feelings, but when you realize that everything is just a flashing into the vast universe you become very strong, and your existence becomes very meaningful. This was Dogen's Enlightenment, and this is our practice.

## Absolute Calmness

We should establish our practice where there is no practice, or no Enlightenment. As long as we practice zazen in the area where there is practice and Enlightenment there is no chance to make perfect peace for ourselves. In other words we must firmly believe in our True Nature. It is beyond our conscious experience. There is good, or bad, or practice, or Enlightenment only in our conscious experience. But whether or not we have experience of our True Nature, what exists there, actually exists. Here we have to establish the foundation of our practice.

Even to have a good thing in your mind is not so good. It is a kind of burden for you. When you have something in your consciousness you do not have Perfect Composure. The best way is to forget everything. Then your mind is calm, and your mind is always wide enough, or <sup>clear</sup> clear enough to see things, and to feel things as they are, without any effort. To harbor some ill will is, maybe, better than to have some idea of what you should do, or of what you ought to do. Buddha says: "You should be like this. You ought to be like this". But to have what he says in your mind is not so good. But to have some mischievous idea in your mind is sometimes very agreeable. That is true. So actually good or bad is not the point.

The best way to find Perfect Composure is not to retain any idea of things, whatever they may be. To forget all about them, or not to leave any trace of thinking, or not to have any shadow of thinking is the best way. But if you try



your mind, or if you try to go beyond your conscious activity, that will be another burden for your mind. "I have to stop my mind in my practice, but I cannot so my practice is not so good." This kind of idea is also the wrong way of practice. So don't try to stop your mind, but leave everything as it is. Then things will not stay in your mind so long. Things will go as they go; things will come as they come. Then your clear, empty mind will eventually last fairly long.

So to have a firm conviction of an Empty Mind in your practice is the most important thing. That is why, in the Buddhist scriptures we use some astrological description. We describe the Empty Mind in various ways. Most of the time we describe the Big Mind with some astrologically great number, so great that we cannot count it. This means to give up calculating. If it is so great that you cannot count, then you will lose your interest in counting, and you will eventually give up counting. But still the advantage of this kind of description is that you have some kind of help, a kind of adoration of the Innumerable Number which will help you to stop the thinking of your small mind.

But actually when you sit in zazen you will have the pure, genuine experience of the state of mind which is not even a state of mind, but the Original, or Essence of Mind which Bud and the Sixth Patriarch experienced. Essence of Mind, or Original Mind, or Original Face, or Buddha Nature, or Empty all these words mean the Absolute Calmness of our Mind.

3.

You know how to take physical rest, but you don't know how to take mental rest. Even though you lie in your bed your mind is still busy. Even though you sleep, your mind is busy dreaming. Your mind is always in intense activity. This is not so good. So we should know how to give up our thinking mind, or our busy mind, and firmly believe in the perfect rest of our mind, and to resume our Pure Mind. So we should know how to go beyond our thinking faculty.

Dogen Zenji said, 'You should establish your practice in your delusion.' Even though you think you are in delusion your Pure Mind is there. If you realize the Pure Mind in your delusion that is practice. If you have the Pure Mind,<sup>or</sup> the Essential Mind in your delusion, delusion will vanish. It cannot stay when you say, "This is delusion!" It will be very much ashamed. It will run away. So you should establish your practice in your delusion. To have delusion is practice. This is to attain Enlightenment before you realize it. Even though you do not realize it, you have it. So when you say, "This is delusion" that is Enlightenment. But when you try to expell the delusion it will stay, and your mind will become busier and busier trying to cope with the delusion. That is not so good. Just say, "This is delusion". That is enough; and don't be bothered by it. "Oh, this is just delusion!" When you see delusion, you have your True Mind, your calm, peaceful Mind. When you start to cope with it you will be involved in delusion.

So when you sit, whether you attain Enlightenment or not, just to sit is enough. When you try to attain Enlightenment, then



you have a big burden on your mind. So your mind will not be clear enough to see things as they are, and things as they should be. So we should attain Enligherment; that is one thing. But as long as we are physical beings it is pretty hard in reality. This is one side. Even though we are not good right now, we want to be better. This is another side. We exist here in this way, as everything exists in this way. So if we start to attain something, the other side of our nature will be brought up; and we will see things as they are, and as they should be. But if we have the Transcendental Mind, beyond things as they are, and things as they should be, <sup>the</sup> there we have Perfect, Peaceful Mind.

