

The Stupid Way

Gudo Nishijima's Zazen Retreat Talks



Gudo Nishijima held a 3-day English language Zazen Retreat at Tokei-in temple in Shizuoka city, Japan around the beginning of September each year for about 25 years until he retired in 2003. Nishijima Roshi gave four lectures during each retreat. Each lecture was followed by a period of questions and answers. This collection contains four talks transcribed from the 1995 and 1996 retreats.

Talk 1

Nishijima talks about his fundamental ideas about Buddhism, and the relationship between religion and western philosophy.

Talk 2

Nishijima outlines the life of Master Dogen, a 13th century Buddhist priest and philosopher, and discusses four main principles of Master Dogen's most famous book, Shobogenzo. The four principles are: 1. The will to the truth; 2. The existence of the rule of cause and effect; 3. The instantaneousness of this world; 4. Zazen.

Talk 3

Nishijima describes the origins of various Buddhist sects in Japan and compares the two main sects that practice Zazen - the Rinzai sect and the Soto sect.

Talk 4

The last lecture is an open discussion between Gudo Nishijima and the retreat participants during which he answers various questions about Buddhism.

Lecture 1

Zazen Retreat 1995

(Nishijima Roshi talks about his fundamental ideas about Buddhism and civilization today. He discusses the relationship between religion and western philosophical thought, and how Buddhist theory can solve the contradictory situation between idealistic and materialistic thoughts.)

After thousands of years the world is becoming one civilization. In this situation, western civilization, western thoughts, are governing the world. So I would like to reflect, in short, on the historical situation of western thoughts, which is very much related with Buddhism today.

In western thought in the Greek age, there was a very famous philosopher called Plato. He insisted that our mental function is reality, idea is reality. He thought that matter which is different from ideas is not reality. Relying upon this theory, he established a very large philosophical system which is called idealism. Plato's theory had a very strong influence on western thought, because relying upon idealistic philosophy people revered mind, spirit, the intellectual function, and intelligent ability very much. Relying upon this reverence of the mental function, western civilization was established.

At the end of the Roman empire this idealistic philosophy met with Christianity, and Christianity utilized the idealistic philosophy of Plato to confirm Christian belief. The philosophy of another famous philosopher, Aristotle, a student of Plato, was also utilized to base Christianity. Both Plato's philosophy and Aristotle's philosophy were very powerful for encouraging Christianity. And in the mediaeval ages in Europe, Christianity was extremely powerful. People usually revered mind, spirit, belief, God, meditation, and prayer. Consequently, western society in the mediaeval ages was governed by spiritual tendencies.

But in the thirteenth century, there was a movement which is called the Renaissance. "Renaissance" means re-born, and re-born indicates the rebirth of Greek civilization or Roman civilization. In the Renaissance, people found out that the earth is moving around the sun. This idea was opposite to the idea insisted on by Christianity. Therefore, the Christian church wanted to stop this new idea. However, it could not do so, because a fact is a fact, and the new theory that the earth is moving around the sun had come from scientific data, scientific facts. After the Renaissance, European civilization entered into the scientific age. People revered matter, people revered facts, people revered the physical body. In the modern age this tendency was promoted more and more, and at the end of the nineteenth century this materialistic tendency arrived at its culmination.

Now even in the twentieth century, we have broken religious belief through scientific knowledge. But nonetheless, scientific knowledge cannot save human beings. In the mediaeval ages people thought that religions saved people, and in the modern age people thought that science would save people. But both

are not sufficient to save human beings, because due to the excellent technology of modern science we have produced nuclear weapons, and nuclear weapons are extremely powerful. If any country uses them, there may be a disastrous situation on the earth.

So now we are living in the age when religion is not so powerful, and where scientific knowledge cannot save people. In this situation, we can find some tendency which is based on the oneness between mind and body. Recently in scientific theory many scholars insist that mind and body are not separate, they are only one. Thinking about this situation, I usually think about an age two thousand five hundred years ago. At that time in India, there was a religious person or philosopher called Gautama Buddha. Gautama Buddha also insisted that, this world is only one, the universe is only one. In Sanskrit, this is called "Dharma". Recognizing only one Dharma, he also thought that body and mind are one. Body is one face of the universe. Mind is another face of the universe. Relying upon this theory he established Buddhism, and he insisted that we practice Zazen to get oneness between body and mind. Of course, originally body and mind are one, however, in our thoughts we usually think mind and body are separate. But Gautama Buddha insisted body and mind are one, and he recommended us to practice Zazen to recognize the oneness between body and mind.

I have studied Buddhism a rather long time and I noticed that the Buddhist insistence is related with the autonomic nervous system in our body, so I usually explain the relationship between religion and science and Buddhism relying upon a theory about the autonomic nervous system. The autonomic nervous system has two systems, one is the sympathetic nervous system, the other is the parasympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system is related to the human mind, the parasympathetic nervous system is related with the physical body.

Regarding the relationship between the two nervous systems, when the sympathetic nervous system is stronger than the parasympathetic nervous system, people are prone to be spiritual. Therefore, there are many people who like to be spiritual, especially, religious people. Religious people insist that the spiritual state is important, so they hate the physical body and revere a symbol of spirit like God, and their aim is to be spiritual. However, that situation is related with the stronger sympathetic nervous system in human beings.

Against the spiritual attitude, human beings have another attitude, that is to be comfortable, to enjoy physical stimuli. When the parasympathetic nervous system is stronger than the sympathetic nervous system, people are prone to be like this. In this case, people pursue only physical pleasure, physical enjoyment, and they dislike the spiritual situation, they dislike religions and they laugh at meditation and so forth. In western societies, these two tendencies have been contradictory for many years.

This same situation existed even in ancient India. When Gautama Buddha was born there was a very spiritual religion called “Brahmanism”. Brahmanism believed that this world was produced by God, and that people have some kind of spirit and should identify their spirit with God. Brahmanism also hated the physical side. But there was also another tendency when Gautama Buddha lived which was called “The Six Thinkers”, and The Six Thinkers usually believed in materialism.

So in the age when Gautama Buddha lived there were also two tendencies, one was very spiritual and the other was very materialistic. Therefore Gautama Buddha made his efforts to solve the contradictory situation of these two tendencies, and he found a new religion or a new philosophy which is called Buddhism. He practiced Zazen and he recognized Dharma. Dharma is something which exists. Relying upon Dharma, he could not rely upon only spirit or only matter. According to his idea, spirit and matter are one. Therefore if we rely upon only one of either spirit and matter, the theory we rely upon must be wrong. Relying upon this situation he established his philosophy based on the practice of Zazen. Practicing Zazen is a kind of action. He established a new philosophy which is based on action itself. Relying upon this philosophy, he insisted that action exists only at the present moment. So to have right action at the present moment is the most valuable matter in our life. Therefore, Buddhism insists the importance of morals or ethics. So Buddhism is different from the usual philosophies, idealism or materialism.

But as I said, since the end of the nineteenth century human civilization has been suffering from the contradictory situation between idealistic thoughts or religion, and materialistic thoughts or science. Our civilizations are separated between religion and science. Without solving this contradictory situation we will be unable to find a peaceful situation. Thinking about this situation, I usually remember the existence of Buddhist thoughts. Relying upon oneness between body and mind we can establish a new philosophy in this world today. And relying upon that new philosophy we can harmonize religions and science, and we can find a harmonized new life on the earth.

That is what I think about Buddhism. I think relying upon Buddhist theory we can expect a new civilization, a new age, which is very peaceful and very organized.

Are there any questions?

Q. I think the word “Renaissance” means “to be born again”. People in the renaissance time felt that they were returning to something.

A. “Re-born” suggests the re-birth of Greek and Roman civilization, humanistic civilization.

Q. It's difficult to imagine what people believed in those times. Although we can read in history books that people in mediaeval ages were spiritual, it's difficult to imagine exactly how spiritual they were.

A. I think the situation comes from the human physical condition, especially from the condition of the autonomic nervous system. People like physical pleasure, but sometimes they hate physical pleasure and want to be spiritual. This kind of wobbling between physical pleasure and spiritual feelings shapes human civilization I think. Human beings originally have this tendency. They want to be very spiritual, but sometimes they are very physical. This wobbling is the pain in human life. So to solve that situation, Buddhism occurred. If the two factors, spirituality and physical pleasure, are balanced we do not go to the right side, and we do not go to the left side. But human civilization has a strange wobbling from right to left, from left to right. However, relying upon Buddhist philosophy we can notice that to maintain the central point is right. Buddhism's insistence is, just to maintain ourselves at the middle way is best, it is the criterion. However, people with a religious tendency dislike this middle way. They want to be spiritual so they insist on the importance of being spiritual. But human beings also have another tendency, so even though they want to be spiritual, sometimes they come back to the physical side. Therefore they are sometimes spiritual, sometimes physical, and such wobbling is human civilization. To stop this kind of wobbling, Buddhism insists that the criteria exists at the center.

Q. In the everyday situation, when we're at one extreme our ideas seem very real or our problems seem very real, and when we're at the other extreme the physical world seems very real. But when we're in the middle it's as if everything disappears.

A. Yes, it's true.

Q. It's rather subtle. I don't know how to put it into words, but when we're in the balanced state it's as if the problems which we had before can't be found anywhere.

A. Yes, it's true. Gautama Buddha recommended this situation to us.

Q. And do you think when societies become balanced, what we see as problems now will not exist as problems?

A. Yes, I think so.

Q. The situation doesn't change?

A. So for example, wars occur because of thoughts. In Eastern Europe there is a war, but if they rely upon the middle way they will feel that it is not necessary to shoot guns. However, without recognizing the real situation as it is, their thoughts make them shoot guns.

Q. The religious cult Aum Shinrikyo has a gift shop. When I pass by I always notice that they sell T-shirts, most of which are written in English. Some of them say things like quotes about the middle way, or things that are quoted directly from Gautama Buddha or sound very much like some of the things that you say. How do you think something like that which is very true or right, becomes so wrong.

A. Regarding that problem, we should recognize the two areas. One is the intellectual area, the other is the real area. For example, the phrase “middle way” is words, “middle way” is an idea. So we can think about the middle way, but to maintain the middle way is different, to maintain the middle way is fact, not idea, not words. So without any image, without any words, we can maintain the middle way in the real area. When we think about Buddhism, it is very important to recognize two areas, one is the intellectual area and the other is the practical area. Aum Shinrikyo sells T-shirts on which they write “the middle way”, but these words are only an idea. To wear such a shirt does not mean to be at the middle way.

