

INTRODUCTORY LECTURES

(Sôsan no Hanashi)

Preface

“Sôsan no hanashi” is a series of six introductory lectures for newcomers to the San’un Zendo in Kamakura, Japan, given during the bi-weekly zazenkai. Each lecture, lasting about an hour, is conducted in a separate room by a responsible senior member of the zendo. Each zazenkai offers two lectures, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. So it takes three zazenkai to finish all six lectures. Since the zazenkai is held twice a month at the San’un Zendo, a month and a half are needed for the newcomer to finish all the introductory lectures.

In these lectures the necessary preliminary information concerning zazen practice, as done in the Sanbô-Kyôdan line, is briefly and systematically presented. Moreover, as the whole series requires one and a half months, the newcomer is also able to amply observe the zendo, its atmosphere, the roshi (while he gives his teisho), and the assembled members. In this way the newcomers are given plenty of time to decide whether or not they really want to practice in this sangha or to go somewhere else. If the newcomer does decide to join the zendo after the six lectures, the ceremonial *shôken* follows, where he or she humbly petitions the roshi to be his or her own master and receives the first individual instruction. Thus, the formal practice starts.

Therefore, the tradition in the San’un Zendo considers this lecture series to be an important and integral part of the introduction into the sangha and into the form of practice specific to it. What follows is a newly revised English translation of the “Sôsan no hanashi,” which, originally composed by Yasutani Haku’un Roshi, the founder of the Sanbô-Kyôdan, has been in use in the San’un Zendo for decades. A similar translation is found in P. Kapleau (ed.): *The Three Pillars of Zen. Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, Tokyo (John Weatherhill) 1965, pp. 26-62.

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LECTURE ONE

1. 1. Introduction

1.1.1. Harada Roshi's Idea

You are now going to listen to the “Sôsan-no-Hanashi,” the introductory lectures that originally derive from Dai’un Harada Sogaku Roshi (1871-1961). He, as a Soto monk, looked earnestly for a truly enlightened teacher in his own School for a long time. But he was unable to find anyone; therefore, he went to Shôgen-ji (Gifu Prefecture), a temple of the Rinzai line, to receive training in the Rinzai tradition. It was, however, at Nanzen-ji (Kyoto), another famous Rinzai temple, that he met his ultimate master, Toyoda Dokutan Roshi (1840-1916), and grasped the deepest reality of Zen. Through these formative years Harada Roshi was able to appreciate the best parts of Zen training in both schools and eventually create his own unique way of guiding people in Zen.

1.1.2. How to Listen

Prior to his lectures Harada Roshi would give his listeners an admonition. First, everyone must listen with his or her eyes wide open and directed upon him. That is, the listener must encounter the teaching with his or her entire being, not simply with the ears. Second, although the listeners must receive the lectures in a small group, each person must listen to it as though it was directed only to him or herself. It happens very often that, when two people listen to something, each person feels only half responsible for what he or she hears. Therefore, if ten people listen at the same time, each person may feel responsible only for one tenth. In fact, you must listen to the lectures as if you were totally alone in the room and the lectures were exclusively directed toward you, so that you are personally answerable for all things you receive.

1.1.3. Intention of the Lectures

The following teaching is composed of thirteen units, which are classified into six sessions. It starts with the basic notion of zazen, followed by the

practical method of zazen. Then come special pieces of advice in practicing zazen. Next, you will hear more in-depth presentations of the world of zazen, accompanied by certain important problems pertaining to practice.

As a matter of fact, it is not at all required that you know the “theory” of zazen before you start practicing it. If you go through the training under the guidance of an authentic teacher, you will naturally learn those “theories” too as your practice matures. However, people in modern times are quite intellectual by nature, and they always demand to know the reasons underlying the instructions they are given. This makes it necessary to take care of some theoretical aspects of the practice to avoid unnecessary set-backs and remove obstacles for the modern mind. But please know that theories are always conceptual and abstract, and therefore, far from the real fact itself. Buddhist scriptures, teachings, and philosophies are nothing but intellectual and insufficient expressions of the true world experienced and practiced in Zen. What we are going to do now is to extract what is of some assistance to you from the vast ocean of theoretical teachings accumulated in Zen Buddhism.

1.1.4. Shakyamuni Buddha as Founder

We consider it proper to begin with the Buddha Shakyamuni (463 BCE-383 BCE, according to a modern chronology). You know how he first underwent an extremely difficult period of ascetic practice, with self-mortification unparalleled by his predecessors. However, this method never brought him to enlightenment. In total exhaustion, almost starved to death, he realizes that this way is utterly fruitless, leading you only to wretched self destruction.

Therefore, he changed his mind and drank the milk given to him by a friendly hand, thus gradually regaining his physical strength. He opted himself for the so-called “middle way” between extreme austerity and sheer laxness, giving himself totally to sitting in meditation. At last, early in the morning of December 8, at the moment when he saw Venus twinkling in the east, he came to the great and perfect realization.

The words and phrases that sprang out of Shakyamuni’s mouth at this very instance are recorded in many ways in the Buddhist writings. According to the Kegon Sutra, Shakyamuni “roared” when he was thus enlightened: “O how

wonderful! All living beings are essentially equipped with wisdom and virtue of the Tathagata; yet on account of their minds turned upside down because of their delusive perceptions, they cannot realize this!” This utterance came out of the deepest awe for the solemn fact he had now discovered. In fact, it is simply wonderful that all human beings – no matter whether they are intelligent or foolish, pretty or ugly, female or male – are complete and perfect just as they are. Truly, they are intrinsically whole and flawless without any defect and are exactly the same as any of the Buddhas in history. What Shakyamuni exclaimed is therefore the ultimate conclusion of Buddhism. However, regrettably we are blinded by topsy-turvy delusions from the moment we acquire self-consciousness, becoming always anxious without real peace of mind. Therefore, what we need to do is come back to our intrinsic state of original perfection, casting off the deluded images of being imperfect, sinful and wretched, to be awakened to the purest reality of our innermost being.

1.1.5. Significance of Zazen

The most effective way to reach this goal is the practice of zazen. It was through zazen that not only Shakyamuni Buddha himself, but all his disciples and succeeding “ancestors” of the Way attained satori. It was through this method that, in the 2400 years after the passing of Shakyamuni, countless practitioners in India, China and Japan have come to the solution of the most urgent question, “What is life and death?” Today too, through the way of zazen, many people have been able to liberate themselves from their anxiety and fear arising from this fundamental question, thus attaining ultimate peace of mind in their daily life.

This indicates that there lies no difference whatsoever in substance between Shakyamuni Buddha, who is superbly perfected, and us, who are totally commonplace. We can take water as a metaphor for this “substance.” Let us say that the mind of Shakyamuni is serene, deep and transparent water, upon which the “moon of truth” is reflected in perfect clarity. The mind of the ordinary person, on the other hand, is a murky and troubled water, incessantly disturbed and churned by the uncontrolled movements of delusive thoughts and passions, so that the “moon of truth” cannot be reflected upon it as it should.

Nevertheless, the moon falls upon the water without fail; simply because of the troubled surface the moon cannot be recognized as such. Therefore, so many people live a frustrated and disoriented life, not knowing where to find true peace of mind.

How is it possible to let the moon shed its supreme light upon our life and our personality? For that, we first have to still the wild billows and restless waves of our heart by stopping the activities of our dualistic and discursive thinking. The “conceptual thoughts of the human being,” according to an expression in the Kegon Sutra, must first be emptied out. In our daily life, the ability to think discursively and abstractly is very highly valued, but the tradition of Zen teaches us that it is this dualistic, “I”-driven thinking which is at the bottom of our fundamental delusion. A saying goes that “discriminative thinking is the illness of all human minds.” Of course, a logical and discursive thinking power is important and is of great avail when properly applied – i.e., when we are correctly aware of its limitations and weaknesses. But as long as we are enslaved to and constantly at the mercy of our own intellect, and yet do not even know that we are thus enslaved, we can rightly be called fatally “ill.”

What is “human thought”? First it means a “stream” which never remains but is destined to change, with a beginning and an end, as we ourselves are fleeting beings in time and space. This is true not only concerning an individual person, but also about an époque or an era. However, these random thoughts are rather harmless, because they are like bubbles that have no substance. Harmful would be the so-called fixed concepts, ideologies, religious beliefs, established opinions – in short, the cherished accumulations of knowledge and intelligence, which since our childhood have thickly shadowed our heart and troubled our mind, thus darkening the light of the moon of truth.

As long as the wild winds of thought and knowledge trouble our heart and distort the surface of our true self, we cannot tell true reality from superficial realities. Therefore, we must somehow calm these winds and still their activities. If they die away once and for all, then the waves disappear and the water becomes pure, so that we can recognize right away that the moon of true reality has always been shining from the very beginning. The sudden experience of this reality is commonly called *kenshō* or *satori*, namely the clear

insight into the substance of our true self. Unlike the ordinary “concepts” in the field of philosophy or ethics or science, this true understanding, once realized, never fades out of your life. For the first time we can live a life of peace free from anxiety and frustration, in full harmony with the world around us.

