



Sesshin Lecture: June, 1971, City Center
Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

6/6/71
71-06-07

Shikan taza, our zazen, is just to be ourselves. We should not expect anything--just be ourselves and continue this practice forever. That is our way, you know.

We say, "Even in a snap of your fingers there are millions of *cetanas* (units of time)." We say, "moment after moment," but in your actual practice, a moment is too long. If we say moment, or one breathing after another, your mind is still involved in following breathing. We say to follow our breathing, but the feeling is to live in each moment. If you live in each moment, you do not expect anything. With everything, you become you, yourself.

If you feel yourself, without any idea of time, in the smallest particle of time, that is zazen. The reason we say this is that if we are involved in an idea of time, various desires will start to create some mischief. But when you have no idea of time, your practice will go on and on with everything.

This practice is not so easy. You may not be able to continue it for even one period, you must make such a big effort. Maybe what you can do, though, for the next five days is to extend this feeling for each period, or to prepare for this *shikan taza*. And this preparation or extension of the practice to another period of time eventually will be extended to everyday life.

How you extend our practice is to expose yourself as you are. You shouldn't try to be someone else. You should be very honest with yourself and express yourself fully. And you should be brave enough to express yourself. Whatever people may say, you know, it is alright. You should be just yourself, at least for your teacher. Until your teacher says, "OK, you should continue your practice in this way," you should try hard. And after your teacher says, "OK, now you should continue that practice forever, you don't need me anymore," that is actual practice, the actual life of you. This is rather difficult to do unless you trust your teacher. But if you find out that your teacher's spirit is the same as your spirit, then you will be brave enough to continue this kind of practice.

Sometimes you have to argue with your teacher. That is OK--you should do that. But you should be ready to give up your argument when you are wrong, when you find yourself foolishly sticking to only one viewpoint, or when you are making some excuse. That is how to be honest with yourself. You should give up--"I surrender, OK, I'm sorry." If you cannot accept what he said, you should try to understand your teacher until you can accept him. What we should do, for the teacher and for you, is try to have perfect communication. So for a teacher the important point is to be always ready to surrender to your disciple. If a teacher thinks he was wrong, he should say, "Oh, you are right, I was wrong." If your teacher has that kind of spirit, you should, too.

You may think that is easy, but it is not so easy. If you continue this kind of practice, sometimes people think, "He is crazy. Something is wrong with him." But it doesn't matter. We are not the same, you know. Each one of us is different from the others, each one has each one's own problem. So it is OK. Anyway, you should be yourself. Fortunately, you have Zen Center here. Zen Center is not an umbrella which will shade or protect you from the outside. But here you can have real practice--you can express yourself fully.

And you should open your eyes to appreciate others' practice, too. You should be able to communicate with each other without words. Your eyes should be open to see others' practice. This doesn't mean to criticize others, but to appreciate or know others. That is why we have rules and rituals.

You may say, if you are practicing zazen, no one knows, no one understands your practice. But when you are practicing, for me it is the easiest chance to understand you. Especially if I see you from behind, it is very easy to understand what kind of practice you have. That is why I walk around--not to hit you, but to see you. This is very interesting. If you are dancing or talking or making a big noise, it is rather difficult to understand you. But if you are reciting a sutra, each one has each one's own voice, and the way each of you recite the sutra is different from the others.

And it is easy to know each other, even though you are not trying to understand. If you practice together, eventually, naturally you will be good friends, because you know each other. You know too well, so you have difficulty because of your small mind. But as

long as your mind is big enough to expose yourself and to accept others, you will practice zazen or rituals together, then you will be good friends. To know your friend is to know something beyond yourself, beyond even your friend.

Another point that I already made is that we are free from an idea of time. You shouldn't try to be ordained, or worry how long you should stay a layman; or if you become a priest, you shouldn't worry about what your next step will be. When you are a lay student, without expecting to be something, you should be honest with yourself. When you try to be someone else, you lose your practice and you lose your virtue. But when you are faithful to your position, the true being of you is there. This is a very important point.

Zen Center is a community. Even though we do not call them "members," those who come and sit are also our members. When they come to Zen Center for the first time, it may be difficult for them to know what we are doing. But more and more they will feel what we are doing and join our practice. So those who know, who are practicing our way, should give them some idea or feeling of practice. The best way to give the feeling of practice is for each one of us to have our feeling fully--then naturally people who come will have a good feeling. But if our practice is wrong, what they will feel is something completely different from the proper feeling a Buddhist must have. Why wrong feeling is created is because we are involved in selfish practice.

Suzuki Roshi's ashes site at Tassajara



I said, "Don't have any idea of time." Why I say so is that if you are involved in an idea of time, today, or next year, or tomorrow, selfish practice will start from there. It is alright to have an idea of time when it is an extended form of non-selfish practice on this moment. This is to express ourselves. We don't know what will happen on each moment, so if you fail to express yourself fully, then you will regret it later. Because you expect some other time, you fail to express yourself fully, and you are misunderstood by your friend. So you should always express yourself fully.

That is why we eat in a certain way. You may think that you cannot express yourself eating in that way, but it is not so. Because you have a way to serve the food, you can express yourself, express how much sincerity you have. If there is no certain way, if you have many ways of expressing yourself, you don't know how to do it. But if you know how to do it, you can express yourself in that way.

