

SANDOKAI LECTURE III

by Shunryu Suzuki-roshi

INTRODUCTION

Sandōkai is a poem by Shih-t'ou Hsi-ch'ien (Sekitō Kisen in Japanese), an eighth century Chinese Zen Master two generations after the Sixth Patriarch. The *Sandōkai* is highly esteemed by Zen Buddhists, and is chanted daily in many Zen temples in Japan, and daily during the morning service at Zen Center.

In the summer of 1970 Suzuki-roshi gave a series of lectures at Tassajara on the *Sandōkai*. In the first two lectures (published in the two preceding issues of the Wind Bell) Suzuki-roshi discussed the background of the poem, and explained the meaning of the first four lines:

Chikudo daisen no shin
Tōzai mitsu ni ai-fusu
Ninkon ni ridon ari
Dō ni namboku no so nashi.

A tentative translation of these lines, taken from the lectures, is as follows:

The Mind of the Great Sage of India
Was handed down closely from West to East;
People may discriminate the dull from the keen,
But in the true Way there is no patriarch of North or South.

This third lecture covers the following lines of the text:

Reigen myō ni kōkettari
Shiha an ni ruchūsu
Ji o shū suru mo moto kore mayoi
Ri ni kanō mo mata satori ni arazu.

LECTURE

Reigen myō ni kokettari: This part is not so difficult. *Reigen*: *rei* is something wonderful, something beyond our description, beyond our words; *gen* is "the source of the teaching." What Buddha talked about is the source of the teaching which is beyond words and terms of right and wrong. This is important. Whatever we can think about is not source; it is already something which has come out from the source. The source is something unknown; only Buddha knows. Only when you practice zazen do you have it. Even when you do not practice, and whether you realize it or not, something which exists before our realization is the source. The source is not like something to put on lettuce; it is not that kind of thing. It is something you cannot taste, in terms of tasty or not tasty. That is real source.

A little further on it says *ri: ri ni kanō mo mata satori ni arazu*. *Ri* is, maybe, "truth." But when we say truth in English, that truth is something which you can see, which you can figure out. But in Buddhism that is not truth. Truth is something which is beyond our description, which is beyond our thinking, *ri*. More figuratively speaking, *ri* is "the wonderful source," wonderful beyond our description. This is source, source of all our being.

By the way, when we say "being," "being" includes our thought too. "Being" is the many things which we can see, but what we can think is also being. So usually, when you say "truth," that truth means some underlying theory: that the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, that the earth turns in a certain direction, is the truth. But in Buddhism that is not truth. That is being also, being which is in our big mind. So whatever it is, whatever is in our mind in terms of big or small, right or wrong, that is being. If you think about something in terms of right or wrong you may say "This is eternal truth," but for us that is being too, because that eternal truth is something which is in your mind.

So we do not make much distinction between things which exist outside of ourselves or within ourselves. You say outside of yourself, but it is not true. You feel in that way, but actually, when you say, "There is river," river is already within your mind. So hasty people may say, "River is there," but if you think more about it you will find out that something which is in your mind is river. So it is a kind of thought we have in our mind.

And if you say, "There is river and here is my mind," that is dualistic understanding, that is hasty, primitive, shallow, understanding of things. That is so-called *u*. It may be good to remember this term: *u* and *mu*. *U* is pre-Buddhistic understanding of things. When you become a Buddhist you have no more idea of *u* or *mu*. Anyway, *ri* is real source, true source which is beyond our thinking.

Returning to our earlier phrase—*reigen myō ni kōkettari*—*myō* is "clear"; *kō* is "white"; and *ketsu* is "stainless." "Stainless" means no stain of thought or words. If you describe it, that puts a limitation on the truth. It means you stain the truth, you put some mark on the truth. So if it is pure white and stainless, it is clear; that is what the true source means. So "the true source is pure white



Every five days the Chiden (Altar Attendant) carries water up the hill to Suzuki-roshi's memorial, bathes the stone, waters the plants, offers flowers and incense, and rakes the sand.

and stainless"—*ketsu*, stainless. These two characters *ko* and *ketsu* are very interesting. I will explain later.