1.2. Basic Rules and Manners in the Zendo

1.2.1. Gassho

The most frequent gesture we use in the zendo is obviously that of *gassho*, literally, “palms joined together.” You raise your hands with both palms touching each other. Keep in mind that the tips of your middle fingers are raised as high as your nose.

1.2.2. Zendo Manners

Before you enter the zendo, you make gassho and bow at the entrance of the zendo. In the zendo you are supposed to walk with your hands folded in front of your chest. This so-called kinhin-style of walking which will be explained more fully later. You never walk inside the zendo with your hands swinging freely .

It is also a basic rule that you do not walk in the central part of the zendo – no matter whether there is wooden flooring or not – , as this space is considered to be reserved for the roshi. Try to walk behind the rows of people sitting toward the wall.

When you reach the place where you should do your zazen, first bow in gassho toward your sitting position. By this action you greet your neighbors sitting on your right and left. Then, you turn around clockwise, with your hands still in gassho, and greet your co-sitters on the other side of the zendo with a bow. Then you turn around to your original position and sit at your place.

When you leave the zendo, turn around at the entrance, make a bow with gassho, and then step out of the zendo.

Please remember that almost all circular movements in the zendo are done clockwise.

1.3. How to Sit in Zazen

1.3.1. Preliminaries

When you start zazen at home, spread out a rather big mat of about one meter square in a quiet room. If you do not have such a mat, a blanket folded like a mat is just as good. Then place on it a small round cushion, *zafu* (with kapok inside), or use a square cushion folded into two. If you sit in a zendo, all these things are already properly placed. No matter whether you sit at home or in the zendo, you should not wear very tight trousers, because they would make it difficult to keep the proper leg positions.

If you sit in a zendo, you hear the wooden clappers hit once by the *jikidô*. This is the sign to get ready to start zazen.

1.3.2. The Postures

When you sit on the zafu, you do not sit on very top of your zafu, but rather sit upon the front half of it. This gives you more stability in posture.

The best recommended way of sitting is the *full-lotus* posture (*kekka-fuza*). You put the foot of the right leg upon the left thigh and the foot of the left leg on right thigh. The biggest advantage of this way of sitting is that it guarantees the utmost stability with the both knees directly touching the ground, so that a broad, solid foundation is created. If the upper body is fixed this way, bodily movements are controlled and thoughts are more effectively made quiet.

If this way of sitting is too difficult on account of the pain in the legs, you should try *half-lotus* (*hanka-fuza*): you put the foot of the left leg over the right thigh. But if you are not used to crossing your legs when you sit, even the half-lotus can be exasperating. Your knees may not equally touch the cushion, and you may experience constant pain. (In either the full-lotus or the half-lotus position, you may reverse the upper foot if the legs become too tired.)

If you find the lotus-sitting totally unbearable, a different suggestion would be to put one leg underneath the thigh of the other leg, which now simply lies in front of you on the mat (“Burmese” sitting). A still different way would be to use the traditional Japanese sitting posture with the buttocks on the heels and calves. This way could be still easier if you use a cushion between the heels and the buttocks. Or you could use a small bench to sit on while you fold your

legs under the bench. If any of these methods does not work, you could use a chair. The most important point is that you keep your back erect, just like an empty chimney that stands upright.

1.3.3. Other Pointers for Right Sitting

Next, you put your right hand in your lap, palm upward, and place the left hand, again palm upward, on top of the right palm. The hands should not be far from your body, but remain close to your abdomen.

Try to touch the tips of the thumbs to each other so that the palms and thumbs form an oval or a “chestnut” placed upside down. The thumbs should always be pointed upward. If your thumbs are leaning away from your body or have lost contact with each other, this is almost always a sign of slackened concentration.

They say that the right side of the body represents the “active” side of the human spirit, while the left side the “passive” aspect. Therefore, all through our practice we are supposed to control the active side through putting the left-side member (foot, hand, etc.) over the right-side member, in order to calm our spirit. However, if you look at a Buddha figure, you will notice that the order of the members is exactly the opposite. This is because a Buddha, completing the process of self-salvation, is now ready to be “active” for the sake of saving all beings.

In actual practice, however, you may reverse the uppermost foot for the next sitting if your legs become too tired.

Now, after crossing the legs, you bend deeply forward, thrusting your buttocks out. Bring your trunk gradually up to an upright position. Observed from the side, your ears should be in a straight line with your shoulders, and the nose should be in line with your navel. Your upper body should be totally relaxed, with no stiffness in the shoulders.

You now look at the horizon. Then, lower your gaze so that it falls about 1.5 or 2 meters away from your body, without focusing on any particular point or object. It is said that our mind easily becomes still when the eyesight is lowered in this manner. Your eyes, however, should always be open; if you close your eyes, you are liable to doze off. Furthermore, your mouth should be

closed, and the tip of your tongue ought to lightly touch the upper gum.

Check that your spine is erect, and it must remain so at all times during zazen. Take special care that your head is erect, not leaning forward or backward or sideward. This does not mean, however, that you should be sternly erect, showing off your inner pride. Rather, you should be naturally and calmly upright. Do not take a slouching form either, as it reflects self-pity, another form of your ego. Besides, the slumping body would place improper pressure upon the organs in the body, affecting the nerves and causing unnecessary strains in the entire system. As you know, body and mind form one single entity; an incorrect physical position influences the mind in a negative way and mars the desirable one-pointed concentration in zazen.

Once the formal posture is correct, you take a deep breath, hold it so for a moment, then let it quietly out. Do this a couple of time, always using your nose and not your mouth. After that, you start breathing naturally.

Then, sway to the right and to the left, about seven or eight time – first rather large swings, then gradually smaller and smaller, until your upper body becomes centered at a still point. This action is named *sayû-yôshin*, “swaying the body right and left,” and is considered very important at the outset of zazen. Now you hear the *inkin*, the small hand bell, struck three times, and that is the sign that zazen concentration has begun.

1.3.4. “Counting Breaths” (*sûsoku-kan*) (1)

You now start with the concentration of your mind. There are many methods for this, prescribed by our predecessors. The easiest method for the beginners (but also for the advanced too) is “counting breaths”: you count incoming and/or outgoing breaths (*sûsoku-kan*). Through this very simple practice all your discursive reasoning can be shunted out and your discriminatory mind put to rest. Then the mind is emptied out but at the same time a sharp, clear state of deep absorption will follow.

This is how you start this method: You count both inhalations and exhalations. When you inhale, you count in your mind “one”; when you exhale, you count “two”; when you inhale again, you count “three”, and so forth, until you come up to “ten.” When you reach “ten,” you go back to “one,” counting up

once again to “ten.” When you are not quite concentrated, you might keep going on “eleven,” “twelve,” Never mind. If you notice that, you calmly go back to your original “one,” “two,” It is so simple – almost disappointingly simple.

1.3.5. How to Deal with Random Thoughts

Let me elaborate the last point a bit more. Floating ideas, coming and going in your mind, are not bad things at all. They do not constitute any real impediment in your practice. Regrettably, this fact is not widely known. Even among the practitioners who have practiced more than 10 years or so there are quite a few people who think that they have to stop their consciousness altogether in their practice of Zen. Of course, there is a special kind of zazen that aims at such a state of mind, but it is not the zazen practiced in Zen Buddhism we know. You must know that, as long as you live, regardless of the intensity of your counting breaths, you will notice what is in front of you since your eyes are open. You will hear sounds around you since your ears are not plugged up. Your mind lets various thoughts and images pass through since you are not sleeping. Please notice, however, that all these perceptions or thoughts do not form an obstacle to or lessen the value of your zazen at all – unless you label them “good” or “bad” and try consciously to chase them or to drive them out. This is an important point. If you want to pursue any of the sensations or ideas, then you stick to them. And that is indeed a distraction and your concentration is broken. If you try to expel the perceived objects or ideas, this also constitutes adherence to them, thus impeding your due concentration. Therefore: let all random perceptions and thoughts come up and go as they will. They are like clouds in the sky. Never keep company with them nor try to chase them out. Just keep concentrating upon counting your inhalations and exhalations. That is all you need to do.

1.3.6. Kyôsaku

The kyôsaku, literally translated as admonition stick, should not be taken as a punishment. Its purpose is to encourage you and help you with your zazen concentration. That is, the kyôsaku hits are very helpful when you are sleepy,

your spirit is dull, or you have very stiff shoulders. In the Sanbo-Kyodan line, it is most commonly applied when you ask for it.

The person in charge of the kyôsaku, namely the *inô*, walks around the zendo, first clockwise, then counterclockwise in order to avoid crossing in front of the altar with the stick. During this time you may ask for the kyôsaku by raising your hands in gassho.

The *inô* touches your shoulder lightly, to let you know that your sign has been acknowledged.

