

March sesshin Lecture

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The following lecture was recorded in the early afternoon during the one-day sesshin held on March 26th.

The way-seeking mind arises when we come to feel the evanescence of life and clearly

⑩ see that we have problems, when we have some direct feeling of our problems, of facts that must be faced.

Usually when we set ourselves to studying something, we put our everyday problems aside, concentrating our attention for a time on something of particular interest. That is how we study generally. On Sunday you may go to church, but to you going to church and your everyday life are two completely different activities. Eventually, however, you will feel some contradiction in your everyday life, and some uneasiness, feeling you have nothing to rely on. It is this feeling which gives rise to the way-seeking mind.

When you are young, young enough to act as you want, you can choose something good, ignoring something bad, and by working on something good, you may feel good enough to spend your early life. But some uneasiness, some dark feeling will follow in your life. Even though you try to appease your conscience by working hard and exhausting yourself on what you are doing, this kind of effort will not give you any conviction. Jumping around in this world without conviction may be the pitiful life. You will be pitied by someone who has strong conviction and deep wisdom concerning our life. Thus we should be ashamed of doing something proudly, vigorously, with some ecstasy even, ignoring the other side of the world, the dark side of our life.

By nature human beings have good and bad sides, half and half. When you want to do something good, at the same time you don't want to do something good. (Laughing.) If you want to get up early, at the same time you say, "I will stay in bed five more minutes. It's too early!" At the same time you want to get up, you will say to yourself, "No, yes, no!" "Yes" is fifty percent; "no" is fifty percent... or more! Bad things sixty percent; good, forty percent."

The more you reflect on yourself, however, the more conscientious you become. Because you become more and more conscientious, you feel as if you are doing ninety-nine percent bad things! That is actually human nature. It is not a matter of what is good and what is bad. It is a matter of our human nature. When you realize this fact in your everyday life, you have to wonder what we should do. If you realize this fact, you will not be fooled by anyone. You may take some pleasure in entertainments, but you cannot fool yourself completely. You cannot deceive yourself when you realize the true state of our human nature.

Some people say, "If we have a perfect social construction, we will not have these difficulties." But as long as there is human nature, nothing will help us. On the contrary, the more human culture advances, the more difficulties we will have in our life. The advancement of civilization will accelerate this contradiction in our nature. When we realize the absolute presence of our contradictory nature, the way-seeking mind arises, and we begin to work on ourselves instead of the material world. Most people who are interested in Buddhism are more or less critical of our social condition, expecting a better social framework. Some people become disgusted with our human life. We cannot approve of these criticisms fully, however, because they do not rest on the full understanding of our human nature.

Human nature is always the same. Some people say our spiritual culture will progress when our material civilization progresses. Strictly speaking, however, as long as we have human nature, it is impossible to obtain a perfect idealistic spiritual culture in our human world. We should fully realize this point. Because of our uneasiness, we are too anxious to achieve something perfect in our spiritual life. Here we have some danger. Our spiritual life cannot be regarded as we have come to regard our material life. You cannot work on your spiritual life as you do your materialistic life. Even though you build a beautiful church, your religion will not necessarily improve. Even though you talk about our spiritual life thousands of times, it will not help you. It is necessary to know actually what is our human world, or what is our human nature. This is a very important point. If you fail to observe our human nature fully, even though you study Buddhism, what you acquire is not what Buddha meant.

For many years we have been practicing zazen here at Zen Center. And we think it is time we made some progress. I think so. You think so as well. But when we feel in this way, we should be careful not to mistake our way. We should know what is the way-seeking mind, what is human nature.

Some people may say, if human nature is always the same, then it is useless (laughing) to practice zazen, to study Buddhism. But our study is based on this fact. Our study is not to improve upon the actual fact that we have good and bad, half and half, as our human nature. We should not try to improve upon this actual fact. Even Buddha accepted this truth... he started Buddhism based on this fact. He accepted this truth. If you try to change this truth, you are no longer a Buddhist.

