



## SANDOKAI LECTURE VIII

by Shunryu Suzuki-roshi

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NOTE: This lecture covers the following lines of the Sandokai: *Manako wa iro mimi wa onjo. Hana waka shita wa kanso. Shiki mo ichi-ichi no ho ni oite ne ni yotte habunpu su. Hommatsu subekaraku shu ni kisubeshi. Sonpi sono go o mochiu.*

In my last lecture I explained the meaning of the "independence" of everything. This means that although things are interdependent with respect to each other, at the same time, each being is independent because each being includes all other beings. When each being includes the whole world, then each being is actually independent.

NOTE: *The previous Sandokai lecture was incorrectly numbered. The correct number is VII.*

In the *Sandokai* Sekito was talking about the nature of reality while most people, forgetting all about this point, were discriminating about which school of Zen was right or wrong. That is why Sekito Zenji wrote this poem. Here he is talking about reality from the viewpoint of independency. The Southern school is independent and the Northern school is independent and there is no reason why we should compare the two (as to which is correct). Both schools are expressing the whole of Buddhism in their own way. Similarly, the Rinzai school has its own approach to reality and the Soto school has its own approach. Sekito Zenji is pointing at this. Actually he is not so much talking about the dispute between the Northern and Southern schools but about the nature of reality and what Buddha's teaching is in its true sense. He is pointing out this mistake of the two schools of his time.

Tonight I want to explain these six lines which denote reality from the viewpoint of independency: *Manako wa iro mimi wa onjo. Hana waka shita wa kanso.* "For eyes there is color and form; for ears there is sound; for the nose there is smell; and for the tongue there is the salty or sour taste." *Manako* is "eyes"; *iro* means "color and form."

It looks like Sekito is talking dualistically about the dependency of eyes on their object. But when you see something, if you see it in its true sense there is no thing to be seen and no one to see it. Only when you analyse it is there someone who is seeing something and something which is seen. It is one activity which can be seen in two ways. I see something. But when I see something really, there is no one seeing it and nothing to be seen. Both of these are true, and here Sekito is talking about this oneness of eye and form. That is how Buddhists observe things. We understand things in a dualistic way, but we don't forget that our understanding is dualistic. I see. Or someone or something is seen by someone. These are interpretations of subject and object which our thinking mind produces. Subject and object are one, but they are also two.

So what Sekito is saying is that, for eyes, there is form. But at the same time there is no form and no eyes. When you say eyes, eyes include the form. When you say "form", form includes the eyes. If there is no form and nothing to see, eyes are not eyes anymore. Because there is something to see, eyes become eyes. The same is true of ears, nose and tongue. Dogen Zenji says, "If there is no river, there is no boat." Even though there is a boat, it will not be a boat. Because there is a river, a boat becomes a boat. Usually the reason that non-Buddhists become attached to the objective world, or to something they see, is because they understand in only one way. Their understanding is that something exists independent of us. That is the normal way of understanding. "Here is something very sweet to eat." But cake becomes cake because we want to eat it. So we make a cake. There is no cake without us. When we understand in this way, we are seeing cake, but we are not seeing cake. This is how we keep our precepts.

Maybe you will kill some animal or insect. But when you think "There are many earwigs here and they are harmful insects, so I have to kill this one." You understand things only in a dualistic way. Actually earwigs and human beings are one. They are not different. It is impossible to kill an earwig. Even though we think we have killed it, we have not. Even though you squash the earwig, it is still alive. That

tentative form of earwig may vanish, but as long as the whole world, including us, exists, we cannot kill an earwig. When we come to this understanding, we can keep our precepts completely.

But even so, we should not kill anything without a reason, or we should not kill by making up some convenient reason. "Because earwigs eat vegetables I must kill them." "There is nothing wrong with killing animals, so I am killing earwigs." To kill an animal, excusing your action through some reasoning, is not our way. Actually, when you kill an animal, you don't feel so good. That is also included in our understanding: "even though I don't feel so good, I have to kill; even though it is not possible, tentatively I may kill an animal." In this way, something is going on in the big world.

So sticking to some idea of killing or not killing, or to some reason why we kill, or don't kill, is not the actual way of observing precepts. How to observe precepts is to have complete understanding of reality. That is how you don't kill. Do you understand? How you understand my lecture, how you understand zazen, is how you don't kill. In other words, you should not live in the world of duality only. You can observe our world in two ways: from the dualistic viewpoint, and from the viewpoint of the absolute. So, "It is not good to kill," and "Even though you think you killed, you did not kill." Even though you violate your precepts, if after doing it you feel very sorry, if you say "I am sorry" to the earwig, it is Buddha's Way. In this way our practice will go on and on. You may think that if there are precepts, we should observe them literally or else we cannot be Buddhists. But if you feel good just because you observe some precept, that is not the way. To feel sorry when we kill an animal is included in our precepts. Everyone is involved in this kind of activity. But the way they do it and the feeling they have may not be the same. One person has no idea of precepts or attainment. The other is trying to make himself feel good by some religious activity or by observing some precepts. That is not the Buddhist Way.