Then you bow in gassho, and the *inô* behind you bows at the same time. You bend slightly forward, curving your upper body to the left. The *inô* strikes your right shoulder twice. Then you change your posture, while you bend slightly forward again, curving your body this time to the right, in order to receive two strikes on the left shoulder.

After the kyôsaku strikes, you bow in gassho again, and the *inô* behind you bows at the same time. Then you go back to your zazen concentration again.

1.3.7. *Kinhin (Walking-Zen)*

When you hear the *inkin* struck once during zazen, it is a sign to stop zazen for a free break. If you hear it struck twice, it is the time to finish one period of zazen and move on to *kinhin*, a walking form of Zen.

Do not stand up abruptly. That would not be good for your inner state; besides, that may possibly damage your spine. First swing from side to side several times, beginning with small movements, then slowly to larger ones. Notice that your movements of the *sayû-yôshin* this time are in the reverse fashion compared to those at the beginning of your zazen.

Then turn around on your zafu clockwise, and stand up slowly. Arrange your sitting place neatly, and face the co-sitters on the other side. With the sign of the wooden clappers, bow to the other side in gassho, and turn 90 degrees to the left. You slowly walk round the zendo with all others. Notice that this collective walking goes around clockwise too.

When walking in *kinhin*, you place the right fist, with the thumb inside, on the chest and you cover that fist with your left palm. Try to form a straight line with the elbows. Your hands should not be lowered to your belly or nor

raised up to your chin. The head should stay erect, just as it was during zazen, with the eyes resting this time about 3 meters in front of you. Since this is walking Zen, you carry on your present practice further, either Mu or counting breaths, as you walk calmly and steadily around the zendo.

This practice of kinhin usually lasts at least for five minutes, until you hear the wooden clappers once again. Then you go back to your own place at a normal walking speed.

At your own place, you bow to the other side together with all others, turn around clockwise, and bow to your neighbors as well. Then take your seat and resume your zazen.

During the kinhin time, you may go out to the restroom and or washroom. When you come back to the zendo, wait for your position in the kinhin line to come in front of you. Then bow in gassho and join the kinshin.

While waiting for your position in the kinhin line, if you hear the wooden clappers finishing the kinhin, do not go rushing into the zendo but keep waiting outside. Only after the people inside have finished bowing to each other should you step into the zendo. By so doing you do not disturb anyone inside; otherwise people must wait for you to get to your own place before they bow to each other.

(There is a considerable difference between the Rinzai School and the Soto School as to their way of walking in kinhin. In the Rinzai tradition the walking is brisk and full of energy, whereas the Soto tradition prescribes that it be very slow and attentive. As a matter of fact, each breath carries the Soto practitioners only several centimeters forward. Harada Roshi preferred a speed somewhat between these two Schools, and that is how we practice kinhin in the Sanbô-Kyôdan tradition. Also the Rinzai School puts the left palm on top of the right hand, while the Soto tradition places the right hand upon the left hand. Harada Roshi thought that the Rinzai way of putting the left hand on the top was more appropriate for the kinhin movements of our line.)

This is the end of Lecture One. Please go on counting your breaths as instructed, until you come to the next lecture.

LECTURE TWO

2.1. Precautions to Observe in Zazen

2.1.1. Facing the Wall

There are several directives to follow when you do zazen alone at home. First is the principle of “facing the wall.” As the saying concerning Bodhidharma goes – “Facing the wall he sat nine years” [*mempeki-kunen*] – it is recommended to do zazen in front of a wall (or a curtain etc.) Do not sit too distant from the wall or too close to it; the best distance is about one meter or a little less. However, you should not sit in front of a glass window through which you can see outside; this would be too distracting and not serve the purpose of zazen. Sitting in front of a wall should make it easy for you to direct your attention inwards. Also, it is worth remembering that, although you should keep your eyes open, you should not actually try to see anything particular on the wall.

2.1.2. Place

If it is possible at all, try to sit in a room which is clean, orderly and quiet. Furthermore, if you can consider the room “sacred” in one way or another, it would be most desirable.

However, it is not advisable to sit in zazen on a bed even if the room is clean and quiet. It is difficult to keep your mind attentive on a bed because of various reasons. If you are bedridden, then you have of course no other option.

2.1.3. Sounds

You will notice that natural sounds such as those of birds, insects, falling rain or running rivers will scarcely disturb you while sitting; but human voices do distract you, whether heard directly or on the radio or on TV. This is why you should choose a quiet place for your zazen as much as possible. But it is also true that, as your sitting gets deepened and matured, no noise, including human voices, will disturb you any more.

2.1.4. Conditions in the Room

It is advisable to furnish your sitting room with flowers or to burn incense, as these elements may augment the sense of purity and sanctity of the space. In this way it becomes easier for you to make your inner state serene and to devote your attention to your zazen more quickly.

2.1.5. Clothing

Try to wear rather simple and comfortable clothing in which you can feel natural and pure. Avoid tight trousers, since your sitting posture as well as your breathing become unnatural and difficult. When you sit with other people, try not to wear loud clothing, because they tend to distract your co-practitioners' concentration.

2.1.6. Lighting

The room should be neither too light nor too dark. A kind of twilight is considered ideal. If you make it too dark, it dulls your spirit and may lead you to dozing, similar to the case in which you close your eyes during sitting. Real zazen will not lead you to an inactive state of mind, but to a highly activated dimension of your spirit amid a perfectly peaceful state of mind.

2.1.7. Room Temperature

The room should not be too hot in summer nor too cold in winter. Zazen does not intend to make you mortify your body and go through ascetic self-torture; therefore, it is not necessary to fight with either the extremity of heat or cold. Too hot a temperature makes you sleepy. However, we can say from experience that you can sit better in a slightly cool condition. Of course, as your zazen power becomes stronger, you can sit almost anywhere, regardless of cold or heat.

2.1.8. The Time of Day for Sitting

What is the best time for sitting during the day? If you are eager and do have free time, any time of the day is fine. But if you work, the best time would be early morning or late evening, or even better: both. If you sit in the

early morning, sit before you eat breakfast, and if at night, preferably right before you go to bed. If you can sit only once a day, then the early morning hours might have greater advantages because of the following reasons: In the morning you are sufficiently rested and your stomach is rather empty, which is a desirable state for practicing zazen. In the evening, on the contrary, you tend to be tired because of the day's work; maybe you have already had supper and your stomach is full, which is not ideal for sitting at least for beginners. Of course, as your eagerness to sit grows, it does not really matter whether in the morning or in the evening, or whether before or after the meal.

2.1.9. Length of One Sitting

Next, how long should you sit for one sitting? In fact, there is no fixed rule for this, since, as you can see, it depends entirely upon your ardor, maturity and methodological awareness concerning sitting. If you are a beginner, you might as well start with shorter periods. Then, after sitting earnestly for five minutes a day, let's say, for a month or so, you will most probably want to prolong your sitting time a little longer – for ten minutes or more. When you are capable of sitting half an hour without having too much pain or difficulties, then you will start savoring the deep serenity of the heart-mind and profound peace generated by the sitting itself. Because of this process of gradual verification it is advisable that beginners should start sitting with shorter periods. If, on the contrary, beginners forced themselves to sit for longer periods, the pain in the legs would become simply intolerable torture. You would be discouraged from sitting anymore without ever coming to experience deep peace of mind through sitting. Regrettably, this happens all too often. On the other hand, even if you sit only for ten minutes a day, the brevity of your sitting time will be compensated by the intensity of sitting you bring to your practice, thus creating a very effective zazen period. That is, you should never sit with dull or absent-minded consciousness, as if you were mechanically carrying out your obligations.

Even if you can continue sitting for more than an hour with a fine feeling of tranquility, it is better to reduce each sitting time to about half an hour, since our spirit cannot maintain the same intensity longer than that and the quality

of each sitting inevitably degenerates – even if you do not notice it. That is the reason why you should alternate a zazen period of about 25 to 30 minutes with a round of kinhin [walking Zen], thus refreshing your spirit for another period of intensive sitting.

As a matter of fact, it is for the same reason that the Zen temples have always added the time for manual work [*samu*] to this routine practice. The principle is that you must always keep yourself mindful of your own practice during this samu. Laxity of the spirit mars the entire practice.

2.1.10. Food

As for food, you should not eat more than 80 % of your stomach's capacity. The *Zazen Yôjinki* (Precautions to Observe in Zazen), written about 650 years ago by Keizan Jôkin Zenji (=Jôsai Daishi), founder of the Temple Sôjiji/Yokohama, maintains that the practitioner should not fill the stomach more than to two-thirds of its capacity. Furthermore, it suggests you prefer vegetables. It is true that many people today eat food that produces more acid in the blood especially from eating meat. Most vegetables are, however, alkaline in their nature. In olden times there was a notion of *yang-yin* diet. The *yang* was alkaline, the *yin* acidic. Many ancient books admonished that our diet should not be either too yang or too yin. Such care of our health is not unrelated to our Zen practice.