Next is *shiha an ni ruchūsu*. *Shiha* is "branch stream." Sekitō says *shiha* for poetical reasons, with *reigen*, the source. He uses *shiha* to make these two lines of the poem beautiful. *Reigen* is more noumenal and *shiha* is more phenomenal. To say noumenal or phenomenal is not right, but tentatively I have to say so. That is why I said it is better to remember the technical term *ri*. Another important term which you should remember is *ji*.

Ji is something which you can see, or hear, or smell or taste, and it includes objects of thinking or ideas. Whatever can be introduced into your consciousness is *ji*. Something which is beyond our conscious world is *ri*. So these five characters "*reigen myō ni kōkettari*" mean *ri*, something which is beyond words, something which is stainless. In the *Prajna Paramita Sutra* it says "no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue," and so forth. That is *ri*, actually.

So *shiha an ni ruchūsu*: *an* is "dark," *ruchū* is "to flow" or "pour in." *Shiha*, branch stream, naturally or by itself flows or pours in everywhere like water. Even though you don't think there is water, there is water. Water is inside of

our physical body; in plants there is water. Even though we don't know, there is water all over. So the pure source is all over. Each being is itself pure source and pure source is nothing but each being. If you want to know what is pure source, each being is the pure source; if you want to know what is each being, pure source is each being. So there are not two things. There is no difference between *ri* and *ji*, pure source and stream. The stream itself is pure source, and pure source is stream.

This is "*reigen myō ni kōkettari, shiha an ni ruchūsu*": "even though you don't know, there is *reigen*, the stainless, pure source flowing all over." "Even though you don't know"—that is "dark," *an*. This "don't know" is very important, and *myō*, "clearness," is also important, but I have to explain them later.

So to stick to various beings, or to stick to some idea, even of Buddha's teaching—thinking you understand it, saying "Buddha's teaching is something like this"—means you stick to *ji*. *Ji o shū suru mo moto kore mayoi*: "to stick to being or thought of course is delusion." *Mayoi* is "delusion," and *kore mayoi* means "itself is delusion" or "nothing but delusion." *Moto* is "of course," *shū suru* is "to stick to."

Ri no kanō mo mata satori ni arazu. *Satori* is "enlightenment"—No, not enlightenment. It is better not to say anything. If I translate it into English it is *ji* already. If you "recognize"—*kai*, as in *San-dō-kai*—if you recognize the point, if you make some point about *ri*, it is not enlightenment. Enlightenment is not something you can experience, actually. Enlightenment is beyond our experience. At the same time, if you think that enlightenment is beyond our experience, something which you cannot experience, if when you hear someone say "I have attained enlightenment" you think he is wrong, it means that you stick to some explanation of enlightenment, you stick to words. That is delusion. So you cannot say, there is no enlightenment, or there is enlightenment. Enlightenment is not something which you can say there is, or there is not. And at the same time, something which you can experience is enlightenment too.

In Sekitō's time there was a big dispute about sudden enlightenment and gradual enlightenment. The *Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* denounces Jinshu's¹ way very strongly, saying that Jinshu's way is gradual attainment, while the Sixth Patriarch's way is sudden enlightenment. So in the *Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, it seems that just to sit is not true practice.

But maybe that was not the Sixth Patriarch's own idea. There is not much difference between Jinshu's way and the Sixth Patriarch's way, actually. These critical words were added later by Katakū Jinne—a disciple of the Sixth Patriarch—or by a disciple of Katakū Jinne, after he had passed away. Katakū Jinne was very good, a great Zen master; he was very active and critical of Jinshu's practice. But on the other hand he would not be so hasty as to say something like that.

So although the *Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* was compiled right after the Sixth Patriarch's death, maybe fifty years later Katakū Jinne's disciple made some corrections, or changed some parts, or added something like this poem: "There is no Bodhi tree; there is no mirror. There is no stand for the mirror; there is nothing. How is it possible to wipe the mirror?" Many people criticize this poem because it is not so good; people think this cannot be the Sixth Patriarch's poem.

In those days it was an honor to own the Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch. But the books they had were not the same. There are many different books entitled "Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch," and the oldest ones do not include any denouncing or criticism of the Jinshū school.