Q. So you need both the philosophy and the action?

A. Yes, so we have to study Buddhist philosophy. Buddhist philosophy clearly divides the area of intellect and area of reality.

Q. It seems the way we go wrong is by just having the idea but not actually putting the idea into action.

A. Yes, that’s true. Idealism and materialism belong to the area of intellect, but reality exists as it is. It’s different from ideas. This fact is very important. Reality is sometimes called action, and action exists at the present moment. So, we should study action, we should study the present moment, relying upon practice. And one kind of practice is Zazen. And, for example, tennis or sports is another kind of practice. So to do something is Buddhist philosophy. We usually worry about many matters, but worrying about things does not have any value. To do something to solve the problem, that is the only solution which can exist on the earth.

Q. When we do something, when we act, do we need to have any idea what we are going to do?

A. Yes. Before acting we need an idea, but at the present moment when we are acting there is no idea. There is just action. And Gautama Buddha suggests this fact.

Q. Ideas, for instance, of a religious organization urge us to do something, and for instance, sports psychology may direct us to do something else. They are both ideas. What kind of ideas do we need in order to act ?

A. We need intuition, not thoughts but intuition. When our autonomic nervous system is balanced intuition takes effect. Intuition is called “Prajna” in Sanskrit. “Pra” means before, “jna” means to know, or knowledge. So Prajna means “before knowledge”. This is intuition, and Buddhism esteems the value of intuition very much. Therefore Buddhism insists that we should be balanced at every moment.

Q. How is a person to recognize intuition from any other thought that might cross their mind in a very subtle way?

A. As Buddhism says, it is impossible for us to notice the balanced state. So to act is the only method. To practice Zazen is one way, and even though we practice Zazen we cannot recognize whether we are balanced or not. So we have to rely upon action. It is a rather strange situation. Because people have a strong reverence of the intellect, we believe everything can be noticed. But, in fact, this kind of balanced state cannot be recognized. Buddhism believes in the existence of the balanced state, but the balanced state cannot be recognized because at that time we are just acting. In action there are no thoughts.

So Buddhist philosophy is a rather strange philosophy, a rare philosophy. But I think day by day, the two fundamental philosophies, idealism and materialism, are moving towards this strange philosophy. Spiritual thought and materialistic thought are moving towards the one point. That is the middle way, action.

Q. Are you saying that materialism and idealism are part of it?

A. Yes, those two philosophies are going to the same destiny, and the destiny which they are going towards is different from idealism and different from materialism. Therefore I expect human beings will find only one criterion in the future.

Q. We’re normally quite used to doing something, following some aim, then when we do it we want some kind of confirmation that we got nearer to our aim. You say we can’t tell when we’re balanced, so we act blindly, and when we act blindly without intention we may be balanced. How can we get something from that to believe? Where does belief come from?

A. For example, by practicing Zazen we can notice something exists or the existence of this world.

Q. So we notice something, and that something which we notice we start to believe in it?

A. It is not notice, but the state of balance. Keeping the state of balance we can have criteria.

Q. And those criteria, we notice them and we accept them and believe them?

A. It is based on belief. Believing in Buddhism we get that idea. Without belief it is impossible to insist that the middle way is criteria.

Q. Normally, in spiritual religions the word belief means something very strange and mystical. I feel in Buddhism belief is actually quite a simple thing.

A. Yes, the belief in reality. Whether it is called belief or not is the problem.

Q. Like when someone said earlier that after ten years playing tennis in the sun they are sure that the sun is hotter, I felt, ah, that's kind of belief based on experience. So is that the kind of belief that Buddhism talks about?

A. Yes.

Q. Very simple, something based on experience which we say must be true?

A. Yes.

Q. That's very different to spiritual belief.

A. Yes, very different. So I think spiritual people feel very strange when they listen to Buddhist theory. Therefore, I think the relationship between the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system is very important. There are three kind of thoughts, one is spiritualism, one is materialism, one is Buddhism. Which of these three thoughts we prefer is the problem.

Q. So Buddhism is kind of to bring the extreme sides together?

A. It is to avoid the extreme sides.

Q. You said quite often recently that Buddhism is not a religion. I guess you mean that it's so far away from spiritual belief, that it's in a completely different area and you use the word "philosophy". I also feel that Buddhism has some kind of a part of science, because we're experiencing something, we're noticing something, and that procedure is also part of the scientist's.

A. Yes, I think so. Buddhism is rather inclusive. It includes both sides, not only one side. And this attitude is very important. But people usually do not like this attitude, because it seems too compromising and too boring. People sometimes like to be extremely spiritual, and people sometimes like to be extremely materialistic.

Q. I think you have to invent a new word for Buddhism because you can't call it religion, and if you call it philosophy I feel something is missing.

A. So to select the word is rather difficult.

Q. Buddhism has some kind of psychology, philosophy, and science altogether.

A. In my English translation of Master Nagarjuna's book *Mulamadhyamakakarika* I used the word "conviction". But I do not know if "conviction" is an adequate word or not. In the Japanese translation it's "shinko naiyou", "contents of belief".

Q. Is the contents of belief in Buddhism what is in front of us?

A. Yes, and *Mulamadhyamakakarika* clearly suggests four things. First is reason, second is the external world, third is the present moment, and fourth is reality. I was rather surprised when I was reading those lines. Master Nagarjuna insists that the contents of belief are four things or matters. And he insists that there is no fifth.

Q. There's nothing else other than those four?

A. He believed there were four things or matters. His insistence is very strong and very clear.

Q. If many people understand Buddhist theory, I guess it must be necessary for them to be conscious of when they're too materialistic or too spiritual?

A. To avoid the too extremes is very important.

Q. So they need some kind of consciousness or awareness?

A. When we are acting, I wonder whether we can recognize consciousness or not? I do not insist the value of consciousness or mindfulness and so forth. In action, it is rather difficult for me to find consciousness. Just that we are doing something, like sports.

Q. Although we're just doing something, we need something to tell us?

A. We have words, we have intellect, we have reason. Therefore Master Nagarjuna suggests, first reason.

Q. Yes. But it's amazing, the world for so long has tried many different ways to explain what reality is, and we usually believe the explanation. You said for instance, that in the middle ages the world was very spiritual because people believed the words or the talk. So I suppose in modern times if the words describe reality, people will believe them. In that way, Buddhist theory and the theory of, for instance, acting in sports, or acting in business are the same thing, aren't they?

A. Regarding that point, there is a difference in the area. We can say that the mediaeval ages were the age of mind, and that the modern age is the age of matter. Mind and matter belong to our intellect. But action is a different area. So to get out of the area of intellect is to enter into the area of action. This is a very important point, and the difficulty of Buddhism comes from this situation.

Q. In which area are the words?

A. Words exist in the area of mind.

Q. So the theory is in the area of the mind?

A. Yes, I think so.

Q. And it tells us to get out of the area of the mind?

A. Yes, and to get out of the area of the mind, to act is the point.

I think Buddhist philosophy has a very interesting point. But, unfortunately, people do not recognize this interesting point yet.

Q. I think people will, because it's describing what people can experience for themselves. I guess the problem is finding the way to explain.

A. I think the situation is very clear if we explain it on the basis of Buddhism. But, it is very difficult for people to notice the existence of two areas, the area of intellect and the area of reality. To find the area of reality, action is the best way. Therefore the practice of *Zazen* and playing sports will be important in the next age.

So I think the existence of the two books, *Shobogenzo* and *Mulamadhyamakakarika* is very important. Without those two books I could never understand Buddhism. And the reason why I could understand the *Mulamadhyamakakarika* is because I have read the *Shobogenzo*. Without reading *Shobogenzo* I could never understand *Mulamadhyamakakarika*. For example, in *Mulamadhyamakakarika* Nagarjuna insists that the 4 convictions are, reason, the external world, the present moment, and reality. But if I did not understand the meaning of the *Shobogenzo*, I could never understand the meaning of these 4 convictions.

Q. So you feel Buddhist philosophy will spread more and more throughout the world?

A. I think that world civilization is becoming only one. Previously, there was a contradictory situation or conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, but it was solved. Therefore, I think the whole world is going towards the one aim. The so-called "G-7" are going towards the

common aim in world history. Because of this situation I am rather optimistic about the future of the world.

Q. In your thinking, the G-7 and everything is working for religion.

A. They believe in something, and I think we can call it “humanism”. And that direction is similar to the Buddhist movement I think.

Q. So you feel that even governments and so on are moving forward in the direction of unifying?

A. Yes, they have not found the clear image of their aim, but they are going towards the same aim. It is not so clear, but they are pursuing the common aim. That is the situation today.

If they notice the Buddhist principle or Buddhist theory and if they accept it, I think the situation in the world will become much more peaceful and much more harmonized. Also, I expect there may be a very strong power that will govern the whole world. Without such a power we can never keep the perfect peace. That is my very pessimistic idea. Just an idea can never govern the world, only power can govern the world. Power and the truth, those two govern the world.

Therefore I want to explain the truth. I expect the existence of a very strong power on the earth. However, the world is rather far from having the clear idea. Therefore it is very important to explain the Buddhist principle. Relying upon the Buddhist principle people can cooperate for the same aim. Without the principle, people go in miscellaneous directions, and there is no cooperation. In that kind of situation there is only confusion.

So the existence of the G-7 and the existence of the United Nations, makes me optimistic. And the ending of the cold war and beginning of cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union made me very optimistic. Before that time I was very pessimistic. I thought that it was impossible for us to avoid a third world war, and because the United States and the Soviet Union hold nuclear weapons, I believed there was a possibility that the world would be almost completely destroyed. But the avoidance of that war occurred in human history, so I think that human beings are not so stupid. That is the reason why I am so optimistic.

Q. Stupid, but not so stupid?

A. Yes, sometimes stupid, but not so stupid.

Shall we finish here. Thank you very much.

Lecture 2

Zazen Retreat 1996

(Nishijima Roshi outlines the life of Master Dogen, the 13th century Buddhist priest and philosopher and discusses the four main principles of Master Dogen's most famous book, the Shobogenzo.)

Master Dogen was born in Japan in the year 1200 and died in 1253. At the time Master Dogen was born, Japanese society was in an extremely unsettled period. This was because the warrior classes had just obtained political power to govern Japan from the emperor's government. Before that time, Japanese people believed that Japan should be governed only by the imperial family. But in 1192, the head of the warrior classes, Yoritomo Minamoto, obtained complete power to govern Japan. Consequently, Japanese society at that time was very confused, and it was in this period that Master Dogen was born.