2.1.11. Use of a Notebook

When sitting by yourself it is advisable that you have a notebook and a pencil/ball-point pen near you, because during zazen very precious ideas or things you should not forget may flash into your mind. States of affairs which earlier seemed impossible to understand might suddenly be clarified; problems which were so difficult might find abrupt solutions. If you do not jot them down right away, they will frequent your mind and so interrupt your zazen concentration.

2.1.12. Checking the Effect

As you may see, the effects of zazen do not have any clear forms. Even if

you have practiced for a reasonable period of time, therefore, you may not notice most of the effects of your sitting. Consequently, you may think that sitting seriously does not bring any remarkable results, and you may quit in frustration. Therefore, after having practiced zazen regularly for half a year or a year (let's say, sitting for twenty to twenty-five minutes each time, two to three times a day), you might as well compare your every day conditions or/and your mental states with those before you started regular zazen. Most probably you will notice some kind of positive change in your conditions. Or you could ask your friends or family whether they have noticed any changes in your everyday life at all. They will certainly be able to point out some favorable changes in you, which will encourage you to continue your zazen.

Actually, it is advisable to fix a rather short-term target, e.g. one month or two. If you have cleared the target, check the effects of zazen in the way mentioned above. If you have found something positive, then set up another goal. This way you may find it easier to continue zazen on a regular basis.

2.2. The Three Aims of Zazen

The aims of zazen are the following three:

- 1) development of the power of concentration [*jôriki no renma*]
- 2) experience of the supreme Way [*mujôdô no taiken/kenshô-godô*]
- 3) actualization of the supreme Way in our daily lives [*mujôdô no taigen*].

These three constitute a single unity, but for the benefit of explanation, we will speak about them one by one.

*2.2.1. Development of the Power of Concentration [*jôriki no renma*]*

Jôriki [literally: stabilizing power] is the mental power that is naturally generated when the heart-mind has experienced the state of “one-pointedness” through deep absorption for a certain period of time. This is more than just an ability to concentrate your mind in an ordinary sense of the word. It is a deep, dynamic power of our mind that makes it possible for us in any unexpected situations to act instantaneously and in such a manner that is appropriate to the given circumstances. If you have developed *jôriki*, you are no more a slave

of your random passions; nor are you subject to your own environment. You can move and act with perfect freedom and equanimity, always in command of yourself as well as the circumstances given in your concrete life situations.

The power of *jôriki* can be augmented and developed almost endlessly as we keep practicing *zazen*, but it will fade away if we stop regular sitting and eventually it will disappear. Another important thing to remember is that, although many marvelous and extraordinary capabilities will be cultivated out of *jôriki*, this power alone can never cut off the root of our delusive thoughts. Although *jôriki* is necessary, it alone is not enough to grant us the highest Wisdom; for this, we need the awakening experience of *satori*, which basically stems out of an entirely different dimension. In this connection, we should remember what a classical document maintains which derives from the Patriarch Sekitô Kisen (700-790), the founder of one of the early Zen lines: “In our school, realization of the Buddha-nature, and not mere devotion or strength of concentration, is paramount.”

2.2.2. *Experience of the supreme Way [mujôdô no taiken/kenshô-godô]*

The second aim of *zazen* is *mujôdô no taiken*, experience of the supreme Way, or *kenshô-godô*, realization of the essential World by seeing into your self-nature. It is an experience called *satori* or *kenshô* in Japanese, or self-realization or enlightenment in English. The term “supreme Way” is almost synonymous with the “essential World.” *Satori* is an experience of realizing this “Way” or “World” – in other words, the absolute Reality of you yourself. If it is authentic *kenshô*, its substance is always the same, no matter who experiences it, be it the Buddha Shakyamuni, one of the Patriarchs, or any one of us.

However, this does not imply that we all can experience *satori* to the same degree as Shakyamuni, since there are tremendous differences concerning the depth, clarity and thoroughness of the experience. Imagine, for example, that a person who was born blind starts to recover his or her eyesight. At the beginning the person may see an object right in front of him or her very vaguely and indefinitely. Then, as the person’s eyesight continues to get better, he or she can distinguish an object which is a couple of meters away. Then, the

person can see things which are ten meters away, then fifty meters away, and in the end, the person may be able to see things which are up to a hundred meters away. At each level mentioned above, the person sees the same thing in substance, but the clarity and depth of the view can be as different as the distance between heaven and earth.

One note concerning the connection between jôriki and kenshô: Although, as mentioned above, satori does not spring automatically out of jôriki, it is also true that many people will never be able to attain kenshô unless they have first accumulated a certain degree of jôriki. That is, without jôriki people may remain too uneasy and troubled in their mind to patiently practice their zazen. Also, unless you are strengthened by jôriki, your kenshô experience may be unable to exercise any positive effect upon your life; it is often reduced to a simple memory of “having had a kensho.” The kenshô experience certainly enables you to see through the Oneness of the universe with the eye of your mind, but without jôriki you simply cannot act freely enough in accord with your new vision revealed in your kenshô experience. Therefore, it is very important to cultivate jôriki as you constantly practice zazen.

2.2.3. Actualization of the Supreme Way in Our Daily Life [mujôdô no taigen]

The last of the three aims is *mujôdô no taigen*, the actualization or personalization of the supreme Way throughout our entire existence and daily activities. Of course, if you sit diligently without any trace of your ego according to the instruction of a competent teacher, your Buddha nature, intrinsically pure and without blemish, is perfectly unfolded, no matter whether you have had kenshô or not. However, we must emphasize here that it is only with authentic satori that you thoroughly grasp the reality of your Buddha nature and *start to embody that truth through your actual being* in your daily life. From this point of view you can safely say that this third aim of zazen is the ultimate goal of Zen. And it is easy to see that this aim is most difficult to actualize. It is even said that you need “more than one life” to fulfill it; in fact, there is a saying that goes, “Even Shakyamuni Buddha is still practicing.”

The Rinzai School has a tendency to make the satori-experience their final

target, passing quickly through the area of constantly strengthening jôriki as well as neglecting the ultimate goal of actualizing the supreme Way in our daily life. That is, they tend to minimize the need of seriously practicing after enlightenment; the koan study, unaccompanied by constant zazen practice and by the need of actualization in the ordinary life, often becomes an intellectual game instead of an effective way of bringing the world of satori to its full realization.

The way of practice professed by the Soto School, on the other hand, emphasizes the actualization of the highest Way from the very beginning; however, it is in reality scarcely more than just a mere accumulation of the concentration power, since they radically exclude any possibility of attaining satori. They do not hesitate to contend these days that kenshō is not necessary and that all you have to do is to get involved in your daily activities with the “Buddha mind.” This is totally off the mark, since you remain unable to find out what “the Buddha mind” really is without the authentic experience of satori.

These unhappy positions taken by both schools in modern times have unluckily lowered the level of Zen in Japan to a considerable degree.

2.3. “Counting Breaths” (sûsoku-kan) (2)

Now please change your breath-counting exercise a little. At the end of Lecture One you were asked to count “one” when you breathed in and “two” when you breathed out. From now on, count “one” only when you breathe out. You do not have to care about counting the inhalations; simply count “one,” “two,” “three,” etc. when you exhale.

LECTURE THREE

3.1. The Five Categories of Zen

3.1.0. Introduction

Let us now review the various kinds of Zen. You must learn how they are different from each other, so that you do not make mistakes concerning important points, e.g. whether enlightenment (*satori*) is indispensable to Zen at all, or what the ultimate goal of Zen is, etc. As a matter of fact, there are some types of Zen that are very deep, and some that are rather shallow; some lead to *satori*, and some do not. Tradition holds that at the time of Shakyamuni there existed ninety or ninety-five schools of philosophy or religion in India, each professing their own style of Zen, and each slightly differing from one another.

It can be said that all major religions possess some degree of “Zen,” as they normally consider *prayer* as one of their major practices, and prayer requires concentration of the mind-heart. The teachings of Confucius and Mencius, those of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, have also their share of “Zen,” since the concentration of the mind is more or less presupposed in each of them. In Japan you can see the influence of Zen in many cultural or artistic activities, for example, tea ceremony, Noh-play, kendo, judo, flower arrangement etc. Also, there have been many people who consciously brought in the elements of Zen into their spiritual movements (Japanese type of sitting meditation by Torajirô Okada, 1872-1920, or Indian Yoga by Tempû Nakamura, 1876-1968).

Although “Zen” in the broad sense comprises all these different ways of concentration, we will speak about “Zen” in the narrower sense and follow the five main classifications of Zen according to the presentation by Keihô Shûmitsu Zenji (780-841). He is one of the early Chinese Zen masters, whose Zen categories we still find quite relevant and useful even today.

Looked at from outside these five categories of Zen are hardly different from one another. There might be a slight difference as to the way the legs are crossed and hands are held or how breathing is controlled etc., but the basic elements are exactly the same: erect sitting posture, correct breathing, and the inner concentration of the mind. But they differ greatly in the *substance*

and in the *aim* of their Zen practice. Especially beginners need, therefore, to pay careful attention. You should know the differences well enough when you come for the first time to your Zen master and state your “degree of aspiration” and ask for proper guidance, for these categories can clearly express your own goal in Zen, which makes it easier for the Zen master to lead you accordingly.