The Buddhist Way is, in one word, *jiki*. *Jiki* is encouraging people when they have a positive feeling and helping them get rid of their suffering. That is true love. It is not just to give something or to receive something, or to observe precepts, or to attain something that we practice our way. We practice our way with things as they are naturally going. To go with people, to suffer with them, to help to relieve their suffering and to encourage them to go on and on. That is how we observe the precepts. We see something but we do not see something. We feel always the oneness of the subjective and objective worlds, the oneness of eye and form, the oneness of mouth and taste. So we don't have to attach to something especially, and we don't have to feel especially good because of our Buddhist practice. When we practice in this way, we are all independent. That is what Sekito is talking about.

*Shiki mo ichi-ichi no ho ni oite*: "Each being comes out from the root." *Ichi-ichi* means "each"; *ho* means "dharma." Eyes, nose, tongue, ears, sight, smell, taste, and hearing: all these are dharmas, and each being or dharma is rooted in the absolute which is Buddha nature. *Ne ni yotte habunpu su*: "as branches and leaves come out from the trunk." Observing the many things we should look beyond their appear-

ance and know how each thing exists. Because of the root, we exist; because of the absolute Buddha nature, we exist. When we understand things in this way, we have oneness.

*Hommatsu subekaraku shu ni kisubeshi.* *Hom* is "root" and *matsu* is "end". "Root and end," we say. "But both root and end should return to the original nature."

*Sonpi sono go o mochiu.* "the words we use are different, good words and bad words, respectful words and mean words, but through these words, we should understand the absolute being or source of the teaching." That is what is said here.

In the *Bommokyo*, the important scripture of the precepts, it says, "to see is not to see, and not to see is to see." To eat meat is not to eat meat; not to eat meat is not to eat meat. But you understand the precepts in only one way. You observe the precepts by not eating meat. But not to eat meat is to eat meat. Actually, you are eating meat. Do you understand? That is how we observe the precepts. "Don't commit unchaste acts." To see a woman is not to see a woman. Not to see a woman is to see a woman.

There were two monks traveling together and they came to a big river where there was no bridge to cross. While they were standing on the bank a beautiful woman came. So they were very encouraged and at last one of them carried her on his back across the river. Later, when they were on their way, the other monk became furious. "You are a monk! You violated the precept not to touch a woman. Why did you do that?" And the monk who helped the lady said, "You are still carrying the woman. I already forgot about her. You are still violating the precepts." Maybe

*Building the Suzuki-roshi memorial cabin at Tassajara*



according to the rules for a monk it was not completely right for him to carry her. Even so, as all human beings are friends, we should help them even if we violate a Buddhist precept. But if you think about it uselessly, when there is no need to think about it, that is actually violating the precepts. So to see the woman was not to see the woman. When the monk crossed with her on his back, actually he was not helping her. Do you understand? So not to help her was to help her in its true sense.

When you are involved in the dualistic sense of precepts, of man and woman, or monk and layman, that is violating the precepts and is a poor understanding of Buddha's teaching. Without any idea of attainment, without any idea of doing anything, without any idea of meaningful practice, just to sit is our way. To be completely involved in sitting meditation is our *zazen*. And this is how we observe our precepts. Sometimes we will be angry and sometimes we will smile. Sometimes we will be mad at our friends and sometimes we will give a kind word to them. But actually what we are doing is just observing our way. I cannot explain it so well, but I think you must have understood what I mean.

*Question:* I don't feel that talking about Buddhism or the *Sandokai* is the same as my life, or my practice. I feel some separation. Talking about it seems like something else. It's way out there.

*Suzuki-roshi:* I felt that way myself for a pretty long time. It is rather difficult to give you some actual feeling through lecture. That is why the old masters twisted their students' noses or hit them. "Right here! What are you thinking about?" In short, that is the point. I am going around and around the point so I am using words. We say, "to scratch our itchy foot with our shoe on." It doesn't help so much, but even so I have to talk.

*Question:* You said that when we kill an earwig or any insect we can't kill it as long as everything is here. Do you mean that each thing will always be each thing, this lecture will always be this lecture?

*Suzuki-roshi:* When you see things "as it is," it is so.