Master Dogen's family life was not so joyful. He was the son of a very famous politician who was a minister of the royal court. Master Dogen, however, could not live with his father. This was because his mother was not the first lady of his father. Instead, Master Dogen lived alone with his mother in a place called Uji, in the suburbs of Kyoto. Furthermore, when he was two years old, his father died and there was a rumour that his father had been killed because of a political problem. Then when he was seven years old, his mother also died. Therefore, as well as having a very lonely childhood, he also lost both his parents when he was very young. In that situation, he had a strong will to find out what is the truth. Thinking about his situation, it is very natural that he wanted to know the truth which is perfectly reliable.

By the time he was twelve years old he had decided to become a Buddhist monk. However, his family did not agree with his idea. So one day Master Dogen left his house secretly at night and went by foot to Enryaku temple on Hiei Mountain. He stayed there as a novice and became a Buddhist monk when he was thirteen years old. He stayed in Enryaku temple for three years. He was very intelligent and therefore very good at understanding Buddhist sutras.

But he had one question in his study of Buddhism. Enryaku temple belongs to the Tendai sect, and in the traditional teaching of the Tendai sect they insisted that human beings are innately excellent and the human body is naturally splendid. Listening to this theory Master Dogen had the following question; If human beings are so innately excellent, why do we have to train ourselves in Buddhism? He asked this question to many of the older Buddhist monks in the temple, but strangely, no Buddhist monk could answer his very simple question.

The reason why no-one at the temple could answer his question comes from the Tendai sect's method of studying Buddhism at that time. The Tendai sect liked to study Buddhism

theoretically, therefore they read many Buddhist sutras and they understood the meaning of each word. So they understood Buddhism theoretically. However, their understanding was not practical. Master Dogen's question, however, was very practical. His question was related with his own life. He wondered, if human being are so excellent as the Tendai sect said, why do we need to train ourselves in Buddhism? His question was very natural, but unfortunately there was no Buddhist monk in the temple who could answer it. Therefore, he went to another temple which was located opposite Enryaku temple. This temple is usually called Mii-dera, and was formally called Onjyoji.

Master Dogen asked the same question to the abbot of Onjyoji. The abbot of Onjyoji could not answer his question either, but he said, "Recently I heard a Buddhist monk called Eizai has come from China and established a temple in Kyoto called Kennin temple. If you visit Master Eizai there is some possibility that you can find an answer to your question."

So Master Dogen went to Kennin temple and met Master Eizai, and at that time Eizai said, "I do not know whether Buddhas in the past, present and future exist, but I know cats and white oxen exist.". This reply struck Master Dogen because Master Eizai's answer was so concrete, so practical, and Master Dogen noticed that Buddhist teaching is very practical, very concrete, very realistic. Then he moved to Kennin temple and studied Buddhism and especially the practice of Zazen for nine years.

Kennin temple belonged to the Rinzai sect, therefore in the temple they wanted to attain the so-called "enlightenment". In the Rinzai sect they think that there is a so-called "enlightenment" which is different from the state in Zazen, and is reached after practicing Zazen for a long time. Therefore they practice Zazen to obtain this so-called "enlightenment". Master Dogen also followed the same training, but after nine years he could not obtain the so-called "enlightenment". The temple master at that time, called Myozen, also had the same experience, and wanted to go to China to study Buddhism further. So Master Dogen followed the temple master and they went to China to study Buddhism more.

For the first two years in China Master Dogen visited many Chinese temples, but those temples all belonged to the Rinzai sect so the training in those temples was almost the same as the training at Kennin temple. Master Dogen was a little disappointed and wanted to return to Japan. Just at that time however, he met an old Buddhist monk who said, "recently Master Tendo Nyojo succeeded to the position of master at the Tendo Keitoku temple, and Master Tendo Nyojo is a very excellent Buddhist monk, so it is better for you to visit him."

Master Dogen had lived in Keitoku temple once before, but after hearing that information he went to Keitoku temple again and met Master Tendo Nyojo. When they met, Master Tendo Nyojo felt that the young monk from the south-east island called Japan had excellent ability to pursue the truth. Master Dogen also felt that this master may be the master which he had been looking for for such a long time. So Master Dogen stayed at Keitoku temple and studied under Master Tendo Nyojo for two years.

Under Master Tendo Nyojo the most important teaching was that to practice Zazen is getting rid of body and mind. These words suggest that the practice of Zazen is forgetting consciousness of body and mind. We are just sitting in Zazen. Therefore, in that situation we just act. In other words, the practice of Zazen is just action. So getting rid of body and mind suggests, forgetting consciousness of mind, forgetting consciousness of body, and just sitting. This is the practice of Zazen.

This teaching was very important for Master Dogen. When he was in Japan he practiced Zazen for nine years in Kennin temple to obtain an enlightenment which is different from the practice of Zazen, and he studied the same type of practice in China for a further two years. But then Master Tendo Nyojo said, Zazen is just enlightenment, we should not look for anything else other than practicing Zazen. Practicing Zazen is just enlightenment, practicing Zazen is just the truth, practicing Zazen is just Buddhism. Listening to this theory, Master Dogen was very satisfied. Therefore he studied for two more years under Master Tendo Nyojo, and then returned to Japan.

After returning to Japan someone asked him, “what have you brought back with you to Japan?”. Master Dogen said, “I have not brought anything to Japan”, and he added, “if I dare say, I brought soft flexible mind, I brought soft flexible mind. This is the centre of Buddhism.”. So the reason why we practice Zazen is to get the soft flexible mind, and relying upon this teaching Master Dogen established the new Buddhist lineage in Japan.

After returning to Japan, Master Dogen stayed in Kennin temple for a few years, and then moved to the suburbs of Kyoto where he established a small temple and built the first Zazen hall in Japan. There he taught Buddhism to Buddhist monks and lay people. Many people came to the temple to study Buddhism and practice Zazen. He stayed there for about ten years.

But as Master Dogen’s fame spread, Enryaku temple started to become more and more hostile towards him. They hated Master Dogen’s popularity and started to attack his temple. Because of these attacks by Enryaku temple, it was impossible for Master Dogen to stay near Kyoto. At that time, a very powerful sponsor of Master Dogen, called Yoshishige Hatano, recommended him

to move to Fukui prefecture where Eiheiiji temple is now. Master Dogen followed his sponsor's recommendation and he went to Fukui prefecture and established Eiheiiji temple.

He stayed at Eiheiiji temple for ten years to teach his disciples and practice Zazen. But when he was fifty-two years old he felt that he was sick. So he transmitted the position of temple master to his disciple named Kon Eijyo, and came back to Kyoto and died there.

That is an outline of Master Dogen's life.

Master Dogen wrote many books, among them a very famous book entitled *Shobogenzo*. "Sho" means right, "bo" means Dharma, "gen" means eyes, and "zo" means warehouse. Therefore "Shobogenzo" means the warehouse of the right Dharma viewpoint. "Shobogenzo" suggests the practice of Zazen. In Master Dogen's teaching, the main centre is practicing Zazen. He noticed that Buddhism is not only theory, but that Buddhist philosophy emerged from the practice of Zazen, therefore without practicing Zazen there is no true Buddhism. Before Master Dogen there was no true practice of Zazen in Japan, therefore Master Dogen believed that he was the only person to bring true Buddhism to Japan.

Master Dogen was very diligent to spread the practice of Zazen and to hold many lectures. Those lectures were recorded precisely by his disciples, and as a result, we can read his books even today. The book entitled *Shobogenzo* is his main work. In *Shobogenzo* he described Buddhist theory very exactly. Therefore, even though *Shobogenzo* is a rather difficult book, if we read it we can understand Buddhist theory very clearly. So now I would like to explain briefly the main principles of *Shobogenzo*.

The first principle is to establish the will to the truth. He revered this principle very much. In Sanskrit, the will to the truth is written "Boddhichitta". "Bodhi" means truth, "chitta" means mind. We usually translate it as "Bodhi mind". Master Dogen insisted the necessity of establishing the will to the truth. When we begin to study Buddhism we do not know what Buddhism is, but even in that situation we can have the will to the truth. Master Dogen revered this attitude very highly. Without having the will to the truth we can never begin to study Buddhism.

The reason why he insisted the importance of the will to the truth comes from the fact that Buddhism is just to pursue the truth. In human societies there are two fundamental criteria of value; One is fame, and the other is economic profit. We human beings work to achieve these two aims, fame or social position, and economic profit. But Master Dogen noticed that if we make our efforts in studying Buddhism for fame or for profit we can never arrive at the truth, because if we study Buddhism to get fame or to get economic profit, our Buddhist efforts can

never be begun. Master Dogen wrote in *Shobogenzo*, in the chapter entitled *Ju-Undo-Shiki*, “we should know that if we establish the will to the truth our mind to fame and profit disappears suddenly”.

When we study Buddhism it is very important to think about whether we want to get the truth, or, fame or profit. We do not study Buddhism to obtain fame or profit. But, in many cases, people study Buddhism to obtain fame or profit. Therefore, Master Dogen tells us to be careful regarding this point. So, the first principle of Master Dogen is to establish the will to the truth.

The second principle is the rule of cause and effect. In Buddhism we believe in the rule of cause and effect. But in some lineages they take this rule lightly, because they have become a little arrogant in studying Buddhism, and believe that if we acquire excellent Buddhist ability we can transcend the rule of cause and effect. Master Dogen, however, criticized this idea very strongly. He believed that we should maintain the rule of cause and effect throughout our Buddhist life, and even if we become very arrogant we should never lose belief in the rule of cause and effect, because this universe is governed by the rule of cause and effect completely.

Particularly now in the modern age, we have acquired excellent scientific knowledge, and relying upon scientific knowledge there is nothing which is outside the rule of cause and effect. This fact is very important, but many religious people sometimes violate this important rule. They sometimes become too arrogant and believe they have the ability to transcend the rule of cause and effect. But that fact can never exist, we can never live outside the rule of cause and effect. This principle is also a very important principle in Buddhism.

Master Dogen revered the principle of the rule of cause and effect very much. In *Shobogenzo*, he wrote a chapter entitled, *To believe in cause and effect profoundly*. In the chapter he said, “a person who does good goes upward, a person who does bad goes downward. These rules have absolutely no exception”. Therefore, in his idea the rule of cause and effect also relates to human moral behavior. So the rule of cause and effect governs not only the material world, but all of human life is governed by the rule of cause and effect. This principle is very important for thinking about Buddhist theory.

Looking at human societies for 76 years, I have noticed his insistence is very true. Looking at many situations of my friends and acquaintances and looking at the changeable streams of human societies, I notice always the existence of the rule of cause and effect. So even though Buddhism is a kind of philosophy, we should never forget the existence of the rule of cause and effect.