Usually religion develops in the realm of consciousness with beautiful buildings, wonderful music, or by perfect organization. These are religious activities in the conscious world. But Buddhism emphasizes the world of unconsciousness. So the way to study Buddhism is to practice zazen, or to live in good Buddhist surroundings. These ways are much better than to read some books, or to study some philosophy of Buddhism. Of course it is necessary to study some philosophy because by studying it you will have a firm conviction in your religion, but our philosophy is not only the philosophy of Buddhism. It is the philosophy of all life. These practices were built up to protect the true teaching. The purpose of the Buddhist philosophy is not to propagate Buddhism in some wonder mystic way, but to protect our way. So when we discuss someth



about religion we should discuss the problem in the most common and universal way. That is why Buddhist philosophy is so universal and so logical. But this does not mean to expand our way, or to propagate our way by some wonderful philosophical thought. In some ways Buddhism is rather polemical, and some feeling of controversy is in it, because the Buddhist must protect his way from some mystic, or some magical understanding of religion. So philosophy is not the best way to understand Buddhism, unless you have some particular interest in discussion with some other religious people. But if you want to be a sincere Buddhist the best way is to have some way to practice zazen, or to see some Buddhist culture or heritage. Anyway, when we sit we have to sit. That is how to study Buddhism. We are very fortunate to have a place to practice zazen together in this way. So I want you to have a firm, wide, unperterbable conviction in your zazen of 'just sitting'. Just to sit, that's enough.

## Communication

Communication is very important in Zen practice. Because I cannot speak your language very well I must find some way of communicating with you. I think the result of this kind of effort is something very good. We say if you do not understand your master's words you cannot understand his way. Understanding your master's words or your master's language means understanding your master's words in their true sense. This is not just language, but language in it's wider sense. So through his words you understand more than what your master actually says.

Statements usually involve or imply the speaker's subjective intention as well as the listener's objective situation. So there is no perfect word; it is involved in some statement, and some distortion is always present in the statement. But through the statement we have to understand the fact, or the event which happened to us. You may call this fact or event Being, or Ultimate Truth. By Ultimate Truth we do not mean something eternal or something constant, but we mean things as they are. You may say it is Being or Reality. If we understand things as they are, that is Reality. But it is difficult to speak about Reality because when I speak about it my subjective ~~opinion~~ intention is involved in it and this implies some subjective <sup>OPINION</sup> ~~opinion~~ about it; so it is not possible to speak about Reality. But through the master's words we have to understand the Reality directly.

To understand Reality as a direct experience is the reason we practice zazen and the reason we study Buddhism. By the study of Buddhism you will understand your human nature, or your intellectual faculty, or some truth which is present in your human activity. By knowing your human nature you can take human nature in consideration when you understand something. By the study of the Buddhist teaching, and by Zen practice you will understand various statements made by your teacher or Buddha in their true sense. The



direct statement may not be only words; behavior also is a way of expressing ourselves. So we put emphasis on demeanor or behavior. By behavior we do not mean that you should behave like this or like that, but the natural expression of yourself. So we emphasize straight-forwardness. You should be true to your feelings, and to your mind. And you should express yourselves without any reservations. This is the way we express our teaching or our nature in it's true sense. This helps the listener to understand more easily.

When you listen to someone you should give up all your preconceived ideas and your subjective opinions, and you should just listen to him and just observe him. That is how we communicate with each other. We put very little emphasis on right or wrong, or good or bad. We just see things as they are and accept them. This is how we communicate with each other. When you listen to some statement it is quite usual to hear the statement as a kind of echo of yourself. Actually you are listening to your own opinion. If it agrees with your opinion you may accept it, but if it does not you may not hear it. That is one danger when you listen to someone. The other danger is to be caught by the opinion. If you are caught by the ~~opinion~~ <sup>STATEMENT</sup> in it's true sense it is alright, but when you are not caught by the statement in it's true sense you will be easily caught by something which is involved in your subjective opinion or you may be caught by some particular way it is expressed. Without understanding your teacher's words in their true sense you will only understand what he says as a statement without understanding the spirit behind the words. This kind of danger is always there.

