

OCTOBER SESSHIN LECTURES October 16, 1965

In the course of a full day Sesshin some time is devoted to instruction or lecture each morning, afternoon, and evening. During the October Sesshin, the instruction was given in the morning by Rev. Katagiri. (These lectures were taped during the sesshin and then transcribed for the Wind Bell.)

In the morning when you first meet one of the members of the Zen Center, Reverend Suzuki, or myself, you should greet us with a complete presence of your mind, such as making a bow, gassho, or a "good morning". When you are doing something you should use both hands, not just one. For example, when you handle a kettle, use both hands. When you do something with a single hand, your other hand should be touched to your waist.

After doing zazen do not stand up roughly and quickly, because your calm mind should be maintained. If you do something roughly and unevenly at this time, your mind will lose its calmness. So when you hear the bell ring ending zazen, you should put your hands on your knees palms up and swing from left to right, first small and then gradually larger. After that, if your legs are asleep, you should stretch and exercise them by pushing out with your heels and pulling back with your toes. Then, stand up slowly.

Before beginning another period of zazen it is best to do some exercise. First you should take a seat facing the wall, then put your hands on your knees with palms up and swing right and left. In the beginning the swing should be large, gradually becoming smaller. And then continue doing zazen. If you don't do this exercise it becomes harder to control your mind. In your daily life, when you do something, your will is concentrated on it. In the same way, if you want to do zazen, you should concentrate on getting ready for it. Anyway, before doing something, your mind should first begin to control the conditions in preparation, such as by some exercise.

Everyone is likely to have bad habits of posture, so it is important to watch your posture during zazen. You should pay attention to keeping the mudra or position of your hands, your back straight, your chin pulled in and so on.

Each act you do in the zendo involves your Buddha nature, so don't do things roughly. Please watch each of your actions. It is very important for the practice of zazen.

Suzuki, Roshi, continued the morning instruction by explaining the importance and way of practice of walking-meditation (kinhin) and standing-meditation. Because Suzuki, Roshi, was walking around the Zendo during his explanation, the tape recorder did not pick up his words. Briefly: hands are held, right hand around left fist, at waist level, but a little out from the body and arms a little away from the sides; breathing is fairly slow and deep, stepping forward on the exhale, and preparing to lift back foot before bringing it forward on the inhale; the walking is slow and in relation to the others doing kinhin; and the mind should be following the walking and breathing. When the bell rings ending kinhin, each person should close the gap in front of him so the line can walk at a more rapid pace back to the original places.

In standing-meditation feet should be planted firmly on the floor separated by about the width of a fist or hand, head and back should be straight as in sitting and walking meditation. Breathing should be what is called in China "toe breathing": you feel some strength in your heels when you inhale, as if you were inhaling all the way from your heel; and when you exhale you feel the strength in your toes as if you were exhaling there. When you stand in this very stable way after zazen, you feel as stable as being rooted to the ground.

The following is Zen Master, Suzuki's afternoon (1 P.M.) lecture:

It is a great joy to practice Sesshin with you in this way. I think this is quite unusual to be practicing zazen with many students in this room. Even in Japan I don't think this is always possible. Japan and America are not so far away today, although the ways of life are quite different from each other. I have studied many things in America which I could not study in Japan. And I think that you will study many things from us which you cannot study in America. In this way our effort will bring some result if we keep our straightforward way in practice.

In zazen practice, the most important point is straightforwardness, as the Sixth Patriarch emphasized. According to him, if we always remain in straightforwardness we have our Way and we are expressing our true nature. But this straightforwardness does not mean to remain lazy without

making any effort to improve yourself. When your true nature is covered or bound by something, even though you try to express your straightforward nature, it is impossible. So, for the beginner, it may be necessary to know what is the straightforwardness meant by the Sixth Patriarch. (4)

If you always remain straightforward, you will have some confidence within the straightforwardness. Whatever comes to us, whatever we face, we should accept and respond to without fear, without being caught by anything - any idea or fear. It is not easy to be straightforward. If you realize this, you will accept pretty hard discipline to keep your true nature.