In the third principle, Master Dogen insists, like Master Nagarjuna, that our life is just action at the present moment. This is also the fundamental Buddhist philosophy. In our daily life, if we have made some serious mistake it is impossible for us to go back to the past and correct that wrong behavior. Thinking about this fact, it is clear that we can never live in the past. We usually think that we can remember the past, therefore we can live in the past, but this is wrong. Even though we can remember the past, we can never live in the past really. This is a very clear fact.

Likewise, when we hold a beautiful dream about the future we sometimes have the idea that we can live in the future. But actually, because the future has not arrived at the present, we can never live in the future. Therefore, human beings can never live in the past, and human beings can never live in the future. The time when human beings can live is only the present, and the present is a very short time which is called “moment”.

So the real time human beings can live is only the moment at the present moment. Therefore Master Dogen insisted the third principle, action at the present moment. His expression is “Instantaneousness of this world”. So the idea that our life is just action at the present moment means also, the world where we live is existence at the present moment. So the “World” or “Universe” or “Dharma” is also instantaneous, it is not eternal. It exists at the present moment, now, now, now. Relying upon this idea, he explained that our life is just action at the present moment. This is another very important principle in Buddhism.

The last principle is the practice of Zazen. Buddhism is based on the idea of action at the present moment, but to experience this fact is difficult. When we read Buddhist books it is impossible for us to experience the action or the situation at the present moment. So thinking about this situation, Gautama Buddha established the training of Zazen in ancient India, and relying upon this practice we can experience what action is. Action is the basis of Buddhist philosophy. Relying upon the practice of Zazen, we can experience action itself, we can experience reality itself, we can experience Dharma itself. So the practice of Zazen is the fourth principle of Master Dogen.

Are there any questions?

Q. Would you say that the universe is only now, only happening now? Only action?

A. Yes, that is true.

Q. So, if it's only action now in this present moment, what was the cause and effect? What caused it?

A. Buddhism has the layers of the four philosophies, and in the second philosophy we think of all phenomena on the same basis as science. In that situation, time is a series of past, present and future. In this series of time we can find cause and effect. But action at the present moment belongs to the third philosophy. The third philosophy is based on the present moment, so the principle where the rule of cause and effect works and the principle where action at the present moment works are different.

Q. But the reality is that there is only this moment? I can say, “We just passed one moment and we’re going into another moment” and in this way we store moments up, but they don’t exist?

A. Yes, so according to the Buddhist idea real existence is just at the present moment.

Q. I still can’t understand where cause and effect comes in if there’s only this moment.

A. After the passing of the present moment, when we think about past, present, and future, we can clearly notice the existence of the rule of cause and effect.

Q. That’s when we think about it. But if we didn’t think about it there wouldn’t be any cause and effect? These are the two systems you’re talking about?

A. There is a rather important Buddhist theory regarding this point, which I would like to explain. In western thoughts there is a very serious and difficult problem which hasn’t been solved yet. That is the contradictory situation of human freedom and cause and effect. In western thoughts human freedom is based on idealistic philosophy, and cause and effect is based on materialistic philosophy. So these two philosophies are perfectly contradictory. If we believe in human freedom we can never believe in the existence of cause and effect, and if we believe in cause and effect we can never believe in human freedom. So spiritual people think, “we have freedom, we have the ability to do good and bad”. But materialistic people think, “we are governed by the rule of cause and effect, therefore we do not have any freedom, we do not have the ability to do good or not to do bad”.

These two insistences have been contradictory for thousands of years in western thought, and this contradictory situation hasn’t been solved yet in western philosophy. But in Buddhism, relying upon the instantaneousness of this world, we solve this contradictory problem. I would like to explain the situation using the following simile: Imagine a razor with a very sharp edge. If we put a pearl on the edge of the razor, the edge is so narrow that the pearl will fall down. The pearl will sometimes fall down on the right side, and sometimes fall down on the left side. Human freedom is like this. Sometimes we go to the right side and sometimes to the left.

Because the present moment is so short, relying upon this situation human beings can have freedom. So even though we are governed by cause and effect totally, just at the present moment we can be free. This theory solved the contradiction between the two principles which hadn't been solved for thousands of years. Relying upon this theory, Buddhism solved the problem. So this theory is very important for thinking about human life, for thinking about philosophical problems.

Q. This is how we live now?

A. Yes.

Q. So we live on the razor's edge.

A. We act at the present moment, therefore we can be free.

Q. But that suggests that on the razor's edge we always have a choice which way we go.

A. Yes.

Q. Who is the chooser?

A. The person decides whether to fall to the right side or to the left side. Just at that moment we can decide what we should do. For example, we can steal other people's property or refrain from doing so. That comes from the structure of the present moment. Action exists just at the present moment, therefore we can be free.

Q. So you are saying that I am the actor, doing the action?

A. Yes.

Q. So there are two things happening in duality?

A. In the present moment there is no separation between actor and action.

Q. There is only the perception and action?

A. Yes. There is one simple fact.

Q. So the stealing is the action. If I take something it causes an effect, so I don't touch it?

A. Yes, so the cause and effect is later remembrance or reflection. When we think about the series of past, present and future we can find cause and effect, but just at the present moment

there is the simple fact, and that simple fact exists like the pearl on the edge of the razor. Therefore just at the present moment human beings can have freedom.

Q. If you fall on one side of the razor and steal something from someone, the repercussions of cause and effect are endless.

A. Yes, cause and effect is endless, but just at the present moment we can change it. Therefore, human action is extremely valuable.

Q. There's no problem in the present?

A. Yes, to do something, to work something, that is our life. It is not necessary to worry about anything.

Q. To worry is the cause and effect?

A. Worry is a mental function, the movement of brain cells.

Q. If I'm acting with pure freedom in the present moment, does that mean that that action is not caused?

A. We can cut the cause at the present moment by action.

Q. So that action is not the effect of a cause?

A. We can become free at the present moment.

Q. If I do that and then later I reflect on it?

A. After the fact, when we reflect on the situation we have to notice that we are governed by the rule of cause and effect.

Q. So then it appears later. It appears that my action was a caused effect?

A. Yes, the existence of the rule of cause and effect comes from the reflection of scientific research.

Q. So even though it appears that my action was caused, it's not really true?

A. Our present is also influenced by the past, but at the same time, at the present moment we have the choice of what we do, and we can choose some preference. But afterwards, if we think about the fact, it is unavoidable that we notice the existence of the rule of cause and effect. At

the present moment we can be free, but thinking about the fact in terms of the past, present and future, it is necessary for us to notice the existence of cause and effect.

Q. The cause and effect is not really a determined process, but even though we act with freedom, later when we look at it the cause and effect all works out. It works into the system of cause and effect, although at that moment we were free?

A. In Buddhism we use four kinds of philosophies. One is the philosophy which is based on mind, this is called idealistic philosophy. The second is the philosophy which is based on matter, this is called materialistic philosophy. However, Buddhist philosophy is a philosophy which is based on action, so Buddhist philosophy is different from idealistic philosophy and materialistic philosophy.

In our civilized situation we have only two fundamental philosophies, one is idealism and the other is materialism. But Buddhism insists that we are living in reality, we are not living in ideas or sense perception. So relying upon the fact that we are living in reality, Buddhism established the third philosophy. The third philosophy is the philosophy of action. So even though Buddhism was established two thousand five hundred years ago, Buddhism is a rather new philosophy in the world today.

Q. We live in ideology. It appears that any decision we make about the future is based on the past, so we are carrying the past forward all the time and always getting it wrong?

A. We are living with a large amount of miscellaneous ideas, but those ideas are a kind of dream, they are like bubbles. If we blow them away there is nothing, and then we can find reality. It is necessary for us to find reality, but nowadays our brain is full of miscellaneous ideas. That is the problem.

Q. Can we say that the past is actually the future?

A. The future does not appear. We have no ability to touch the future. What we can touch is just the present, just action. For that reason, to think about the future is not so important. But many people worry about the future, for example, if there is a big earthquake what should we do, etc.. This kind of worrying is unnecessary, just to live at the present moment, that is human life.

Q. But living in the present moment means thinking about the future.

A. I don't think so.

Q. I notice that you sometimes say things about a day which didn't come yet, next week or next year, or for instance you say the world is going towards the one point.

A. The future is always undecided so to live at the present is our life.

Q. So living at the present is accepting that we think about the future?

A. I think the present moment is too busy to think about the future. We are occupied by the present moment.

Q. When you talk about your philosophical system, I don't think that you mean to say so but sometimes you give the impression that we should deny what's in front of our eyes. You don't mean to say that, do you?

A. According to Buddhism, to look at what is in front of us exactly is the most important point.

Q. So if the person in front of us is talking about, for instance, what we are going to do this afternoon?

A. The talking is at the present moment but the object which is being discussed belongs to the future. Talking is at the present moment.

Q. Regarding freedom, you said that at the present moment we are free because we can choose our action. But because of the relationship of cause and effect, what I did yesterday has a consequence today. That means in fact, that even if I am free in the present moment I am not free in the long term, because what I did in the past has a consequence now.

A. Yes that's true. So we are born in some country, and we are brought up by parents and these facts in the past influenced us. That is true. But just at the present moment we can select what we should do.

Q. Previously, you said that thought and action are different. Sometimes I understand this because we can say. "oh I will do this, and I will do that", but we never do. So it does seem they are different.

A. The situation is like this: I place a stick on the table, and I think about whether I will pick it up or not. That is thinking. But, (picking up the stick) this is action. So that is the difference. People sometimes think that to worry about whether or not to pick up the stick is the fact, is reality, but it is not reality.

Q. But we have to think about it before acting, before acting we have the thought, “I will pick up the stick”.

A. That is the tendency or principle in western thoughts. Since the Greek age when idealistic philosophy was established by Plato, people have revered thoughts very much. Therefore, thought is very powerful in the western tradition. But Buddhism thinks that to think about whether to pick up the stick or not is not so important. Whether we do the action or not is life. That is the Buddhist idea.

Q. Once you said these things like thoughts or planning or thinking are a tool, we use them as a tool, we utilize them before we make the decision or do the action. So they’re just a tool.

A. Yes, like a map or trip guide.

Q. When you were talking about earthquakes, did you mean we’re not supposed to worry about it like, “oh, what am I going to do, what am I going to do”, but in the present moment we can only do what we can do, so if we need to save water we save water, if we need to get an emergency food kit we should stock something and make preparation. Is that right?