3.1.1. Bompu-Zen (Zen for Ordinary People)

The first type of Zen is called *bompu-Zen* (Zen for ordinary people). This type of Zen is basically void of any philosophical or religious character, and it is practiced with the well-founded belief that it can contribute to improving your physical as well as mental health. In fact, various psychosomatic symptoms are likely to be ameliorated, and the practitioner’s entire well-being will be generally promoted through *zazen*. Therefore, this type of Zen is for all people, regardless of religious conviction or philosophical orientation.

The main point of this type of Zen practice is to learn to concentrate yourself and control your mind. Without this faculty of effective concentration you cannot be successful in anything you seriously undertake. Furthermore, through properly training *bompu-Zen* you will be able to control your mind and to overcome various temptations you had earlier no power to resist. Also, many attachments which have enslaved you for such a long time can naturally be loosened. A consistent practice of this type of Zen will moreover contribute to enriching your personality and deepening your character, since the serene Zen meditation will inevitably develop your intellect, emotion and will power.

However, it must be maintained that *bompu-Zen*, although it is far more powerful than reading books or studying philosophy and ethics, is unable to reveal the deepest and most fundamental nature of a human being and to solve the basic question of life and death. The reason is that this type of Zen is not capable of dissolving the obstinate delusion of oneself being basically separate from all others.

3.1.2. Gedô-Zen (Non-Buddhist Zen)

The second category of Zen is called *gedô-Zen* (Non-Buddhist Zen). *Gedô* literally means “an outside way,” i.e., teachings other than Buddhist, since it is

seen from the Buddhist viewpoint. This is a Zen clearly motivated by religious and philosophical interests, but is not a Buddhist Zen in the precise sense of the word. Hindu yoga, the quietist sitting of Confucianism, some meditation practices in Christianity – these are some examples of gedô-Zen.

One possible characteristic of gedô-Zen is that it often aims to develop various supernatural powers or abilities, and/or to acquire special talents above the ordinary human level. Although these things are cultivated through the continuous strengthening of *jôriki*, the power of mind stabilization, it must be remembered that any type of Zen, whose sole target is to develop such *jôriki* with the above-mentioned concept, does not belong to authentic Buddhist Zen.

An additional point: There are certain Hindu Sects that practice Zen in order to be “reborn in heaven.” Zen Buddhism does not aim at this. Of course, Zen Buddhism does not refute the image of heavenly strata or the idea that a person could be reborn in heaven by virtue of performing ten kinds of meritorious actions etc. But the Zen Buddhists themselves do not crave for heavenly rebirth. Conditions in heaven are said to be too happy, comfortable and easy, and the person there would in the end lose all motivation to do zazen seriously. Therefore, when the accumulated “merits” are all gone, the person might fall to hell. Zen practitioners prefer to be born into the human world and to devote themselves to zazen, in order to ultimately realize Buddhahood, the essence of our being.

3.1.3. *Shôjô-Zen (Small Vehicle Zen)*

The third kind of Zen is *shôjô-Zen* (Small Vehicle Zen). The word “vehicle” means a teaching or a method which takes you from this world of delusion to the other world of enlightenment. The “small” vehicle means that it is conceived to accommodate only one’s own self. The “large” vehicle (Mahayana), on the other hand, is named “large” because it takes lots of other people at the same time. The former could be compared to a bicycle with just one rider, while the latter would be a bus or a big ship where a large number of people could be accommodated to go to the destination. Therefore, *shôjô-Zen* is a type of Zen which looks only to one’s own peace of mind and salvation in mind.

This can be classified as a Buddhist Zen, but a Zen which does not precisely

match with Shakyamuni Buddha's supreme teaching. It is rather an expedient means conceded for those practitioners who really cannot grasp the deepest dimension of Shakyamuni's intention. Each entity cannot be separated from the whole, since it contains the entire universe in itself. Therefore, it is impossible to attain true peace of mind only for yourself, while you stay totally aloof from other beings.

However, there are people who just cannot believe that there is such a world of Oneness as true reality. Even if they are taught countless times that the world of relative opposition is an illusory world, a product of their own distorted conviction, they cannot stop clinging to it. Those people very often find this world originally evil and sinful, full of killing, hating, being killed and being hated; it is indeed the world where suffering lasts forever, day in and day out. They are often in despair and wish to escape from it, finding that even death is preferable to lingering longer in this world.

Shôjô-Zen might grant an effective answer to those people. Its objective is to stop and suspend all human thoughts with the consequence that the mind becomes perfectly still like a total blank sheet; thus, the practitioner enters into the state of *mushinjô*, a condition in which all human senses have ceased to function, as if extinguished, so that only lifeless consciousness remains. You could soar into a state similar to an ever-lasting trance for some time or for an indefinite period of time. If it were to continue indefinitely, death might follow as a matter of course, naturally and without pain. Buddhists speak here also about "dying without rebirth"; such a process of dying without being reborn is depicted minutely in a Buddhist philosophical work named the *Kusharon* (*Abhidharmakosabhasya*; a book by Seshin (*Vasubandhu*) in the 4th-5th C.).

3.1.4. *Daijô-Zen* (Great Vehicle Zen)

The fourth type of zazen is *daijô-Zen* (Great Vehicle (Mahayana) Zen). This indeed is an authentic Zen for the Buddhists, since its primary purpose is to attain *kenshô-godô*, i.e. seeing through to our essential nature and realizing it in our actual life. In fact, the *daijô-Zen* presupposes that those who practice this type of Zen understand well enough the relevance of Shakyamuni's own experience of great awakening and are firmly determined to practice in order to

break through their illusory dualism to come to the absolute reality of the universe. The Buddha Way relies basically upon enlightenment. After his own great experience Shakyamuni spent more than four decades teaching people the way to come to their true essential nature. This intention and method of Shakyamuni have been handed down from masters to their students all through the generations, until the present age. If a school of Zen does not take enlightenment seriously or even denies it, then it is quite certain that that Zen never belongs to our daijô-Zen.

However, it is necessary to mention the following point: In Zen practice, you naturally set your aim to come to the awakening of your true self. Do not consider, however, that zazen is simply a *means* to enlightenment. In fact, it is the manifestation itself of your essential nature. A thoughtful master will, therefore, admonish the students from the outset that their practice is already a realization of what they essentially are, namely their Buddha-nature. If zazen were merely a means to the end called enlightenment, it would be totally nonsense to go on practicing after the so-called kensho. The truth of the matter is exactly the other way around: As Dogen Zenji points out, the more profoundly you see your intrinsic nature, the more fervently you feel the need of further practice.

3.1.5. Saijôjô-Zen (Supreme Vehicle Zen)

The last type of Zen is *saijôjô-Zen*, which means “Zen of the highest vehicle.” This is the zenith and the crown of Buddhist Zen practice. It is this type of Zen that all the Buddhas and great masters of the past advocated and maintained as the expression of the absolute life in its purest form. It is also the Zen which Dogen Zenji spoke of, free from all ideas about enlightenment or related consciousness. It is justly called *shikan-taza*, and we will discuss it in more detail in a coming lecture.

Let me point out just one aspect of *saijôjô-Zen*. In this category of Zen, means and end go hand in hand. If this type of Zen is practiced correctly, you, even as a beginner, sit with a deep conviction that your zazen is the manifestation of your indefinable essential nature, and, at the same time, you sit in firm belief in your sub-consciousness that the day will come when you cry

out, “This is it!”, realizing clearly what is meant by your original nature. Therefore, you do not wittingly strive for a quick enlightenment.

The Rinzai School evaluates daijô-Zen as the highest form and saijôjô-Zen as under it. However, you can see that saijôjô-Zen comprises daijô-Zen, or, to put it in a different way, daijô-Zen and saijôjô-Zen are in reality complementary. The Soto School today, on the other hand, maintains that we are already Buddhas as we are and we do not need any experience of enlightenment. This is a grave mistake, which demotes and reduces *shikan-taza*, the supreme form of zazen, to a mere state of bompû-Zen, explained above as the very first one of the five categories of Zen.

This concludes the explanation of the five categories of Zen. Let me suggest that you recall our earlier lecture on “the three aims of Zen,” and compare those aims with the five categories of Zen just mentioned. Then you might understand the five types, especially the last two, all the more clearly.

3.2. “Counting Breaths” (*sûsoku-kan*) (3)

This time you are asked to try a new way of concentration: Up to now you were supposed to count your exhalations; now please count “one” when you first inhale, then “two” when you inhale next, up to ten. This way is more difficult than counting your exhalations, since most of our mental as well as physical activities are performed with our exhaling breath. However, as this way of practice is rather difficult, you can take it as another challenging method of trying to increase your concentration. So, try counting your inhaling breaths with your mind, until we meet for the next lecture.