What I want to talk about now is how to orient your mind in practice. For the beginner it is inevitable that there will be hard discipline, the observation of some rules. The observation of rigid rules is not our point. But if you want to acquire vital freedom, it is necessary to have some strength, or to have some discipline, in order to be free from one-sided or dualistic ideas. So our training begins in the realm of duality or rules: what we should or should not do. These kind of rules are necessary because before you start your practice or realize the necessity of religious life, before you adore something holy; you are bound in the realm of necessity, you are controlled completely by your surroundings. When you see something beautiful you will stay there as much as possible. When you are tired of it you will go to another place. You may think that is freedom, but it is not freedom. You are enslaved by your surroundings, that is all. Not at all free. That kind of life is just material and superficial.

Because we have some idea of freedom, because of our true nature which wants to be free from our surroundings; we start to study something and we choose between good and bad, right and wrong. This will be a new kind of life called life seeking for freedom, which is not realized in a true sense. Some people may think: if we were like cats and dogs there would be real freedom. But this kind of desire will not satisfy our true nature or inmost desire. After striving and seeking for freedom you will realize you cannot attain freedom by searching for it.

Of course, if you keep up this kind of effort for a long time, you will develop a kind of intuition so that you will know what you should do without thinking and wandering so much. This is like the expert who can tell how much a package weighs without using a scale. From his experience he will know. In this way you will have a certain ability to know or intuition about what is good and what is bad. But this kind of ability based on experience is not religious experience. Religious experience is not only intuition about what is good or bad, but also joy, happiness and composure.

Even though you continue a certain discipline, it may be difficult to attain enlightenment if you do not know what is true religious experience, or how you should concentrate your effort. But for the beginner, it is the same whether you understand this or not. Anyway it is difficult. Just to practice zazen in certain posture is enough for awhile. After you are used to a certain posture, it is necessary to know in what way your practice should be oriented.

Dogen Zengi said that Bodhisattva Kwannon (Avalokitesvara) changed the direction of a sound by hearing it. Usually sound comes from a bell and you hear it. You think: there is a bell, it's a wonderful sound and you are listening to it. That experience is quite usual. But when Avalokitesvara heard the sound, he made the sound at the same time. (laughing) Do you understand? He made sound, not the bell - you made the sound. You practice zazen, zazen is there. You practice zazen in Zen Center. In Zen Center there are rigid (laughing) - they insist on rigid forms. So long as you want to study Zen, you should practice in that way. That is your understanding of our practice. It is true but it is not perfect. At first it should be like that, but at the same time, when you practice zazen there is no other zazen than your practice. The practice that you are doing is zazen. No one can force you to practice our way. Because you practice zazen there is zazen, and that zazen is your zazen, as sounds come from some temple and go back to that temple from you. When you realize this fact there is no duality or dualistic ideas, no need to choose between two, for you there is only one way.

In naive, childish, animal, or inanimate life there is no freedom; in human or moral life there is freedom; but when we enter religious life there is no longer freedom. Religious life is moved by necessity like animal life. The way we take is the way we should take. In this realm we become one with human beings and one with all the rest of existence, animate and inanimate; we can accept scientific truth and mechanical civilization. Our vital freedom will be like running water originating from a mountain and passing through valleys and fields, reaching the sea. There is no freedom for the water to return to the mountain. But at the same time there is vital freedom. This kind of life is called religious life. To attain it is to practice zazen without the idea of gaining. To expect some result from your practice is like trying to hear the bell from outside yourself. To expect something from outside, to try to achieve something, is to try to hear the bell from the outside only. If you do not have the faintest idea of gaining, the sound will arise from you. When the bell is sounding, you are sounding. Stop your gaining idea and keep alert and ready to accept - ready to respond to the slightest sound which will come. When you have no pain in your legs, if you can keep your posture right, if you can practice zazen without difficulty, what you should work on is to stop your ideas of gaining by your practice and concentrate on making

yourself alert enough to respond to activity and ready to express yourself in your own way. This is the ability which you will gain by practice. No one has this ability without practice. We should not mix up animal life, the life of a cat or dog, with the life of an enlightened person. (5)

We are now studying, practicing zazen in one room. Some of you have practiced zazen for a long time. Some of you started just now. But each should have his own way, even though we practice in the same way. This is very important in our practice, but it is not difficult. It should not be very difficult for you to understand what I am talking about right now. Just practice zazen until you get accustomed to right posture and when you get tired of it you should conquer the tiredness. You should make yourself alert; you should try to respond in the right way; and you should try to express yourself in the right way. This is how we practice zazen.