A. Making preparation is useful but the most important matter is, if this building shakes very strongly what do I do. That is the most important matter. So, even though we imagine many situations before the earthquake happens, these situations are usually different from the real situation when the building shakes.

Q. But when a building shakes, whether it falls on your head or not is important. Therefore the people who are constructing a building will think about the future, and they’ll think what shall we do to make this building strong. Based on their thinking they will construct the building, and that will have some effect on the present.

A. Yes, I do not think that those kind of efforts are unimportant. Of course they are very important and useful. I do not take scientific knowledge lightly. I revere scientific knowledge very much.

Q. If the building shakes in an earthquake, we don’t think about it, we act straight away.

A. Yes, so sometimes we run out of the building, sometimes we stand still. When the fact occurs, then we need intuitive ability. That is called “*Prajna*”.

Q. If we thought about it in advance, perhaps we would act better. For example, if we train ourselves to run under the table each day, then when an earthquake actually occurs we will have the reflex to do this. So it's important also to think about it.

A. Yes, so thinking is also a kind of action. However, freedom is not idea, but fact. Sometimes people think that freedom exists in our brain, and because they think freedom only exists in our brain they are prone to think that people are perfectly free. But this idea is not real. Therefore we should divide what exists in our brain and what exists in our real life. To distinguish those two parts is the main point of Buddhism. Freedom has many choices in concrete situations.

Q. Is it like you have two sides of a sheet of paper with human freedom on one side and cause and effect on the other side, and it's not so easy to see both of them together? It seems difficult to get the two ideas together?

A. In history, for thousands of years human beings couldn't solve this contradictory situation. This is a historical fact.

Q. They solved it with Christianity because they said God intervenes in cause and effect on behalf of human beings, so everyone was happy then.

A. Yes, that is one solution, but whether that solution is reliable or not is another problem.

Q. What do you mean when you say humanity is converging to the same point?

A. We have many accumulated thoughts from our past, but recently people are noticing whether or not those accumulated thoughts are really useful in our daily life. People want to know the real fact. This tendency exists in many divisions of science, literature, the arts and so forth.

Q. So you mean there's a common theme in many places?

A. Yes, I think so.

Q. Sometimes I agree with you and I feel that we are coming closer together in our thinking, but in our brains for every choice we make we have a myriad more, and often it seems we are diverging.

A. Yes, it's true. So it is very important to notice which tendency is fact. We may think that human beings are going to separate widely, or, we may think that human beings are moving

more and more towards the one direction. Which of these tendencies we believe is true has a very serious effect on our life.

For example, if I am fighting in Eastern Europe and using a gun, if I believe that human beings do not have a peaceful situation and that to fight against each other is human fate, then I have to shoot the gun. But if I have the idea that human beings are going to the same point, and therefore it is not necessary for me to shoot the gun, then I can stop shooting.

So our actions differ according to the ideas we hold. That is the situation. Therefore, to have the true theory is very important. It decides our life completely. That's why we study the true theory. However, many people are disappointed because they feel that there is no truth, and that it is impossible for us to get the truth. But, I notice that there is just the truth in this world. So to study the truth and to rely upon the truth is very important for human beings. That is my idea.

Q. Sometimes science says that, for example, to see a piece of paper we need some light, but the fact of seeing the paper is modified because we need light, so we don't see the paper as it really is. Therefore, to see the paper as it is we reduce the light more and more, and more and more we can see the paper as it is without modification, and the point where there is no light is when we see the truth. But in this case, at that point we cannot see the paper anymore. Then we have no method to see the truth in this case. And sometimes even when we practice Zazen, we just have an apparition of the truth, through our mind or through our five senses and it is a kind of modification of reality. How can we reach this reality by practicing Zazen.

A. So to study that kind of situation is one aim of Zazen. During Zazen we have many ideas, we have many experiences, so among those experiences and images we have to select the real situation.

Shall we finish now. Thank you.

Lecture 3

Zazen Retreat 1995

(Nishijima Roshi outlines the origins of various Buddhist sects in Japan, and compares the two main sects which practice Zazen, the Rinzai sect and the Soto sect. He also describes Master Dogen's explanation of Zazen using four principles which Master Dogen liked to explain: 1. not thinking; 2. regulating the body and sitting in the right posture; 3. getting rid of body and mind; 4. becoming one piece.)

There are several Buddhist sects in Japan. In Japanese history, the Japanese capital moved several times due to the political situation, and in ancient times there was an age when the capital was in the Nara district. At that time, six Buddhist sects existed. The six sects were: the Kegon sect, the Hosō sect, the Ritsu sect, the Jyōjitsu sect, the Sanron sect, and the Bishō sect. Three of these sects still exist today in Nara prefecture even though they are not so big. The other three sects now belong to these existing sects.

At that time, Buddhism was a kind of civilization which had been introduced from China and Korea. Therefore, in those days Buddhist monks had miscellaneous kinds of scientific knowledge, medical knowledge, knowledge regarding therapy and so forth. But they did not practice Zazen, their Buddhism was just theoretical Buddhism. They studied the meaning of the sutras but their Buddhism was not practical.

After the Nara era the capital moved to Kyoto, and in that era there were two large Buddhist sects; One was the Shingon sect, the other was the Tendai sect. In the Nara era, the power of the Buddhist sects had become extremely strong, and in order to avoid the strong influence of Buddhism the government moved to Kyoto. Also, the Japanese emperor ordered two excellent Buddhist monks to go to China to study Buddhism and to bring back to Japan Buddhist sects which were different from the Nara era sects. So two famous Buddhist monks called Saichō and Kūkai went to China, and Saichō brought back the Tendai sect, and Kūkai brought back the Shingon sect.

But those two sects were also scholastic. They studied Buddhist sutras very diligently, particularly the Tendai sect. In the Shingon sect they did have some kind of practical training, but at the same time the Shingon sect was still rather mystical. They used fire and prayed using a special method. Also, because the Tendai sect and Shingon sect belonged to professional Buddhist monks, common people did not have much relations with these two sects. The government and officials had contact with these sects, but common people did not have much contact with them.

After that period, the political power of Japan moved to the warriors. At that time, Buddhism experienced a very strong change because the Japanese social situation had changed enormously and people wanted to know another philosophy, different from the philosophy of former times. Therefore, around that time several very strong Buddhist sects appeared.

At that time the government was in Kamakura, therefore those Buddhist sects are called “Kamakura Buddhism”. Among them was the Shin sect, the Jodo sect, and the Giin sect. These three sects insisted reciting the Buddha’s names many times. Also, there was the Soto sect and the Rinzai sect which practiced Zazen diligently. Another sect was the Nichiren sect. These six sects are called “Kamakura Buddhism”, and of these six sects, two sects practiced Zazen.

So even though there are many Buddhist sects in Japan, there are not so many sects which practice Zazen. In the Kamakura era there were two, the Rinzai sect and the Soto sect. At the beginning of the Edo era the Obaku sect, another sect which practices Zazen, was established. The Obaku sect was established by a Buddhist monk called Master Ingen who came to Japan from China as a refugee after the Chinese Ming government was destroyed by the Shin government. Master Ingen received strong support from Japan’s government of the time, the Tokugawa government, in establishing the Obaku sect. Therefore, in Japan there are three Buddhist sects which practice Zazen diligently. Now, I would like to compare these three sects.

The Obaku sect, which was established at the beginning of the Edo era, is similar to the Rinzai sect because Obaku is the name of one of the teacher’s of master Rinzai, who founded the Rinzai sect. Therefore, it is interesting to compare the other two sects, the Rinzai sect and the Soto sect.

The main difference between the Rinzai sect and the Soto sect is their interpretation of Zazen. In the Rinzai sect they believe in enlightenment, and they think that the reason for practicing Zazen is to get enlightenment. Therefore, they practice Zazen diligently and expect to get enlightenment. But the Soto sect, which was established by Master Dogen, think that the state in Zazen is just enlightenment. So to practice Zazen is just enlightenment. The Soto sect believe that we should not expect any enlightenment other than the practice of Zazen itself. This is the idea of Zazen in the Soto sect.

Regarding the two sects different interpretation of Zazen, there is a rather famous story from the ancient time when Master Daikan Eno lived. Master Daikan Eno was the sixth patriarch of China. He had two excellent students, one was Master Seigen Gyoshi, and the other was Master Nangaku Ejo. Master Seigen Gyoshi is the ancestor of the Soto sect, and Master Nangaku Ejo is

the ancestor of the Rinzai sect. The following story suggests that in ancient times even the Rinzai sect lineage believed in the oneness of practice and experience.

One day Master Daikan Eno asked Master Nangaku Ejo, “Do you rely upon practice and experience?” Master Nangaku Ejo replied, “It is true there are practice and experience, but those two cannot be tainted.” And “those two cannot be tainted” suggests that, those two should be separate but they are just one in actual practice. Therefore, at that time even the ancestor of the Rinzai sect, Master Nangaku Ejo, had the idea of oneness between practice and experience.

So we can think that oneness between practice and experience is fundamental Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism is established on the basis of action, and action has the characteristic of oneness between practice and experience. So in ancient times, Buddhist thoughts were based on oneness between practice and experience.

In a later age, in the Sung dynasty in the twelfth century, there was a Zen master called Daiei Soko. We can guess that he was a very intellectual person and therefore he insisted that Buddhist truth should be understood by the intellect. To arrive at that aim, he insisted the usage of koans in practicing Zazen. He believed that we should practice Zazen while thinking about the meaning of a koan, and then we can get enlightenment. This opinion became rather strong at that time, and therefore after that age Buddhist monks who practiced Zazen followed Master Daiei Soko’s idea to get enlightenment. They used stories, koans, in practicing Zazen.

But real Buddhism is different, and this real Buddhism has also been maintained. One master who received the true Buddhist thoughts was Master Tendo Nyojo. Master Dogen met Master Tendo Nyojo and succeeded to the true Buddhist theory that practice and experience are one, and Master Dogen introduced this Buddhist idea into Japan. Relying upon his Buddhist theory we can understand Buddhist philosophy very clearly and theoretically. Therefore, I think his idea about Zazen is rather important.

So when we think about the meaning of practicing Zazen, whether we believe in the existence of enlightenment which is other than practice or not, is a very important point. Many people believe in the existence of enlightenment, but in real Buddhist theory we think that practice and experience are one. Therefore Master Dogen insisted, just to practice Zazen. Just to practice Zazen is expressed in Japanese as “Shikantaza”.