LECTURE FOUR

4.1. *Makyô*

4.1.1. Illusory Perceptions

Here we are going to speak about visionary/auditory and other experiences which are commonly called *makyô*. In fact, *makyô* means various illusory phenomena (such as deceptive appearances, hallucinations, feelings, fantasies, revelations etc.) which are rather commonly experienced by a person who seriously keeps practicing zazen. *Ma* stands for “devil” and *kyô* for “sphere” or “realm.” *Makyô* are, therefore, “devilish” phenomena that appear and disturb the practitioner of zazen. However, such phenomena themselves are not evil by nature. They become obstacles and grave hindrances only when the practitioner does not know the real nature of those phenomena and gets trapped by them.

There are two ways of using the word *makyô*: either in a broad sense or in a narrow sense. When used in a broad and general sense, we can say that the entire life of ordinary people is nothing but a “*makyô*.” Also, a person who holds a strong attachment to what he or she has attained in terms of satori still remains in the world of *makyô*. That is, it is extremely hard to be entirely free from all *makyô*, even after enlightenment. Not only ordinary practitioners, but also Bodhisattvas such as Monju (*Manjusri*) and Kannon (*Avalokitesvara*) – although they are far advanced in their practice, much more than common practitioners, they are still said to possess a certain degree of *makyô*. If not, they would already have become perfect Buddhas, totally free of any kind of *makyô*. – But we are not going to speak about this sort of *makyô* in this lecture.

Here we are dealing with *makyô* in the specific sense of the word. If a person joins a sesshin of five to seven days for the first time and tries very hard to sit, he or she is inclined to experience, on the third or fourth day, some sort of *makyô* in various nature and intensity. These *makyô* are, in fact, extremely varied: Their forms are limitless, each matching the personality, character,

history and situation of the respective practitioners.

There are makyô related to touch or smell or bodily movement. Sometimes the entire body could sway sideways or rock to and fro. It is not rare that words spring out without your knowing or an extremely delicate perfume is perceived out of nowhere.

Visual hallucinations are most common. For example, one is sitting in zazen with one's eyes wide open, when all of a sudden the tips of the tatami before one's eyes look as if they were swaying up and down like ocean waves. Or everything may suddenly fade out or turn pitch-black in front of your eyes. A simple mark on the door may suddenly change into an animal or devil or angelic being. Once there was a Zen disciple who would see visions of "masks": masks of demons and/or those of jesters. When asked whether he had had any history with such masks, he slowly remembered that he, as a child, had seen those things at a local festival in Kyûshû (one of the big southern islands in Japan). Another disciple was always annoyed in his zazen by the strong vision of the Buddha and his disciples walking around him reciting sutras; he was able to get rid of these scenes only by throwing himself into a big barrel of ice-cold water outside!

Many makyô cases also appear in the form of illusory hearing. It might be a sound of some musical instrument or other big noises like a loud explosion, which might actually make one jump up. Of course, these sounds can be "heard" only by the person who has this makyô. One person would hear the sound of a bamboo flute during zazen. He actually had learned how to play the bamboo flute many years before, but had not played it for a long time. Still, when he sat in zazen, the flute sound would constantly come back to him.

In the *Zazen Yôjinki* (Precautions for Zazen; see above) we read the following description about makyô:

"The body may feel hot or cold or glasslike or hard or heavy or light. This happens because the breath is not well harmonized (with the mind) and needs to be carefully regulated."

Further it reads:

"One may experience the sensation of sinking or floating, or may alternately feel hazy and sharply alert. The disciple may develop the

faculty of seeing through solid objects as though they were transparent, or he may experience his own body as a translucent substance. He may see Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Penetrating insights may suddenly come to him, or passages of sutras which were particularly difficult to understand may suddenly become luminously clear to him. All these abnormal visions and sensations are merely the symptoms of an impairment arising from a maladjustment of the mind with the breath.”

Other religions as well as other schools of Buddhism highly evaluate experiences which contain visions of the divine beings or experiences of hearing unworldly voices, performing miracles, receiving heavenly instructions, or purifying oneself through certain religious rites or performing miraculous deeds. These practices may lead to a positive attitude to life, and in that respect, they seem to be of some value. But seen from the point of view of practicing zazen with its ultimate aim, all these experiences are nothing but makyô, which have no decisive meaning on the way of attaining your true self.

4.1.2. How to Deal with Makyô

The important question is: What is the fundamental nature of these makyô, which are supposed to disturb you on the way of zazen? They are nothing but temporary states of mind at a certain point in the ripening process of your zazen practice as your concentration power increases. That is: when the ever-moving waves of thoughts on the surface of the shallow consciousness are more or less pacified, debris of past experiences and impressions, which remain in the deeper layers of the sub-consciousness, rise irregularly to the surface of the consciousness, creating an impression of very vivid and impressive reality. Therefore, makyô represent a kind of mixture of the real and the unreal and are somewhat similar to dreams which one has during sleep in the night. Dreams do not appear to us when we are very deeply asleep, but mostly when we are half-asleep or in a shallow sleep (often in the so-called REM-period). Likewise, makyô do not appear to a person who is in a very deep absorption or real Samadhi.

Important: you should never be led into the idea that these phenomena are

realities and therefore meaningful. No, they are not. Even if you have a pretty vision of some Bodhisattva, it does not mean at all that you are closer to such a being yourself – in the same manner that having a dream of becoming a billionaire does not promise your becoming one when you wake up. This further means that there is no reason at all to boast about your makyô experiences; at the same time, you should not get terrified or discouraged at all even if you have a makyô of an awfully ugly monster or anything of the sort.

It is of particular importance that you do not get fascinated and enticed when you see a Buddha or godly beings blessing you or granting a supernatural message, or endowing some prophetic announcement which eventually turns out to be a reality. Even those cases are nothing but makyô in the process of attaining your true self. Therefore, they are simply a waste of your energy if you linger around these phenomena and get infatuated by them. The absolute rule is: ignore them!

However, one thing is sure: the fact that those phenomena appear to you *is* a certain sign, showing that you have reached the deeper level of your consciousness and therefore are at a crucial level of your zazen practice on the way to your self-realization. Simply keep going on! They say that even Shakyamuni Buddha, before he attained his great enlightenment, was greatly troubled by a spell of such makyô phenomena, which are called “obstructing devils.”

Once more: Each time you encounter a makyô, pay no attention to it, but simply keep doing the assigned zazen practice with all your spiritual energy.

4.2. “Following Breaths” (zuisoku-kan)

This time you are asked to try another method of inner concentration named “following the breaths” (*zuisoku-kan*). Up to now you have counted your exhalations and inhalations; now, simply follow your breathing with full awareness. That is, when you breathe in, just watch your breathing-in with your so-called “mind’s eye”; when you breathe out, you just stay aware that you are breathing out.

This method of concentration is a little more difficult than the

breaths-counting one, because when you count your breaths, the very act of counting helps you with focusing your concentration as a concrete support, like a cane when you walk. If you find yourself distracted and carried away from the counting, you simply have to restart your counting to get back on track again. Now this “cane” is gone, and you must walk without any help. If you stop following the breathing, your concentration is disrupted. You must constantly keep watching your breaths.

Counting the breaths as well as following the breaths are two methods very often given to beginners. But they are by no means reserved for only beginners; any advanced student can use them as well. Furthermore, both counting and following breaths are, in themselves, perfect manifestations of your essence, your true nature. Maybe you do not see this point so easily, but it is a real fact. So, you should not take these practices lightly. Please keep in mind that as you go on practicing this method of watching your breathing faithfully, you will inevitably be led to a great enlightenment for sure (since it *is* the presentation of great enlightenment itself!).

LECTURE FIVE

5.1. Dokusan

5.1.1. Individual Instruction

It is now time to speak about *dokusan*, which literally means “coming to [the master] alone.” This is the time in which a practitioner may privately bring up all questions concerning the zazen practice to the roshi. This tradition of individually coming to the teacher started with Shakyamuni Buddha himself, and has continued until today. We know of this fact because Chisha Daishi (538-597), an outstanding master of the Tendai School who systematized all the sutras, speaks about “secret teaching,” which is considered equivalent to *dokusan* today.

We cannot say that our Zen practice is truly authentic if we do not have this private and personal instruction. However, in the Soto School this *dokusan* tradition has virtually disappeared since the time of the Meiji Period (1868-1912); only the Rinzai School has maintained this practice until today.

You could compare the way of zazen to a journey. People make different types of journeys: some set out quickly, then go on slowly, some start very slowly, then accelerate smoothly, others follow a totally disorganized type of itinerary, etc. Besides, all people carry different kinds of luggage, that is, their own individual ideas and thoughts which preoccupy them. This might give you an idea why it is necessary to have a personal “travel” guidance, which is called *dokusan* in the Zen journey.