So the purpose of the *Sandōkai* is to make clear this kind of wrong understanding concerning Jinshū, who looks as if he sticks to rituals or scholarly work. Scholarly study belongs to *ji*. *Ri* is something which you can experience by practice. Maybe you think that scholarly work is *ri*, but for us it is not so. To realize, or to have complete understanding of *ri*, to accept *ri*, is our practice. But even though you practice zazen and you think that is *ri*, the realization of *ri*, that is not always so, according to Sekitō. This is his intention in writing this poem. This is the backbone of the whole *Sandōkai*. If you understand this much you already understand the whole *Sandōkai*.

So the first four lines are the introduction: *Chikudo daisen no shin, tōzai mitsu ni ai-fusu*: "The Mind of the Great Sage of India has been handed down closely from West to East." *Daisen* is "great sage." *Sen* also means hermit. In Sekitō's time, there were many Taoist hermits who were proud of their supernatural power, and who were seeking for some medicine to prolong life. But they were not so much interested in Buddhist practice, and they couldn't understand why practice was so necessary. That was also true for Dogen-zenji. If all of us have Buddha nature, why is it necessary to practice? Dogen suffered a lot concerning this point. He couldn't understand this problem by intellectual study, he couldn't accept it.

When you really know yourself, you will realize how important it is to practice zazen. Before you know what you are doing, you don't know why we practice. You think you are quite free, that whatever you do is your choice, but actually you are creating karma for yourself and for others. But we have to pay our debts by ourselves; no one else can pay our debts. That is why it is necessary to practice. To fulfill our responsibility we practice. We have to. If you don't practice, you don't feel so good, and you will also create some karma for others. But not knowing this you will say, "Why is it necessary to practice Zen?" Moreover, when you say, "We have Buddha nature," you think Buddha nature is something like a diamond which is in your sleeve. But true Buddha nature is not like this. A diamond is *ji*, not *ri*.

Previously,² I explained about human potentiality. The third line is *ninkon ni ridon ari*: "people may discriminate the dull from the keen." This phrase is mostly for rhetorical need; in the *Sandōkai* this point is not so important. But it is interesting to understand what human potentiality is in Buddhism. *Nin* is

human, *kon* is "root, potentiality"; *nikon* is "human potentiality." *Ri* means "someone who has an advantage," and *don* means "someone who has a disadvantage." So the root of human potentiality is our own advantage and disadvantage. We say *rikon* and *donkon*; there is also the term *kikon*, "human potentiality," which includes *rikon* and *donkon*. I am talking about this in order to explain further our understanding of practice, and why it is necessary to practice zazen.

Ki means potentiality. We have the potentiality to be a Buddha in its true sense. So it is like a bow and arrow. Because bow and arrow have potentiality, if you use them the arrow will go. If you don't use them the arrow won't go. As the bow and arrow have potentiality, so do humans. You are ready to be a Buddha, but if you don't practice zazen, you cannot be a Buddha even though you have potentiality.

So potentiality has two meanings. One is "possibility." From the viewpoint of our nature, we have the possibility to be Buddhas. If you observe me in terms of time, in terms of "when," even though I have the potentiality, if someone doesn't help me I cannot be a Buddha. So from the viewpoint of our nature potentiality means "possibility," and from the viewpoint of our time, potentiality means something like "future possibility."



*Thousand-armed
Avalokitesvara, Senju
Kannon, the Bodhisattva
of Infinite Compassion.
This statue belonged to
Suzuki-roshi for many
years, and is a beautiful
example of Buddhist
craft; the figure itself
is only two inches tall.*

So when we understand potentiality in terms of nature, we should be very kind and generous to everyone because everyone has the potentiality, the possibility to be Buddha, even though one is not Buddha right now. But when we think about the possibility in terms of "when," we should be very strict. Do you understand? If you miss this time, if you do not make a good effort this week or this year, if you always say "Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow," you will miss a chance to attain enlightenment, even though you have the possibility.

It is the same thing with your practice. When you don't think about time, you can be very generous with everyone, you can treat people very well. But if we think about time, about today and tomorrow, we cannot be so generous. So we say "You should do this and I will do that," and "You should help this person and I will help that person." In this way we should be very strict with ourselves. That is why we analyze potentiality in various ways, *ki* as "possibility" and "future possibility." When you understand potentiality in this way, you can work and practice very well, sometimes in a very generous way and sometimes in a very strict way. We have to have two sides to our practice, or to our understanding of *ki*. This is the first meaning.