Late Afternoon Lecture: 65-10-16.B

We have finished Sesshin with unusual results. We have practiced in our own way and our Patriarch's way, expressing our true nature, transmitted from Buddha to us. Our responsibility as Buddha's disciples is to manifest his way according to time and age, according to circumstances. Although how we express his way is not the same, that which is expressed is one true nature, which is universal for everyone and every existence.

Someone may ask us how this kind of practice will benefit our everyday life. The answer may be no benefit, as Bodhidharma said, "no merit." But we mean by merit; merit and no merit. Beneficial and not beneficial. Mahayana Buddhists emphasize the saving of others and the saving of ourselves. To save others is to save ourselves. It does not mean to save others after we save ourselves, or to save others before we save ourselves. Our way is "to save others is to save ourselves." To hear a sound is for the sound to arise. It is one activity. We practice this kind of practice because for us there is no other way to appease our inmost desire. Until we attain this way of life, our inmost desire will not be appeased.

So Dogen Zengi always emphasized "beginner's mind." We should always remain in beginner's mind. It means our experience should always be refreshed and renewed. It means to always have the joy of discovering something. The same joy as children discovering something new. This kind of experience is not possible to attain just by training through which you expect some result.

Dogen Zengi said Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's hundreds of arms are like seeking for something, for our pillow in complete darkness. Because the darkness is complete, we stretch our arms in no particular direction. Although we are seeking for something, we cannot say we are seeking for something. His hand is not hand, his hand is always, as are also his eyes and his mind. This kind of activity is true activity, which is based directly on our inmost nature.

Seeking for something in the dark is no usual activity based on an idea of gaining. He cannot say he is seeking for the pillow with an idea of gaining. He cannot say he is acting with an idea of gaining. He may not even know what he is doing. So Nangaku said to Ba-so, "If you practice zazen to try to attain Buddhahood, there is no Buddhahood." You think you are practicing zazen in that way, but zen is not some particular form. Whatever you do, that is Zen. Everyone is Buddha. There is no particular person who is called Buddha. Then to practice zazen is just to practice, without any idea of attaining Enlightenment or Buddhahood through zazen. To take some activity that appeases our inmost desire, that is our way.

As you know, Nangaku picked up a tile and started to polish it. Ba-so asked his master what he was doing? "I want to make a mirror," he said. Mirror (laughing). "How is it possible to make a tile a mirror?" the disciple said. Nangaku answered, "When a cart does not go, which do you hit, the cart or the horse?" Which do you hit, the cart or the horse (laughing). Ba-so could not answer. If Ba-so had known the true practice, he would have said: I will hit a horse! The answer is quite simple (laughing), but he started to intellectualize, so he couldn't answer his master's question. So Nangaku kindly said to him, "If you want to acquire Buddhahood, there is no Buddhahood. If you want to practice zazen, just to sit on a cushion is not zazen." Ba-so hearing this instruction felt as if he was drinking ambrosia. He appreciated and was able to understand his master's remark.

As long as we have some idea of attaining Buddhahood or enlightenment by practice, it is not possible to understand what zen is. But when you just whip the horse, the cart will go. When you just practice zazen, enlightenment is there. But when you start to intellectualize or start to understand the value of zen in terms of some gaining idea, zazen, you cannot value zen, because you are trying to figure out what is zen in a worldly sense. Thus you will get no answer to your question. There is no answer to that. We don't know why we practice zazen, why we have been practicing for such a long time, thousands of times practicing zazen in this way. No one knows, but we just did it. There must be some meaning. That is why we practice zazen. But while you are doing it, you will find out for yourself, you cannot stop the practice of zazen. This is the so-called true practice transmitted from Buddha to us.