The word “Shikantaza” is rather famous even in western society today. People think that Zazen which is based on “satori” (enlightenment) and Zazen which is based on “just to practice” are both Buddhism, but I do not agree with that idea. Thinking about Buddhist philosophy exactly, I

think only just to sit is Buddhist thought. Zazen to get enlightenment is a kind of idealistic philosophy, and idealistic philosophy cannot be Buddhism. So when we think about the meaning of Zazen, we should not expect the existence of enlightenment other than practice. This is one point in Zazen.

Next I would like to describe Master Dogen's explanation of Zazen. In this explanation, I will also use the four principles which Master Dogen liked to explain. The four principles are: first, not thinking; second, regulating the body and sitting in the right posture; third, getting rid of body and mind; fourth, becoming one piece. I would like to explain each of these principles one by one.

First, he insists that Buddhism is not to think. And he sometimes quotes a famous story about a Chinese Buddhist master called Yakusan Igen. One day Master Yakusan Igen was practicing Zazen when his student asked, "What are you thinking in such a stable situation?". Master Yakusan answered, "I am thinking the state of not thinking". So the student asked again "How can we think the state of not thinking?". Then the master replied, "It is not thinking". This is a rather famous story to explain the meaning of Zazen. In the Rinzai sect some people think that the aim of Zazen is to consider some philosophical theory, but in the Soto sect we think that Zazen is different from thinking. And "different from thinking" suggests, Zazen is a kind of action. So not thinking is the first principle of Master Dogen's idea about practicing Zazen.

The second principle is to make the body right and sit regularly. Zazen has a characteristic to make our body right. In Buddhism we have belief in oneness of body and mind, therefore according to this theory, if we make our body right our mind cannot but be right. In other words, when we make our body right our mind must be right. So Master Dogen explained Zazen is to make our body right and sit regularly.

When we make our body right or keep our body in the regular posture, our autonomic nervous system becomes balanced. This effect is very important in Zazen. The autonomic nervous system can never be changed by our mental effort. Even though we may be anxious to make our autonomic nervous system balanced, it is impossible for us to make our autonomic nervous system balanced through our mental anxiety. This is why the nervous system is called "autonomic". To make the autonomic nervous system balanced we need action, we need to make our body right.

The second principle of making the body right and sitting regularly suggests that Buddhism is also a kind of physical training. Relying upon the physical training we can make our body right, through this we can make our mind right at the same time. Understanding this meaning of Zazen

is also important. Even though we may have much anxiety, anxiety can never solve anything. To solve the problems in our daily life, making our body right is a very important point. Zazen has this meaning. So Master Dogen insisted the second principle, to make the body right and sit regularly.

The third principle is getting rid of body and mind. Getting rid of body and mind suggests forgetting body and forgetting mind. That suggests, concentrate ourselves in sitting, concentrate ourselves in action. So Zazen is to enjoy action itself, not thinking, not feeling, just concentrate ourselves in the training, in action. This is the third principle of Zazen.

But these words are sometimes misunderstood by many Buddhist students. They think that getting rid of body and mind suggests a kind of enlightenment, and therefore Master Dogen insisted a kind of enlightenment. But this interpretation is wrong. Master Dogen recognized the action in Zazen. And to express action, he used the words “getting rid of body and mind”. These words come from Master Tendo Nyojo. Master Tendo Nyojo expressed these words relying upon his lineage in which they insisted the oneness between practice and experience. So the principle “getting rid of body and mind” is also important. Getting rid of body and mind suggests “enter into action”, and “enter into action” is very important in Buddhism.

In Buddhism we think about two areas, one is the area of intellect, the other is the area of action, the area of reality. Our intellectual thoughts are always working in the area of intellect. Human civilizations are based on such intellectual thoughts, even today. But, in Buddhism we insist the other area which is different from the area of intellect. The other area is the area of action, the area of reality, the area of life.

The power of the intellect is extremely strong in human civilization. Intellectual thoughts govern our mind almost perfectly, therefore it is rather difficult for us to find an area other than the intellectual area. But Buddhism found the area of reality, the area of action. So, in Buddhist training we have to enter into the area of action, the area of reality, by practice. If we do not practice Zazen in our Buddhist study, we can never get rid of intellectual thoughts. In that situation we can never enter into the area of Buddhism, the area of reality, the area of action. Therefore, to get rid of body and mind is a very important point in studying Buddhism.

Master Dogen expressed the fourth principle as “becoming one piece”. And to become one piece is his own real experience in Zazen. When we are practicing Zazen, sometimes we experience the state where our body and mind have become one and we are just sitting, there is nothing other than sitting. That situation is called “becoming one piece”. So becoming one piece

is the experience in Zazen. It is a simple expression of the state, and that state is described by Master Dogen, therefore we also revere this expression.

So when we think about Master Dogen's Buddhist thought we can select four principles, the first is not thinking, the second is make the body right and sit regularly, the third is getting rid of body and mind, and the fourth is becoming one piece. Relying upon those principles Master Dogen described his thoughts about Zazen.

Master Dogen wrote many books about Zazen. The first book he wrote is called *Fukanzazengi*. "Fu" means universal, "kan" means to recommend, Zazen is Zazen, and "gi" means posture or form. He wrote this first book, *Fukanzazengi*, just after coming back to Japan from China. Master Dogen also wrote a book called *Shobogenzo*, and in *Shobogenzo* we can find many explanations of Zazen. Another book he wrote is called *Bendoho*. *Bendoho* is also a book about the method of practicing Zazen. And he wrote *Eiheikoroku*. *Eiheikoroku* is a collection of his Buddhist lectures, and in *Eiheikoroku* we can find many explanations about the concrete method of practicing Zazen, for example, how to breath. By reading his books we can know the exact meaning of Zazen very clearly. Relying upon these books we can grasp the true meaning of Zazen, that is the true meaning of Buddhism. Then we can follow true Buddhism relying upon his Buddhist theory and our own practice of Zazen.

Now I would like to stop my talk and have the time of questions and answers. Are there any questions?

Q. In your talk you talked about practice and experience being one. The words practice and experience, it's quite difficult to grasp what they mean.

A. Practice and experience are concepts. We usually think of them as two parts, but action is only one, even though in the intellectual area we distinguish two, practice and experience.

Q. In English, the word experience is not so clear as related to practice.

A. We can replace the word experience with enlightenment. Practice and enlightenment.

Q. Practice with some separate result from practice?

A. Actually there is no distinction, but in our intellectual thoughts we usually distinguish the two. To do something and the effect.

Q. Practice and the effect of the practice?

- A. Yes. But actually there is no separation.
- Q. So the practice is the same as the effect of the practice?
- A. Yes. Therefore Master Dogen insists just to practice.
- Q. So we can't get something and take it away?
- A. There is nothing other than practice.
- Q. Sometimes though, if we practice Zazen every day the state stays with us. The state stays in our body and mind. So in that sense we have some kind of result of practice.
- A. Yes, so coming back to ourselves. And coming back to ourselves is coming back to the universe. We are part of the universe, so relying upon the practice we can come back to the universe. We can come back to ourselves. This fact is a very nice situation.
- Q. So, not getting something different?
- A. Not getting something different.
- Q. But throwing away something?
- A. Yes. So Master Dogen said "getting rid of body and mind".
- Q. The idea of coming back to the universe, isn't that a spiritual idea?
- A. No, not a spiritual idea. Both mental and physical. A realistic idea.
- Q. Coming back to ourselves?
- A. Yes, coming back to ourselves.
- Q. When you say "universe", what do you feel is the universe?
- A. Everything.
- Q. Everything here and now?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Or everything which we imagine?

A. The fact here and now, and it expands endlessly. So this endless something is called “the universe”, in my mind.

Q. So coming back to here and now, but expanding?

A. Yes.

Q. So exactly how we feel when we sit in Zazen.

A. Yes, so that is a rather interesting point. We usually think “I am sitting in the temple”, or “I am living as one member of a family”, or “I am Japanese, I am American”, and so forth. People have this kind of area. In another area, people think “I am living in Tokyo, I am living in Japan”, people have this consciousness. But, we are living in the universe, we are living in the endless world.

Q. Can you say that in other words we come back to one element of the universe?

A. Part of the universe, but there is no distinction between a part and the total universe. So we come back to the universe, or we become the universe.

Q. I’m about to say something which sounds a bit strange. I come from England, but when I am in Japan, I have a picture in my mind of where England is. But recently I began to notice that besides that picture, “England is around there”, I have no idea where England is really. I notice that the real situation is, England is somewhere but the picture in my mind may be true or may not be true, I don’t know.

A. I think we are the same as the universe. So when I went to China, the universe moved to China, when I go to the United States, the universe goes to the United States.

Q. But the picture which science gives us is so strong that we have a very clear picture of the world. It’s round, because we know it’s round, because we saw photographs and people told us and we believe it. And we believe that everywhere is situated where it is.

A. So what I call the universe is much bigger. Not only the earth, not only the solar system, but an accumulation of so many systems like the solar system.

Q. I don’t mean to say that our picture is wrong, just simply that there is no way to prove that the picture we have is like that. My only experience is here, now.

A. In my practice I feel that this area expands limitlessly. Far beyond the solar system, and far beyond the milky way.

Q. So if I become one with the universe, and you become one with the universe, and everybody here becomes one with the universe, does that mean I become one with you?

A. Yes, there is no distinction. So that big something is called “Dharma”.

Q. So we have a connection.

A. Yes.

Q. If the situation is such that we have this connection, and Master Dogen seems to be saying that this connection is always there, even right now at this very moment, then why is it that I feel I’m sitting over here and you’re sitting there and he and she are sitting over there?

A. This is the situation or relation in the universe. In total all are common, so you and I are a kind of relation. We intellectually think that you and I are separate, but when we think about the total universe, there is no distinction.

This thought sounds strange because we are competitive in our secular society. But which of the following is true: There is no distinction, or, there is individual distinction? Buddhism insists that there is no distinction, the whole universe is only one. That idea also sounds strange, but in modern physics the quantum theory says a similar idea. The universe is a kind of stream of energy, there is no distinction.

Q. So the distinction is an illusion within our own mind.

A. Yes.

Q. I read something the other day about people who are watching the way that babies develop. And very, very young babies don’t seem to make distinctions like we make when we’re older. So when somebody goes, that person has gone, and when that person comes back it’s a different person as far as the baby is concerned. So they haven’t yet made the kind of structure which we make in our minds.

A. That idea is very strong in Master Nagarjuna’s book, *Mulamadhyamakakarika*. The first words of the first chapter are, “there is no subject, there is no object”. And that means he believes in the existence of total Dharma, and in Dharma there is no subject, there is no object.