Buddha said our human life is a life of suffering. This is a fundamental truth. Knowing this fact, having this deep understanding of human nature, we may continue our life step by step helping each other. Because we have good and bad, half and half, we can help. If all of us (laughing) were good, it would be impossible to help one another. It is a good thing that

we have good nature and bad nature... we are able to feel the improvement, however slightly we may change. It would be wonderful if we could help another even by a hair's breadth. It makes no difference what sort of problems or situation in life we have. If we have something to work on, it is enough. Because we have good and bad, half and half, because we can find some way to help others, if only by the width of a sheet of paper, by a few words, we can enjoy our life.

The way-seeking mind should be realized in our actual world, which includes flowers and stones, and stars and moon. The true way-seeking mind can only be actualized in full scale. Where there are human beings, there is the sun and stars, land and ocean, fish and grass and birds. Without this vast area to live in, where we can have our various problems, we cannot survive in this world. But forgetting this vast realm where we have absolute freedom, we seek for something merely for the sake of ourselves, just for human beings. Thus we have to suffer our nature, which has good and bad, fifty-fifty. When we become aware of this big realm, which includes everything, then we have big big mind and big big trust. We have perfect eternal freedom within this big realm.

Actually the way-seeking mind is the conviction to fly as a bird that flies in the air, to enjoy our being in this vast world of freedom. Enjoying our nature as a part of this vast world, we have no uncertainty because we don't know where to go; we know there is nowhere to go. Life and death is not our problem anymore. Our nature of good and bad is not a problem anymore. We attain enlightenment in this big realm. We suffer in this big realm. We are ignorant of the limit of the world. Here we don't have even the problem of attaining enlightenment. Ignorance is good, enlightenment is good; zazen is good, to stay at home is good. Every activity will take place in this big realm. Our human effort, our human culture should be based on this kind of imperturbable conviction. Our effort should not be limited to ourselves. That is what I mean by the way-seeking mind.

When Dogen Zengi attained enlightenment, he said he forgot all about his body and mind. This means he found himself in this big world. So our activity should be limitlessly small and at the same time should be limitlessly great. There is no difference in the greatness of our activity, and what may seem a trivial small activity. They have the same value. Our pleasure and conscience will be fully supported by this big big realm. In this way we practice zazen. We should strive for enlightenment, of course. We should try to calm down our mind. But it is impossible to obtain enlightenment or to calm down your mind without realizing the fact of this big realm which supports us. If you don't realize this fact, trying to calm your mind is the same as arguing which came first, the chicken or the egg. The moment you say the hen came first, the egg is already there as her mother. There is no end to the argument.

That we appear in this world means we should disappear from this world (laughing). If you were not born in this world, there would be no need to die. To be born in this world is to die, to disappear. That we can do something good means that we can do something bad. It is true. Do not be fooled by this kind of contradiction, home-made contradiction! You made some contradiction in your life.

Our study, our effort or practice, should be firmly supported by Buddha's wisdom. You may come to realize how true Buddha's teaching is to the circumstances under which we suffer. When you realize how this teaching is true to us, you will begin your practice. But when you are jumping from one place to another, it is difficult to teach you how to practice Buddhism. Anyway, for the beginner, it is difficult to sit. However, if you continue your practice, you will discover your own posture, good or bad. Then you can say it may be better to put some more strength in your abdomen, make your posture straighter; or you may find that you are leaning forward or backward. That you have some posture, your own posture, is at the same time to have some bad habits. Without bad habits you cannot improve your posture! (Laughing.) It is good for us to have bad habits! But you ask me what is right posture. That is also a mistake. Whatever you do is right. Nothing is wrong with what you do. But some improvement is necessary. Something should be done with what you have attained. Even though you attain enlightenment like Buddha, something should be done with it. That is his enlightenment. So the point is not whether your posture is right or wrong. The point is constant effort or way-seeking mind.

I think I shouldn't talk too much. The more you practice zazen, the more you find out the true, deeper meaning of our practice. Anyway, we should be more friendly and frank and straightforward, and we should be more free, and we should accept the instruction. This is our way.