It is a big mistake to think that the best way to express yourself is to do whatever you want to do, that you may do exactly as you feel with superficial feeling, just choosing some way when you don't know what to do. This is not expressing yourself. If you know what to do exactly, and you do it, then you can express yourself fully. In that way, doing the same thing, a strong person expresses himself in a very strong way, and a kind person will express himself very kindly.

When you pass the sutra cards from this end to the other end of the row, each one passes them in each one's own way. So if I see it, it is easy to see, because they do it the same way. If they do it in different ways, it is very difficult to know. Because all of you are doing it in the same way, from this corner of the room to the other, it is easy to see. And because you repeat the same thing over and over again, you can all understand your friends' ways, eventually. Even if your eyes are shut, you know, "Oh, that was so-and-so." That is an advantage of having rules and rituals.

Without this kind of understanding, your understanding of, or your relationship with, people will be very superficial. If someone wears a beautiful robe, you'll think he is very kind to you. If she thinks a beautiful thought, you think she is a good person. That kind of understanding is not good understanding. It is very superficial.

Usually the system of our society is built up in some superficial, frivolous way, always changing. The controlling power is money, or some big noise, That is the controlling power because our eyes and ears are not open, not subtle enough to see things, and our feeling is very dull. Most people who visit Zen Center may feel Zen Center is a very strange place. "They do not talk so much, they do not even laugh. What are they doing?" But actually, we can communicate without talking so much. We are not always smiling or talking, but we can feel others' feelings, and our mind is always open, and we are behaving exactly, expressing ourselves fully. Actually, you know, even when you are not trying to express yourself, you are expressing yourself anyway. If your mind is open, you can see. It's just that those who are accustomed to big noise cannot see anything here--that's all.

We should extend this kind of practice to city life, and we must have more friends, so that all of us can be good friends with each other. It is not difficult when you decide to

be honest with yourself and to express yourself fully, without expecting anything. Just to be yourself and to be ready to understand others is how you extend our practice to everyday life.

But it is not so easy to be free from selfish practice. So even if only for one hour a day, you should try to sit *shikan taza*, without moving, without expecting anything, as if you are in your last minute. Moment after moment you feel your last minute. In each inhaling and in each exhaling there are countless units of time, and you should live in each unit of time.

And you should breathe smoothly--exhaling first, and then inhaling. Calmness of your mind is beyond the end of your exhalation. If you exhale in that way, smoothly, without even trying to exhale, you are entering into the complete perfect calmness of your mind. Then naturally your inhaling will start from there. All your blood will be cleaned and that fresh blood will carry everything from outside to pervade and refresh your body. You are completely refreshed. Then you will start to exhale, to extend that fresh feeling to the emptiness. In this way, moment after moment, without trying to do anything, you continue *shikan taza*.

Complete *shikan taza* may be difficult because of the pain in your legs. But even though you have pain in your legs, you can do it. Even though your practice is not good enough, you can do it. So with your exhaling, you will gradually vanish, gradually fade into the emptiness. And inhaling will naturally bring you back to yourself with some color or form. And again, with your exhaling you gradually fade into emptiness--empty, white paper. That is *shikan taza*.

I'm just explaining the feeling of *shikan taza*. The important point of *shikan taza* is in your exhaling. Instead of trying to feel yourself, try to fade in emptiness when you exhale. When you have this practice in your last moment, you have nothing to be afraid of. You are actually aiming at emptiness, the empty area. There is no other way for you to have a feeling of immortality. You become one with everything after you completely exhale with this feeling. If you are still alive, naturally you will inhale again. "Oh, I'm still alive! Fortunately or unfortunately!" So then you start to exhale, and try to fade into emptiness. Maybe you don't know what kind of feeling it is. But some of you know it. By some chance you must have felt this kind of feeling.

When you have this practice, you cannot be angry so easily. Because you are interested in inhaling more than exhaling, you become angry quite easily. You are trying to be alive always, you know. The other day, my friend had a heart attack, and all he could do was exhale--he couldn't inhale. That was a terrible feeling, he said. But if he could have tried to exhale at that moment as we exhale, aiming for emptiness, then I think he wouldn't have felt so bad. The great joy for us is exhaling, rather than inhaling. He tried to take another inhalation, and he thought he couldn't inhale anymore. But if he could have tried to exhale as we do, then I think he could have taken another inhalation more easily.

So exhaling is very important for us. To die is more important than to try to be alive. We always try to be alive, so we have trouble. Instead of trying to be alive or active, if

we try to be calmer, and die or fade away into emptiness, then naturally we will be taken care of. Buddha will take care of us. Because we lose mother's bosom, we are not her children anymore. If we feel for the emptiness as we feel for our mother's bosom, then mother will take care of us. Moment after moment, you shouldn't lose this kind of practice as you practice *shikan taza*.

Various secrets of religious practice are included in this point. When people say, "Namu Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu," they want to be Amida Buddha's children. That is how they repeat Amida Buddha's name in their practice. The same thing is true with our zazen practice. Zazen practice is not different from their practice. If you know how to practice *shikan taza*, and if they know how to repeat Amida Buddha's name, it cannot be different, as long as their practice is Buddhism. As Buddhists, we have the same practice in different ways.

So we can enjoy, we are free. We feel free to express ourselves, because we are ready to fade into emptiness. If you are trying to be active and special and trying to do something, you cannot express yourself. Small self will be expressed, but big self will not appear from the emptiness. From the emptiness, only great self appears. That is *shikan taza*, OK? It's not so difficult if you try, if you really try.

Thank you very much.



*Bodhidharma in
City Center Courtyard.*