It is difficult to have good communication between parents and their children because parents have their own good or bad way. Their intention is always good, but the way they speak, or the way they express themselves is not so free. Usually we each have our own way of expressing ourselves. It is difficult to change our way



according to the circumstances. If parents can manage to express themselves in various ways there will be no danger in the education of their children, but it is rather hard. Even a Zen Master has his own way. When                      scolded his disciples he always said, "Go away!" One of his students took him literally and left the temple. But                      didn't mean to expel the student. It was just his way of expressing himself. Instead of saying, "Be careful," he said, "Go away!" If your parents have this kind of habit you will easily misunderstand them. This kind of danger always follows in our everyday life. So as a listener or a disciple it is necessary to clear your mind from various distortions, or preconceived ideas; or from your own intentions or habits. So that is why we practice zazen and clear our mind which is related to something else.

To be quite natural to ourselves, and to follow what others say, or what others do in the most appropriate way is quite difficult. But we cannot always adjust ourselves in some way. It is impossible. If you try to adjust yourself in a certain way you will lose yourself. So without any artificial, fancy way of adjusting yourself, to express yourself quite freely is the most important thing to make you happy, and to make others happy. And the way we acquire this kind of ability is by practicing zazen. Our teaching is not just the art of life, or the art of living. Our teaching is to live always in Reality in it's exact sense, and to make an effort in each moment to concentrate on what we are doing. The only thing we can study in it's exact sense is what we do in each moment. We cannot even study Buddha's words. When we study Buddha's words in their exact sense it means to study Buddha's words through some activity which you face moment after moment. So we should be concentrated on what we do, and we should be faithful subjectively and objectively to ourselves, and especially to our feelings. Even when you do not feel so well it is better to express how you feel without any particular attachment or indi-

cation. So you may say, "Oh, I am sorry, I don't feel well." That is enough. You should not say, "You made me...."(laughter) That is too much. You may say, "Oh I am sorry. I am so angry with you." There is no need to say that you are not angry when you are angry. You should just say, "I am angry." That is our way.

## Self Nourishment

When the alarm rings early in the morning, and you get up, I think you don't feel so good. It is not easy to come and sit, and even after you arrive and begin zazen you have to encourage yourself to sit well. These are just waves of your mind, and in pure zazen there should not be any waves in your mind. But while you are sitting these waves will become smaller and smaller, and your effort will change into some subtle feeling.

We say, "Pulling out the weeds we give nourishment to the plant". We pull the weeds and bury them near the plant to give nourishment to the plant. So even though you have some difficulty in your practice; even though you have some waves while you are sitting, those waves themselves will help you. So you should not be bothered by the weeds you have in your mind. You should be rather grateful to the weeds you have in your mind, because eventually they will enrich your practice. If you have some experience of how the weeds in your mind change into mental nourishment in your practice your practice will make remarkable progress. You will feel the progress. You will feel how they change into self-nourishment. Of course it is not so difficult to give some philosophical interpretation of our practice, but that is not enough. We must have the actual experience of how our weeds change into nourishment.

Strictly speaking, any effort we make is not good for our practice because it creates waves in our mind, but it is impossible to attain absolute calmness of our mind without any effort. We must make some effort, but we must forget ourselves in the effort we make. In this realm there is no subjectivity or objectivity. Our mind is just calm, without even any awareness. And in this unawareness every effort and every idea and thought will vanish. So it is necessary for us to encourage ourselves, and to make an effort up to the last moment when we have no effort. You should keep your mind on your breathing until you are not aware of your breathing.



We should try to continue our effort forever, and when we continue our effort we should not expect some stage when we will forget all about it. We should just try to keep our mind on our breathing. That is our actual practice. And that effort will be refined, more and more, while you are sitting. At first the effort we make is quite rough and impure, but by the power of practice the effort will become purer and purer. When your effort becomes pure, your body and mind becomes pure. This is the way we practice Zen. Once you understand our innate power to purify ourselves and our surroundings you can act properly, and you will learn from each other, and you will become friendly to each other. This is the merit of Zen practice. But the way of practice is just to be concentrated on your breathing with the right posture, and with great, pure effort. This is how we practice Zen.

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi  
Haiku Zendo 1965