5.1.2. Privacy in Dokusan

You may ask why it is necessary to have individual *dokusan* with the roshi in a private space; as there is nothing unethical in the dialogue, why can it not be made public? First, we must know that most of us are ordinary, ego-centered people, so that we tend to show ourselves better than we really are in front of other people. It is extremely difficult to show our real, naked souls when other people are watching us. Even if we do not try to stand out among others, we might try not to tell the whole truth for the fear of being laughed at.

This makes it necessary to have a privacy-secured space for an authentic guidance.

There is one more reason why dokusan must be strictly private. After experiencing the so-called kensho, you go through a series of koans. If other people were there in the dokusan room, they would learn how you presented your answer to the roshi and how the roshi responded, so that they would capture intellectually what the koan intends to say – “Aha, that’s the answer!” – without having any real experiential understanding of the koan. This would actually destroy their Zen practice, since if they are stuffed with intellectual understanding of the koans, they would never come to authentic realization.

For these concrete reasons you should remain silent concerning your dokusan dialogues with the roshi and never discuss them with other people, not even with your best friends or family members. The koan system has been surrounded with the walls of secrecy in order to guarantee the authentic encounter with the true experience for the Zen students.

It was the violation of this principle of secrecy that gradually deteriorated the Rinzai training. Not a few monasteries house monks who are simply there to finish the period of service required to inherit the priesthood in a temple somewhere. Those monks often create problems, especially in monasteries where the discipline is not rigid enough: It could happen more often than not that the so-called answers to the koans are leaked out to the junior students from the senior ones. Normally, the roshi can tell whether the answer truly comes from the disciple’s direct experience, but if the roshi is not strict enough, he may accept the memorized answers which did not spring up from the guts of the disciple himself. If the disciple finishes the entire course of the koan study more or less with the abominable attitude such as this, it would mean that someone with no authentic experience becomes “qualified” as a Zen teaching person to guide other people. It is not difficult to see that this is one of the ways in which living Zen dies out.

5.1.3. What to Ask / What Not to Ask

Next, we have to know what questions are proper to ask in dokusan and what are not. All questions directly related with your concrete zazen practice

are appropriate in dokusan. This means that purely philosophical or theoretical questions are excluded. Also, very private problems – e.g. how you should educate your children, whether you should marry him or her, whether you should change your present job, or whether you should rent or buy an apartment etc. – are outside the dokusan issues. Maybe you feel that the strict privacy of dokusan offers an ideal place for discussing all your private problems, but please remember that the roshi is not your psychological counselor or job advisor, and that the dokusan room is not a place for those problems.

Of course, if, for instance, you are troubled by the phenomenon that your stomach growls each time when you sit in zazen, then you may ask the roshi about it. Or if you do not know why your teeth feel strange whenever you do zazen, you may bring up that question too. Also, it is all right to ask about the annoying visions you always have while you sit in zazen. Simply, you should not ask about purely private matters without any relevance to your concrete zazen practice.

5.1.4. Formal Procedure of Dokusan

We cannot emphasize too strongly that dokusan is not a frivolous matter, and that it should never be taken lightly. Although everyone can freely practice zazen and openly listen to the roshi's teisho in sesshin and zazenkai, the basic nature of dokusan is quite different. Its purpose is to create and deepen a personal tie between teacher and student, which is the foundation for the student to deepen his or her practice in an authentic way. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that without dokusan there is no Zen.

Futhermore, we know that the dialogue between the roshi and the student in dokusan handles problems of ultimate concern, so that only the truth must be uttered between the two. In public we may hesitate to say things directly which might offend other people, but this is not the case with dokusan, where only the ultimate truth must be focused upon.

It has traditionally been considered proper to wear ceremonial dress when you come to dokusan, but nowadays this is not required in the same style as before. You may wear any clothes you want to wear, provided that they look presentable.

When dokusan is announced by the leader of the zendo, go out of the zendo to a spot where the dokusan line is formed (the place is called *kanshōba*), and take a position in line behind the gong. When you come up to the top of the dokusan line, you wait with the hammer in hand, ready to strike the gong in front of you any time. When you hear the roshi's small bell ring inside the dokusan room, strike the gong in front of you *twice* and go to the door of the dokusan room with gassho.

Still in gassho you wait for the previous person to open the door and come out. Then you step inside. The person who has just finished dokusan will shut the door behind you.

If you happen to be the very first person to go to dokusan, you must hit the gong in the proper way: When you hear the roshi's bell telling you that the roshi is going to start dokusan, you hit the gong as follows:



Then you hear the roshi's bell again. This time you hit the gong twice and open the door by yourself, go into the room and then close the door behind you.

Once you are inside the dokusan room, you make your first *prostration* (deep bow) near the threshold of the entrance door. First, you bow to the roshi in gassho, then kneel down so that you touch the floor with your forehead, with your hands extended in front of your head, palms upward. Then, bending your arms at the elbows, raise your hands, palms upward, above the level of your ears. This gesture means to receive the Buddha's feet, the lowliest members of the Buddha's body, and to raise them higher than you yourself. This action symbolizes humility and grateful acceptance of the Way of the Buddha into your own life.

Then walk straight to the roshi, always in gassho. About 1.5 meters away from the roshi, you stop and make your second prostration. Next, you slide closer to the roshi, taking a position about 30 centimeters in front of the roshi, with your hands held in the same manner as during zazen.

Then you announce what your present practice is. For example, "I am counting my breaths," or "I am doing Mu," or "I am with Case 4 of the

Hekiganroku.” Bring up any questions you have, but they must be brief and to the point. Do not come to dokusan and waste time wondering what to talk about; deliberate well beforehand what you are going to say. Of course, please recall once again that the questions must be directly related with zazen.

The roshi’s ringing of the bell is the signal for you to leave the roshi. Make a slight bow and slide back a little. Stand up and walk backward in gassho to the spot where you made your second prostration. Then turn around and walk normally to the exit, always in gassho. Near the door you turn around and do the third prostration. Then you open the door and step out. You let the next person get in, and close the door behind him or her.

Even if you suddenly recall something you wished to say to the roshi when leaving the dokusan room, do not go back to him; you will have to wait for the following dokusan and bring it up then.

It was the original custom to make nine prostrations in a dokusan. The first three at the threshold, three in front of the roshi, and then three more near the doorway before leaving the dokusan room. But this has now been reserved only for the very first dokusan, called *shôken*; on other occasions the prostration procedure is abbreviated to three bows altogether, one at each of the places mentioned.

When you go back from dokusan to the zendo, you always walk in the kinhin style in the corridor. You enter the zendo with gassho and a bow, and go back to your seat in the kinhin style.

When dokusan is finished, the attendant answers the roshi’s bell in the following way with the gong to announce the end of dokusan:

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5.2. “Just Sitting” (*shikan-taza*)

Up to this point you have been doing *zuisokukan*, concentrating on your incoming and outgoing breaths. Now you are invited to practice *shikan-taza*. Of course it is neither normal nor ideal to switch so promptly from one type of practice to another. But please understand that we are trying to give you

beforehand a notion of different modes of inner concentration which you will make avail of in due course.

Shikan in *Shikan-taza* means “nothing but” or “just”, and *ta* means to “strike” and *za* to “sit”. Therefore, shikan-taza is a mode of practice in which your mind is solely dedicated to and absorbed in just sitting. In this mode of sitting you get all too easily distracted, since it is not assisted by any such methods as counting the breaths, watching the breaths or even a koan. A right and firm mind-set becomes, therefore, even more important.

In doing shikan-taza your mind must be relaxed and at the same time solidly rooted and firmly composed, like Mt. Fuji, as they say. Yet it must also be fully alert, like a tautly stretched bowstring. Shikan-taza is, therefore, a highly elevated state of concentrated awareness, in which you are neither overstretched or restless or slackened. You might compare it with the state of mind of someone who is facing immediate death.

It is not certain if the following is the best comparison, but for the sake of illustration let us suppose that you are engaged in a duel of swordsmanship (as in ancient Japan). When you face your opponent, you are fully alert, calm and watchful, ready for any action any time. If you relaxed your mindfulness even for a single moment, you would immediately lose your life. A mob comes together to see the duel. As your eyes are not closed, you notice the crowd from the corners of your eyes. As your ears are not closed, you hear the people mumbling constantly. Yet, not even a single second is your mind troubled by these perceptions.

You cannot maintain this state of mindfulness for a very long period of time. As a matter of fact, you should not continue shikan-taza for more than 30 minutes at one sitting. If you sit too long at one time, your mind naturally slackens in its concentration, your body tires itself, and your efforts would not bring as much fruit as hoped for. So, after a lapse of about half an hour, you stand up and do kinhin for a while; after that you may go into shikan-taza practice again. Should you do authentic shinkan-taza, you would often see that you are sweating, even in a cold season, because of the temperature generated by this intense, single-minded concentration.