Q. Then what should be our attitude to our normal way of thinking? I am sitting here, he is here, his name is John, etc. What is your attitude?

A. So, we need not fight, we need not compete. In Eastern Europe there is a war, but actually thinking, really thinking, they need not fight. They believe it is necessary to fight, but objectively looking at their situation they do not have any necessity to fight. But, with human beings, there are so many stupid situations like that on the earth. Lately, these kind of stupid situations have decreased, but still there are many very stupid situations. People believe that “we have to fight”, then they start fighting against each other. It is a rather comical situation.

Q. On a more practical level, you say that Master Nagarjuna talks about the very, very simple facts in front of us before we start to think. But, we all think in terms of what society has taught us. So, for instance, you say that time is now, for example, but we all have a way of thinking which is different from reality.

A. Different from reality suggests what?

Q. A habitual way of thinking.

A. Yes, it’s true. Therefore, to change these habitual thoughts into Buddhist thoughts is our efforts.

Q. So we should change our habitual thoughts?

A. Yes. So we have to explain to all people that we are living in reality. People usually think they are living in their own thoughts.

Q. A lot of our civilization is in our thoughts. Countries are in our thoughts. The border between two countries doesn’t exist until we think about it, or when we make up something.

A. Yes. So the world is going to become only one state. There is much separation still, but many countries are going to become one state, I think. It takes a rather long time, but the tendency is not to divide, but to merge into one.

Q. Do you mean that as we notice the simple things in front of us, then we can change the situation?

A. Yes, I think so. So I especially felt that fact in the ending of the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Human beings have to become one. I also rely upon the G-7 and the United Nations. Those powers will make the world only one in the future. And in that

situation, Buddhist philosophy is necessary. We should recognize that all are only one and therefore it is not necessary for us to make distinctions.

Q. How do you think when you say there's no distinction between people, between the people in this room and so on. How does that explain things like family. How should I think about my father and my mother and things like that?

A. I think all people are common.

Q. When you say that there's no distinction, do you mean that that's the real situation, so when we habitually think about our daily lives we shouldn't lose sight of the real situation. Using our intellect to always look at the real situation without forgetting it?

A. Yes. For example, because of being Japanese, I really exist. So individual difference is a kind of reality. But, even though there is that kind of individual existence, such individual existence is included into universal existence. So universal and individual, both are necessary. In his book *Mulamadhymakakarika*, Master Nagarjuna suggests this idea using one chapter, universal existence and coexistence. He described those two concepts in distinction. But those two concepts have the common parts. So, because of being Japanese I can exist on the earth.

Q. So we're all brought into this universe with a purpose, and our purpose is to find our way, find our purpose, for the benefit of the universe or part of the universe. Is that right?

A. In Buddhism, we revere the state at the present moment. The purpose or aim exists at the present moment, it is the direction we have. We usually think that the aim or purpose exists at a distant place, but the aim or purpose exists at the present moment in our action, and we decide which direction our action has. So one time I go in one direction, then another time another direction. That state at the present moment suggests our aim, suggests our path. Intellectually thinking, the aim exists in a distant place, so we go to arrive at that destiny. But the real situation is not really like that. We are living just at the present moment. How we behave includes our aim, how we behave includes our purpose. The existence of purpose and the existence of aim are like this I think.

Q. So can the intuition at the present moment help us choose the right direction?

A. Yes, I think so.

Q. That's why we do Zazen?

A. Yes.

Q. So in that way we don't know where we're going, but we can feel where we're going?

A. Yes, that's why the state at the present moment is very important. Whether we are spiritual or whether we are materialistic or whether we are Buddhist, which of these three directions we select decides our life. People who do not believe in Buddhism do not believe in this idea. But people who believe in Buddhism, we think that whether we are spiritual, or whether we are materialistic, or whether we are Buddhist, is the main selection in our life.

Q. So the important point is to develop the intuition?

A. Yes, that is Buddhist idea I think.

Q. So that we can go on the right path?

A. Yes. To promote intuition, to keep balanced is the best way. Keeping balanced, we can always keep the intuitive ability.

So I think Buddhist theory is very simple and very clear, but it is rather difficult for people to think about such a strange theory.

Q. I think that one problem is that in the west we have a very strong intellectual tradition, and we can't even notice it.

A. Yes, so to connect western intellectual thoughts with Buddhist philosophy is a very important point, a very interesting matter.

Q. You've often said that people live in the world of the intellect, or we live in our minds, or we believe our mind is reality, but most people, we don't notice that fact. Just we think, tomorrow I'm going to do something and now I'm going towards it, and we don't notice that that's not true or it's just patterns in our minds. To notice it is very difficult.

A. Yes, so it is necessary to change the thinking method. Buddhism is a kind of different thinking method. So to change our ordinary thinking method into the Buddhist thinking method is necessary, but it is very difficult.

Q. Also, it feels like throwing away something very valuable. For instance, in Britain when children go to school we're encouraged to be clever and to think, "think before you speak, and think before you act". And then you say "throw it away!". We think, "But it's very important,

my mother told me it's very important and my schoolteacher, and now you tell me to throw it away. Oh, I don't think I can throw it away." That kind of feeling.

A. Yes. So that is the difficulty to explain Buddhism, to spread Buddhism.

Q. You recommend that we should get rid of our habitual ways of thinking, the wrong ways that we learned in secular society or through our childhood, externally, school, our parents, TV and all that. For many of us this kind of thinking has become a pattern. Of course it's hard, but if you really want to change the thinking patterns it's possible by training. But my question is, how do you change those habits that have become subconscious?

A. The answer is very simple. The best way is to practice Zazen. But many people do not like to practice Zazen. That is a problem.

Q. It'll empty out the subconscious things too?

A. When we are practicing Zazen we throw away body and mind.

Q. So really Buddhist theory emerges from Zazen?

A. Yes, I think so. Even though Master Nagarjuna said nothing about Zazen in his book *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, I think his idea in *Mulamadhyamakakarika* comes from the practice of Zazen, totally. Without practicing Zazen, he could never arrive at that idea, like Master Dogen. So Zazen has enormous power to suggest the real world.

Shall we stop here?

Lecture 4

Zazen Retreat 1995

(A open discussion between Nishijima roshi and the retreat participants during which he answers various questions regarding Buddhism in daily life.)

Q I enjoy playing sports, and I am wondering if you think playing sports can help our understanding of Buddhism?

Nishijima Roshi I feel that even playing sports can work as Zazen practice. Therefore I think your sports training and play in the past have contributed to forming your philosophical idea, which is very similar to Buddhism. So I expect all kinds of sports can work like the practice of Zazen and help us to realize Buddhist philosophy. That is my feeling.

Q I think in order for Buddhist philosophy to develop to embrace sports philosophy, and other kinds of philosophies, it has to be transformed slowly. And I have a kind of question in my mind in that respect; for us how much in Buddhist tradition is important, and how much we can change naturally?

A Following Buddhist tradition we can study Buddhism. However, in studying Buddhism the most important matter is practicing Zazen. Of course to follow the traditional lifestyle is also nice, but not fundamental I think. The most fundamental matter is to practice Zazen. In comparison with practices other than Zazen, I think Zazen is the easiest one. Everyone can practice Zazen. But in things like tennis, people have different levels of ability and they must train hard in order to win. But I think, even in sports, whether we win or not is not so important. To play sports is important, not winning or losing.

Thinking about societies today, many kinds of sports are very popular, so utilizing them people can study Buddhist philosophy. To clarify what Buddhist philosophy is, is a very important point. If we get the very clear Buddhist philosophy, then all people can study the theory of Buddhism. And if they rely upon some training, they can realize Buddhist philosophy in their daily life too. Of course Zazen is the fundamental practice which everyone can do, but at the same time playing sports can help promote Buddhism.

Q What I mean is, for instance, somebody who plays a sport may have great interest in the philosophy about action. But, they're not likely to read it if it's in a book about Buddhism. But if the book says "action in tennis" or something, then they may read it. So to what extent can we think Buddhism is a nameless religion?

A Yes, I think Buddhism has the name “Buddhism”, but Buddhism is very different from usual religions.

Q Personally, I feel coming to the temple now I feel some value in being in the temple. But the tradition for me doesn't have such deep roots, and I have some feeling to claim back Buddhism from scholarly areas, and that's what you do. For me, you took something called Buddhism out of some kind of mystical area and put it in a real area. The real area today may be tennis shorts or other sports outfits, so what role does Buddhist tradition have in that area?

A I like the Buddhist tradition, so I enjoy that feeling, that atmosphere.

Q If I don't like it so much, is that important?

A If we practice Zazen, and if we study Buddhist theory, we can get Buddhism.

Q I think many people are kind of put off if they see the temple or the statues and the symbols of Buddhism. Immediately a lot of people don't even want to listen to any more. They see it and they say “I don't like that”, and go away.

Q1 There are so many strange theories which are called Buddhism, and which are associated with temples and so on that it's quite difficult sometimes.

A So to spread Buddhism throughout common society is a very important point I think.

Q So if we think like that about the Buddhist tradition, I feel some kind of way Buddhism can be spread. I can imagine, for instance, tennis professionals sitting down to Zazen before playing a match or something. I think that's something possible. But I can't imagine tennis professionals coming to the temple and studying the Buddhist way so easily.

A In my idea, to play tennis is just Buddhist training. Therefore, I hope tennis players will study Buddhist theory, and connect Buddhist theory with tennis play. That is my hope. There are many kinds of sports, and in all such groups if they study Buddhist theory and if they understand Buddhist theory in their own play, then Buddhist expansion will be faster. That is my hope.

Q We can practice Zazen at home everyday, but people who enjoy playing sports, they don't play sports everyday continuously to the end of their life. They can play maybe a couple of times a week, and that's usually when they are reasonably young or middle aged. But if you get weak knees or some physical trouble, then you can't continue to play sports.

A I think if we use some sports training as a method of Buddhist training, it should be done everyday. The intervals should be short. In the case of Zazen, we have to practice Zazen at least once everyday. The Buddhist state is just a state, so it is necessary for us to realize it with short intervals between practice.

Q We have a phrase in English “to make something my own”. To make something my own means to take something and understand it in my own situation. When I first listened to you talking about the book *Shobogenzo*, I couldn’t understand anything. Then I slowly realized that the theory which you were preaching, Master Dogen’s theory, is about everyday life here. And at that point, I could make it my own. And I think in sports, if people associated with sports can take Buddhist theory and make it their own theory, then it will spread. Can you imagine tennis players, for example, practicing Zazen?