The second meaning is "interrelationship." *Ki* means the interrelationship between Buddha and someone with a good nature, and between Buddha and someone with a bad nature. I am sorry to say "bad nature," but tentatively I must say so. We should encourage people who have good natures, giving them some joy of practice. And when we practice with someone who tentatively is not so good, we should suffer with him. That is another understanding. So *ki* sometimes means "interrelationship between someone who helps, and someone who is helped." This is so-called *jihī*. *Jihī* is usually translated "love," but love has two sides. One is "to give joy," *yoraku*, and the other is "to suffer with," *bakku*. To make someone's suffering less we suffer with him, we share his suffering. That is love.

So if someone is very good we can share the joy of practice with him by giving him a good cushion, a good zendo, or something like that. But a zendo doesn't mean anything to someone who is suffering; whatever you give him he will not accept it. He may say, "Oh, I don't need it. I suffer a lot. I don't know why. Right now to get out of the suffering is the most important for me. You can't help me, nothing can help me." When you hear this, you should be like Avalokitesvara, you should become like someone who is suffering and you should suffer as he suffers. Because of your love, because of your innate love, your instinct of love, you share the suffering. That is love in its true sense. So *ki* may mean not only "possibility" or "potentiality," but also "relationship."

A third meaning of *ki* is "good means" or "appropriateness," as a cover for a pot. Do you know the Japanese bathtub? It is a wooden barrel with a big wooden cover. But that cover cannot be used for a pot. It is too big. So the bath must have its own cover. In this sense *ki* means "appropriateness." If you see a person who is suffering because of ignorance, because he doesn't know

what he is doing, you weep, you suffer with him. When you see someone who enjoys his true nature, you should give him *jihī*, encouragement. This is to have good, appropriate relationship.

There is something else I am very much interested in. You know that traditionally Buddhists say that Buddhism will not last forever. The sutras give various times but usually they say it will perish a thousand years after Buddha's death.

According to tradition, in the first five hundred years, in the time of Buddha's direct disciples or grand disciples, there will be good sages like Buddha. This is *shōbō*, the time of Buddha. In the next five hundred years there will be people who practice zazen and study Buddhism. This is *zōbō*, dharma imitation time. And in *mappō*, the last period beginning one thousand years after Buddha's death, people will read and chant sutras, but they will not be interested in zazen, and will not observe the precepts; and people who practice zazen and understand the teaching will be difficult to find. This is true, actually. People do not observe the precepts. And people will be involved in only the ideas of emptiness or somethingness, but they will not understand what is really meant by them.

Part of the duties of the Anja (Abbot's attendant) at Tassajara is to care for the Abbot's garden, which Suzuki-roshi designed.



We talk about emptiness and you think you understand it, but even though you explain it pretty well, it is *ji*, not *ri*. Real emptiness will be experienced—not experienced, realized—by good practice. So the purpose of the *Sandōkai* is to make clear what is emptiness, what is somethingness, what is darkness, what is clearness, what is the true source of the teaching, what is the being which is supported by the true source of the teaching.

So you may ask, "What is the real teaching of Buddha?" If you don't understand it you will keep asking someone, "What is it? What is it? What does it mean?" You are just seeking for something which you can understand. That is a mistake. We don't exist in that way. Dogen-zenji says, "There is no bird who flies from knowing the limit of the sky. There is no fish who swims from knowing the end of the ocean." We exist in the limitless world. Sentient beings are numberless and our desires are inexhaustible, but we still have to continue making our effort as a fish swims, as a bird flies. So Dogen-zenji says, "Birds fly like birds; fish swim like fish." That is the Bodhisattva's way, and that is how we observe our practice.

When we understand in this way, according to Dogen, we are not people in *mappō*, the last period, and our practice is not disturbed by any framework of time or space. Dogen said, "Buddha is always here." In some way, still, Buddhism exists, and when we really understand what Buddha meant, we are in Buddha's time.

NOTES

1. Jinshu and Enō were disciples of the Fifth Patriarch. According to one traditional version, each one presented a poem to the Fifth Patriarch to show their understanding, upon which Enō was given the transmission as the Sixth Patriarch.

2. *Sandōkai* Lecture II, Wind Bell, Fall 1974.