Once again a comparison to the way of swordsmanship: An adept

swordsman uses his sword freely and easily. However, this perfection was not there from the very beginning; he has experienced years of hard training, straining himself day in and day out because of the immature level of his swordsmanship. With shinkan-taza it is the same. When you try it for the first time, you cannot avoid getting over-tense, but as your zazen becomes mature and experienced, you will achieve the composed but fully alert level of deep concentration in shikan-taza. Like an adept swordsman who wields his sword so freely and without traces of efforts, you would be able to sit with the same attentiveness and absorption. But again, please remember that such a level of sitting is only possible after many years of strenuous and devoted sitting.

LECTURE SIX

6.1. The Degrees of Aspiration

Although people do zazen in the same manner, their levels of so-called “aspirations” are not identical, but quite different from individual to individual. We can divide these aspirations into four main categories of “degrees.”

6.1.1. The 1st Degree

The simplest level does not presuppose any commitment in Zen Buddhism; it does not even expect a shallowest understanding of what Zen is. A person hears about Zen by chance and feels he or she wants to sit with a group or do a sesshin together. Nothing more. However, it is not at all an accidental but a karmic happening, as Zen Buddhism says, that out of some billions of people on earth who are completely ignorant of Zen, one particular person finds the way to this 2,400-year-old, uninterrupted line of Zen practice. Therefore, even this first degree of aspiration is of extreme spiritual significance.

6.1.2. The 2nd Degree

The next level of aspiration represents a deeper degree of mindset than the first one. People try to do zazen in order to have better physical health or/and mental wellness. So they have a certain understanding of the effects of zazen, and they sit with a clear target. This level corresponds to the first of the five classes of Zen, as discussed before, i.e., bompū-Zen (Zen for ordinary people).

6.1.3. The 3rd Degree

The third level of aspiration is for the people who are no longer content with simply strengthening their physical and/or mental health, but wish to follow the spiritual way of the Buddha. These people see, for example, the splendid value of the Buddhist cosmology, since, according to this view, human existence is not bound only by one lifespan, but comprises an endlessly evolving process, one life after another, which can be completed only when the ultimate Buddhahood has been attained. The people on the third level esteem such a vision with deepest

sympathy. Furthermore, they have acquired enough belief in enlightenment experience as well as in the significance of this experience for the Buddha way, and they are very willing and are proud to stay in the same line of practice. Although they have not yet made up their mind to personally attain the realization, their wish to follow the Buddhist way is clear and sincere.

6.1.4. The 4th Degree

The people on the fourth level are those who are strongly determined to come to the ultimate realization of the true Self by themselves. They are convinced that this experience is a true and living reality, since they have seen people who had had this experience and are convinced of the overwhelming value of this experience. So, they earnestly wish to have the same experience, knowing that, if they follow the teaching of the roshi, they will surely attain it themselves. Therefore, when they come to their roshi in dokusan, they are always open and humble, prepared to accept and follow whatever instructions they get from the roshi, as they know this is the only way to come to their goal.

6.1.5. Guiding the Practitioners according to the Degrees

When you have finished listening to the six lectures above, you will be asked by the lecturer if you agree to the principal line of practice in the Sanbo-Kyodan and become a disciple of the roshi. If you do not agree or still have apprehensions, you are free to wait or leave the zendo without any trouble at all. If you agree to practice according to the Zen understanding of the Sanbo-Kyodan manifested in these lectures, you can come to the roshi for the so-called *shôken* (literally: “meeting each other”, that is, meeting the roshi in person for the first time). This is practically the first dokusan, and you will be asked by the roshi how you judge the degree of your own aspiration, that is, which category of the above four aspirations you feel you belong to. Please tell the roshi your honest feeling. Do not add anything guided by your pride, or subtract anything led by self-humiliation. Through your candid self-explanation the roshi will see your personal wish as well as the type and the strength of your personality, and will judge what kind of practice could be best suitable for your own purpose. Only if you are frank enough telling the

roshi about your own state will the roshi be able to give you the best form of practice along the way. So, again: be honest.

Usually, if you consider yourself belonging to the first degree of aspiration, you may be assigned the practice of counting your breaths. If you fall into the second category of aspiration, you may be given the practice of following the breaths; the third degree may be accompanied by shikan-taza; the fourth, usually a koan – mostly, the koan Mu. You will also be given concrete and minute instructions about how to continue your practice.

6.2. The Three Essentials of Zen Practice

The very last part of our lectures will take care of the three essential factors or status of mind, which are considered necessary for fruitful Zen practice.

6.2.1. “Great Faith” (dai-shinkon)

The first of the three basic factors of fruitful Zen practice is called “Great Faith” (*dai-shinkon*). This is more than a mere belief. The Chinese character for *kon* means “root” and that for *shin*, “faith, belief.” The expression designates, therefore, a very strong faith, which is deeply and soundly rooted in the Mother Earth like a huge tree, so that nothing can move it or uproot it. It is entirely different from a blind and superstitious belief in the supernatural or occult phenomena. It is a faith with which you engage yourself totally and wholeheartedly in your practice.

Buddhism has often been called a religion of “ratio” or “wisdom.” If it is still a “religion” at all, it is this element of “faith”; otherwise it is a mere philosophy. Since Buddhism started with Shakyamuni Buddha’s great enlightenment, our “faith” means nothing but a fundamental conviction in the reality and meaning of his experience. The core of his enlightenment is verbalized in his statement soon after the experience, namely that all beings – not only human beings but all beings in the universe – are intrinsically perfect, without any blemish or flaw, and are perfectly One from the very beginning. When we talk about “Great Faith,” we mean a fundamental faith or single-minded devotion in this very fact. You must earn this faith by one way or another as you go on practicing; otherwise it is not possible to go very far in

your Zen practice.

6.2.2. “Great Doubt”(dai-gidan)

The second factor necessary for fruitful zazen practice is called “Great Doubt”(dai-gidan). This is not a simple ordinary “doubt,” but a great mass of burning doubt. This is something that wells up from the Great Faith we talked about, for this faith tells us that we and everything are perfect from the very start, lacking in nothing, and yet the reality we observe is exactly the opposite: we and the entire world seem so imperfect, filled with antagonism, anxiety, fear and suffering. It is as if we were born billionaires, and yet we lived in a wretched miserable state with no means whatsoever to sustain ourselves.

Why is it like this? This “doubt” gives us no peace in our mind. It drives us forward to find the solution as soon as possible, by any means possible. Why do we have to suffer so much, when we believe that we are already Buddhas or saved beings from the very beginning? The deeper the basic “faith” is, the greater this “doubt” grows.

We can use a metaphor to illustrate this spiritual situation. Suppose you have been looking at a nice picture of your dear family over a cup of coffee. Suddenly you find that the picture you held in your hand a minute ago has gone away. It certainly was in your hand, and no one was with or around you to take it. It could not have disappeared just like that. You of course start searching for it, since it is such an important picture. The longer you cannot find it, the more intensively you are determined to search for it, until you find it. This is somewhat similar to the inner situation of the “Great Doubt.”

6.2.3. “Great Determination” (dai-funshi)

Out of the emotion of the Great Doubt springs up the third fundamental factor, “Great Determination” (dai-funshi: literally, “Great Indignant Will”). It is called “indignant” in the original wording since you are indignant about yourself that you have not yet totally exerted yourself to reach your goal. It is a desperate conviction to overcome this doubt and come to a solution at any cost, right here and right now. While trusting entirely the teaching of Shakyamuni that we are intrinsically equipped with the perfect Buddha-mind, and

deepening your incessant doubt where your everlasting pain and suffering come from, you resolve to come to and experience the ultimate truth at any cost in this life.

6.2.4. The Three Principal Factors of the Zazen Practice and Daijô-Zen/Saijôjô-Zen

Let us discuss briefly these three basic factors of zazen practice in their relation to *daijô-Zen* and *saijôjô-Zen*. Concerning *daijô-Zen*, we can of course say that all three elements are present in *daijô-Zen*; however, the element of the Great Doubt is most characteristic in *daijô-Zen* since this Doubt is the principal driving force on the way toward satori. If the Doubt is authentic, it will, as mentioned before, allow no rest until you really come to enlightenment and dispel your original Doubt. This element is evidently the most striking point in *daijô-Zen*.

On the other hand, it is the factor of Great Faith that characterizes *saijôjô-Zen*. Although all three factors are more or less present also with *saijôjô-Zen*, the element of the Great Doubt does not touch us so severely any more; we are not constantly driven by this element since we sit with the firm conviction that we are originally perfect Buddhas. Different from *daijô-Zen*, *saijôjô-Zen*, as the purest sort of zazen practice, does not emphasize the over-conscious efforts to attain satori by any means. It demands nothing but the purest devotion to the Way itself, looking for no reward in achievements or prizes for dedicated practice. In this sitting, therefore, the ripening of zazen comes naturally and as a matter of course, involving the so-called enlightenment experience when the time is fulfilled. But, because of that, *saijôjô-Zen* is the most difficult type of Zazen to realize. It is the most authentic form of zazen practice.

As already mentioned before, however, both kinds of zazen comprise all three factors. Tradition holds that if these three elements are present at the same time in your practice, you are certain to come one day to your ultimate goal on your way of practice in Zen.