*Question:* If the body of the earwig dies, what happens to the earwig's karma, where does the earwig go?

*Suzuki-roshi:* Earwigs go to the source of reality. They know where to go. When we speak in this way you will feel that it is just talk. But when you suffer a lot it will be a great relief to know that.

*Question:* Roshi, what is the difference between you and me?

*Suzuki-roshi:* There is difference and no difference — that is why we practice together. Because there is some difference we practice together, and because we are not different we practice together. If you are quite different from me, there is no reason why you should practice with me; and if we are truly the same, there is no reason why we should practice together. Because we are different, we practice our way, and because we are originally the same, we practice our way. Not different and different. This kind of thing is not easy to know. Traditional practice starts from this source of the teaching which is nothingness, which is absolute, which is



*Tassajara*

non-duality. Usually you are attracted to something by your eyes or nose, sight or smell, or some form, but not by this original source of the teaching. The original source is not something which can be described, so we say, "tongueless speech." We are talking about something which it is impossible to talk about. That is called *reisho*, not lecture. We can explain with words, but we are explaining what is empty, so we call these words, "the finger pointing at the moon." If you understand what the moon is, the finger is not necessary any more. So what you should understand is not my words. You should realize by your true experience what I mean. You are blind to this point, so you feel I am talking about something in a sophisticated way which looks like the so-called "Buddhist Way." The Buddhist Way is not those words but the meaning behind the words.

*Question:* In killing the earwig there are no words or memories or anything. There is just the experience of killing the earwig. Is that the teacher which leads you to the source? Is the experience of killing the earwig, not the talk about it, the teacher?

*Suzuki-roshi:* At that time you needn't feel like a good Buddhist or a simple monk or think about violating your precepts. When you are working in the garden for some purpose you should be involved in that activity completely. Sometimes you may be mad at the earwigs. But no one can criticize you. If you are expelled from Tassajara because you killed a lot of earwigs, you should go. "OK, I will go." You should have that much confidence — not confidence, it is more than confidence. You shouldn't have to fight with anyone. If you have that much understanding in what you are doing, that is good — the Way is there.

*Question:* When we say that we shouldn't harm sentient beings, earwigs, or anything else, do we say that because it is possible to harm them, or because it is wrong to harm them, or both?

*Suzuki-roshi:* Both; and we should know that it is not possible. Why it is not possible is because these are just words. Words cannot reach that place. Only when you get caught by words do you say "possible" or "impossible." Killing something, sacrificing something, that is how you actually live every day. You just apply Buddha's teaching to give you some good excuse and you feel good. This is a very superficial understanding of Buddhism. You cannot help feeling bad when you kill something, even though this is a superficial understanding. But that does not mean that you are doing something wrong, because you are not killing actually. So both are true. But if you say, "Because I am not killing anything it is OK to kill," that is wrong because you stick to words or a precept which itself is just words. It is not the true heart, the true feeling of Buddha.

*Question:* Roshi, every animal has a way of living, of eating, of raising its young, of relating to that world, which is in keeping with its particular dharma or Tao. Does not mankind have a particular, specific way of living and eating and raising its young, which is in keeping with its dharma or Tao?

*Suzuki-roshi:* Not absolutely, but we have to make our best effort to keep the dharma — that's what these words are about. Words are necessary, but even though they are necessary you should not think they are complete. We should make constant effort to continuously produce new dharma, new precepts. We say, "this is human life," but that human life is for today, not for tomorrow. Tomorrow we must have improved, better ways to live. This kind of effort should be continued. If we have bad feelings it means something. So we should improve our way. But you should not expect any perfect dharma in terms of "you should" or "you shouldn't." No one can insist on their own way, but we should appreciate their effort to improve the Dharma. That is the Buddhist way. Does it make sense?

*Question:* Can the true dharma be passed on if the disciple does not surpass the teacher? You say that we must always, every day improve our way, make our best effort. I have heard you say, "For the true teaching to be passed on, the disciple must surpass the teacher." Can we carry on the dharma even if we don't surpass the teacher?

*Suzuki-roshi:* Yes. Surpass is also a dualistic world, so we should not stick to it. There is no reason why I should feel good or bad if you surpass me. To talk about which is better is just words.

*Question:* If we had the same understanding as the teacher, the understanding would be static, would be fixed. It would not be changing. If we were to have your understanding right now, what would that be?

*Suzuki-roshi:* It is not so easy. Even to create one page of the new Dharma is very difficult. Even though you feel that you have invented something new, the Buddha is always waiting there for you. "Oh, come here. Good boy! I have some more things for you. Come nearer to me," Buddha will say. So it is very hard to surpass his teaching.

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