Q1 There’s already a lot of players that do a type of meditation. They follow a type of ritual before a game, they do a certain type of stretching etc. All that ritual is in a way a type of Zazen, it’s a routine and it helps them to keep focused on the present. It keeps their focus only on now; now I’m stretching, and when stretching time is over, now I’m doing the warm up etc.

Q So simple action?

Q1 Yes, very simple action. Basically, Zazen is to help you think about the here and now isn’t it? So any kind of routine that someone does will help. But they must be mindful of what they are doing, for example, not doing something and thinking about something else. So they must be doing something and they must be there in that thing?

Q Wholehearted?

Q1 Yes, so I think that’s a very important point.

Q Certainly, in my case, practicing Zazen is exactly the same sensual experience as when I used to climb mountains. But, people don’t usually think that Zazen is a sport.

A This idea is not so popular in societies today, because people sometimes expect some kind of very beautiful religious image in Buddhism. Buddhism is different from secular society, and Buddhism is completely different from sports, therefore my Buddhist idea is not so popular in society now. Thinking about world history however, Buddhism should work in secular society.

Q Yes, in my mind I have to picture taking Buddhism back into life. The Buddhism you preach is in the real area, but there’s a whole field of Buddhism in the world, thousands of

scholars and conferences, and what they're talking about is in a completely separate area. So even by using the word "Buddhism", people think your Buddhism is the same as the Buddhism of the scholars, if we use the word "Buddhism".

A That is a rather difficult point. People usually like what seems to be excellent. Therefore, a very monotonous theory is not so popular.

Q During Zazen, how do you focus your eyes?

A I look at something at the place where my eyes are focused.

Q Sometimes I find my eyes going out of focus.

A In Zazen, looking at something clearly is nice. If we lose focus, it means our mind is a little sleepy or thinking something.

Q So we should be able to see clearly?

A Yes.

Q When you were talking about secular society, I couldn't help thinking about my first Zen teacher's mother. She believed that because her son was sitting in Zazen the devil was going to come and take over his body. There are many people with beliefs like that about any kind of meditation. They don't want to know about it, they don't want to hear it, they don't want to see it, it's something bad. So I wonder what you think about that kind of situation.

A Have you had the same experience?

Q Of meeting people like that?

A Like people who think that during Zazen the devil will come.

Q I've met people who really thought like that. They thought it was very dangerous for me to do Zazen.

Q1 It's the reaction of Christianity.

Q2 Anything outside of what is the normal Christian faith is seen as evil.

Q1 My sister was a Christian missionary in Thailand for twelve years, but her efforts didn't have such a big effect. So when she came back, she said that in Thailand the devil was very

strong. The reason she thought so was because Christianity didn't become popular, so that meant the devil was very strong. So it's quite a common Christian attitude, and Christianity is very deep-rooted in many western societies.

A I think a very important point is the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism, Judaism and Buddhism, and Buddhism and other religions. To think about those problems and to get the clear idea is very important I think.

Q Regarding Buddhism and Christianity, I think the most difficult problem in Christianity is "good" and "bad". And I feel the Buddhist explanation of good and bad is quite helpful for Christians, because Christian people divide themselves and the world into "good" and "bad". Bad or evil is outside, and good is inside. Therefore they cannot see the good and bad in themselves, so they make an effort to be good, and using your simile, they're pushing the cork which is floating on the surface of the water under the water's surface but the cork pops up again, so they do something which they think is bad, and then they try to be good again. So I think the Buddhist explanation of ethics, morality, and what good and bad are, can actually be a kind of relief for Christian people. If they can catch the explanation, they can see the real situation in themselves.

A To think about such problems is very important. Without such consideration, we cannot say anything to people who believe in other religions.

Q When we were in England, we gave a talk to students of a religious department of Bath University. One of them said, "Buddhism doesn't have any sense of morals. Buddhism doesn't tell people good and bad."

Q1 In western society, in many people who still believe in Christianity, their religion is very primitive. For instance, I have a cousin who is a very sincere Christian, and she divides the world, "oh, that's good, God is helping this, that's evil, that's bad". All day, everyday, everything she does, "this is good, this is God's work, God is helping us here". And for something else, "this is the devil". And for people too. I think it's quite a primitive way to view the world.

A To explain Buddhism in that kind of Christian society is important, but very difficult. Thinking about Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism, I think Judaism is a little nearer to Buddhism than Christianity.

Q I don't think Judaism has the kind of strange, sharp divisions between good and evil. They have good and evil, but it's in a very much wider context. They are very much more practical. I suppose the history of the Jewish nation kept the religion very practical.

A Yes, I think so.

Q Certainly Christian nations feel that the Jewish religion is different from Christianity. I think one reason the Jewish religion is nearer to Buddhism is that in their book, the *Talmud*, they have descriptions of practical processes, for example, "This is how you should conduct a funeral service.". But if you read the Bible you can find hardly any description of practical processes. You can read very many spiritual stories and similes, but a lot of the Jewish writing is practical procedures for their religion, even how you should tie your shoes, how you should put on your clothes and so on. I think any religion which has that kind of detailed day-to-day habits must be quite strong.

A The problem is very interesting, but the area of the problem is so big. It is rather difficult to know only a part of it.

Q When you say Buddhism will pervade throughout the world, sometimes it seems hard to imagine.

A Yes. So if Buddhism pervades throughout the world, religions will vanish. That is my idea. Religion is a kind of belief, but Buddhism is believing in the fact in front of us. So the attitude is different.

Q When you say pervade, it has the kind of image of coming from here, and going outwards. But I think in fact, many people in different areas, in sports and in other areas, are looking at the facts in front of them and doing more "linking up". The way that it pervades, whether it goes out or comes this way, is impossible to say.

A I think human history is going to enter into the age of reality.

Q And the age of reality means the age of looking at what's in front of us?

A Yes, based on the fact at the present moment. And in that situation religious thoughts cannot exist.

Q I think there are people who sort of see one glimmer or one small amount of something true, and from that they draw all kinds of very strange conclusions that seem to be missing the

point. I'm thinking specifically of a book I read where several different physicists had looked at some problems of physics, and because of the mathematical problems they had come up with they seemed to be on the track of discovering something of the nature of "at this moment is the only reality", but instead they ended up drawing these mathematical conclusions that there are thousands of different alternate universes or those sort of strange conclusions.

Q1 They follow their ideas instead of reality.

Q But they'll see something that's probably very true, and that little bit of insight then just goes in a strange direction.

Q1 Like they see the handle of a kettle, and then they say "oh, there's a handle, so maybe there's a big thing out here and over there". But, they don't look and see "oh, there's a handle and there's also a kettle". They take one part and then using theory they build a huge picture, following their ideas.

Q2 There are some very popular books I've seen lately that seem to have a little bit of something Buddhist to them. One in particular, a book entitled "The Celestine Prophecy" had ideas which sounded a bit like some of the ideas of Buddhism. In the book there are nine insights, and insight means kind of way of being, how to be, how to act. It goes kind of step by step, and at the end you reach a kind of spirituality. Anyway, it's a best seller in the USA.

Q Some book which has a spiritual theme and which is exciting or heroic, when people read it they feel wonderful.

A Yes, the area of intellect is perfectly free. We can think everything, so we can enjoy every kind of idea.

Q But there are many different theories or techniques which start in a realistic place. I'm thinking in particular about a technique where some business people have kind of meetings, lots of people go, and based on the meetings they find out how to cooperate. And although these meetings start in a very practical way, when people leave the meetings after three or four days, they have got some kind of spiritual enthusiasm, "Oh, I can be a different person! I'm different! I solved all my problems!", and they go away from the meeting very happy. There are many meetings and seminars like this and maybe for one week or two weeks afterwards people feel, "Oh, I'm a different person! There's something I got out, it's gone and now I can move on to.....". Then slowly they come back to reality and they're disappointed. So there are many techniques that start in a realistic place, and then they float into space.

A So I think many people think that Zazen is too monotonous and it seems useless.

Q And the reason it seems so monotonous is, it always brings you back to the same place.

A So for many people, their thoughts are sufficient. They do not want anything other than their own thoughts. Even though their thoughts are sometimes different from reality, they do not get rid of their own thoughts.

Q I told you that the latest book I was reading was written by David Bohm. He has a discussion with many people and his ideas are realistic, but the other people in the meeting have all different kinds of ideas, and slowly the contents of the conversation moves away from reality. And David Bohm has to insist, "No, reality is here." So like that, slowly people build their theories away from the simple fact.

A So David Bohm has to follow them.

Q That's right. So then I realized, "Ah, so Zazen brings us back to a common experience. So without a common experience, there's no place to come back to."

A I think it is very clear that world civilization is becoming realistic. This tendency is very clear, but to realize it takes a rather long time.

Q But we're all realizing it.

A Yes, therefore I am optimistic, because the world is approaching reality even though the speed is very slow.

Q When you say the world is approaching reality, you mean that we can see the real situation in front of us, rather than the idea in our mind or the physical fact?

A My idea is a little historical. People experienced the area of spirit so perfectly in the mediaeval ages, and people experienced the age of matter so strongly in the modern age. But the age of matter has arrived at its culmination, so people need the next criteria and I guess the next criteria may be reality. People are looking for something blindly, but human history will arrive at reality eventually. That is my image.

Q In the case of Japan, before the Second World War would you say Japanese society was in a spiritual phase?

A Yes, it was very nationalistic and there was a kind of religion to the emperor and to the country.

Q So Japanese society entered a very materialistic phase after the war?

A At the end of World War Two we lost that spiritual belief completely. So nowadays Japanese people are very materialistic and work hard to get economic profit, and we are rather successful. But we do not have any criteria other than economical value. It is a very sad situation.

Q You don't think people are getting tired of it?

A Yes, I think they are.

Q Zen has been around in Japan for a long time and I wonder if you think it has had any influence. Westerners always like to point out what they feel are the Zen influences, the Zen aspects of Japanese business or something. Do you think Zen has had any influence?

A For hundreds of years Buddhism governed Japanese society, so in Japanese society there are many customs and habits which are based on Buddhism. Recently Japanese people forget Buddhist theory, but the Buddhist habits and customs exist in our daily life so this tradition makes us Buddhist. That is a fact, so we need to recover Buddhist belief or theory again. We lost belief in Buddhism completely. We have Buddhist habits with Buddhist tradition with Buddhist customs in our daily life – that is the situation. But we do not know what Buddhism is.

So I hope Japanese people will have an interest in Buddhism and begin to study it again. But I wonder whether it is possible or not.

It was a very nice talk. Shall we finish now.

Thank you very much.