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Early Afternoon Lecture by Suzuki, Roshi:

Buddhism is very philosophical, and sometimes intellectual and logical.

It is necessary to be logical and philosophical to believe in the teaching completely. If it is not logical and philosophical, you cannot believe in it. Our teaching should not be doubtful. Although intellectual and philosophical understanding of the teaching is not enough, it should at least be logical and philosophical.

Sometimes a student of Buddhism will become proud of the lofty, profound philosophical teaching. This is wrong. The philosophy is for the believer himself, not for others. — Because it is difficult for us to believe in the teaching, we should enter it from an intellectual approach. However, there is no need to be proud of the profundity of it. It is just for the student, not for others. If it is possible to believe in Buddha's teaching without philosophical understanding it may be all the better. For most of us it is quite difficult to believe in it without intellectual understanding. So philosophy is just for ourselves.

We of the Soto School have the Shobogenzo which, as you know, is very very philosophical, deep, and lofty. It takes a pretty long time to understand the teaching, even philosophically, and there are not so many people who understand Shobogenzo completely. A man may study Shobogenzo intensively and even become quite famous as a result; but by the time he understands it completely he will likely not be a religious leader any longer, but just a scholar, proud of his understanding of Shobogenzo. In the Soto School this is quite possible, so we usually do not talk about the Shobogenzo so much. Rather, we practice Dogen's way whether we have a deep understanding of our practice or not.

The Soto way may seem formal and rigid, if you do not know the background of the rituals. If you want to study it is necessary to have a strong, constant, way seeking mind. Sincerity to accept rituals, to accept the teaching without any discussion. So Dogen Zengi emphasized the straight-forward attitude which accepts the teaching as it is. Just say "hai" (yes), I will do it. That is all. That is our way. If there is some doubt in our way, you may make a philosophical or intellectual study of Shobogenzo. But we should know that Dogen's way is the result of a long intellectual effort based on his pure way-seeking mind. Buddha's teaching has two faces. One is practical and the other is philosophical. The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Holy Path are practical teaching. The teaching of interdependence and transiency are the philosophical side. The practical side of the teaching is for human beings, you may say, or the teaching based on value. For human beings the teaching has some value, you know: that is the practical side of the teaching. But the teaching that everything changes and is independent is not just for human beings, it is the teaching for everything.

According to the teaching of transiency or interdependency, there is no difference between human beings and other animate and inanimate beings. It is a universal teaching for everything. However, the Eightfold Holy Path and the Four Noble Truths are for humans and the teaching we should practice. The teaching of interdependency or the teaching that everything changes gives human beings a strong faith in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Holy Path. It gives us the reason why we should practice zen or why we should behave.

These teachings are not just Buddha's invention. The teachings are based on eternal and universal truth. Buddhism has its validity or universality in the scientific world, that is why people like Buddhism. For a Buddhist there is no reason to be proud of the teaching because of its universality. But there is danger for Buddhism in its universality and profundity. Buddhism,

at the same time, is a very practical, vital, and active teaching. A Buddhist should be concentrated on his practice, rather than on philosophical study. Buddhism should not disappear into the realm of science or philosophy. This is a pretty important point in studying Buddhism and we should always be concentrated on our sincere effort and practice.

That is why we reject the idea of gaining from our practice. Gaining ideas belong to our visible world, whereas sincerity belongs to our inmost nature. Buddha's teaching is based on his inmost nature, which is called Buddha Nature. To realize our inmost nature or appease our inner most request is how we practice Buddhism. It may be difficult for a beginner to realize the inner most request, but by your practice you will realize your inmost, deeper nature and this deeper nature will encourage your practice.

Before Zen Buddhism was established, there was the idea of the pure practice of zen. The Hinayana school classified zen in four ways excluding any idea of gaining. The practice which was based on gaining was called "desire practice" (desire world practice: yokukkal-jo). When you practice zen in order to prepare for true zen, that is of course practice based on an idea of gaining. For example, before you begin zazen, you swing right and left centering yourself, or you rub your muscles. These actions are done from a gaining idea in order to prepare for practice.

The Hinayana school made provision for this kind of practice based on desire. It was not part of the four stages of pure zen. Desire-world zen is not Buddhist, is not our zen. You may call it preparatory zen which belongs to the world of desire, but not to the world of form or the world of non-form.

This early Hinayana distinction of pure-zen and desire-zen is why it is not correct to say that Zen Buddhism was established only after Bodhidharma came from the west. Although there was not a specific zen school by that name, zen ideas were clearly pointed out in the Hinayana way. If we miss this point the Zen school will become one of the many schools of Buddhism. Every school should be only Buddhism. A Buddhist should not have sectarian ideas, and there should be no sectarianism in Buddhism. If we understand this point we will be concentrated on the practice itself without any idea of gaining.

Practice without an idea of gaining is called Buddha's practice. If we become attached to enlightenment or to the profundity of the teaching, we will lose the point. When we just practice zazen as a human being without any idea of gaining we have the universality of the teaching, and also its individuality and validity. If we attach to some idea of perfection, we will lose the validity of the teaching, although we may have its universality. But this is no longer religion; it is philosophy or science. So the point is to practice our pure way as human beings with sincerity and without an idea of gaining. That is pure practice. It is not important whether it is the first stage or the second stage or the third one, that is not the point. Just to practice with a pure-way-seeking-mind, that is true and pure Buddhism.

If you practice zazen for one or two years or more your zen will become part of your life and you may feel as if there is no need even to practice Zen. At this stage you are not practicing properly. When you have some joy or ecstasy in your practice, that will be encouragement, but it is not good enough. This encouragement helps you to reach the realm where you do not have joy in your practice. On the other hand, if you come to think that you understand zen and that there is no need for you to study or practice zen any longer, that is a big misunderstanding. Zen should be our whole day and whole life work. We should follow this way without any idea of gaining. It does not mean to ignore the encouragement and joy in your practice; but true practice is beyond our joy or understanding.