

Be Kind with Yourself, from;” not always so”, by Shunryu Suzuki

“We put emphasis on warm heart, warm zazen. The warm feeling we have in our practice is, in other words, enlightenment or Buddha’s mind.”

I want you to have the actual feeling of true practice because even though I practiced zazen when I was young, I didn’t know exactly what it was. Sometimes I was very impressed by our practice at Eiheiji and other monasteries. When I saw great teachers or listened to their lectures, I was deeply moved. But it was difficult to understand those experiences.

Our aim is to have a complete or full feeling in each moment of practice. What we teach is that enlightenment and practice are one, but my practice was what we call stepladder Zen. “I understand this much now, and next year,” I thought, “I will understand a little bit more.” That kind of practice doesn’t make much sense-I could never be satisfied. If you try stepladder practice. maybe you too will realize that it is a mistake.

If we do not have some warm big satisfaction in our practice that is not true practice. Even though you sit, trying to have the right posture and counting your breath, it may still be lifeless Zazen, because you are just following instructions. You are not kind enough with yourself. You think that if you follow the instructions given by some teacher, then you will have good zazen, but the purpose of instruction is to encourage you to be kind with yourself. Do not count your breaths just to avoid your thinking mind but to take the best care of your breathing.

If you are very kind with your breathing, one breath after another, you will have a refreshed, warm feeling in your zazen. When you have a warm feeling for your body and your breath, then you can take care of your practice, and you will be fully satisfied. When you are very kind with yourself, naturally you will feel like this

A mother will take care of her child even though she may have no idea how to make her baby happy. Similarly, when you take care of your posture and your breathing, there is a warm feeling in it. When you have a warm feeling in your practice, that is a good example of the great mercy of Buddha. Whether you are a priest or a layperson, this practice will extend to your everyday life. When you take the utmost care of what you do, then you will feel good.

Tozan Ryokai attained enlightenment many times. Once when he was crossing a river he saw himself reflected in the water and composed a verse.

“Don't try to figure out who you are.
If you try to figure out who you are,
what you understand
will be far away from you
you will just have an image of yourself”

Actually, you are in the river. You may say that is just a shadow or a reflection of yourself, but if you look carefully with warm-hearted feeling, that is you.

You may think that you are warm-hearted, but when you try to understand how warm, you cannot actually measure. Yet when you see yourself with a warm feeling in the mirror or the water, that is actually you. And whatever you do, you are there.

When you do something with a warm-hearted feeling, Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of wisdom, is there, and there is the true you. You don't have to wonder where Manjushri is or what he is doing. When you do things with your warm-hearted mind, that is actual practice. That is how to take care of things, that is how to communicate with people.

Some of you are priests and some are not priests and each of you will go your own way. Those of you who are not married and those of you who are married each have your own way of extending practice to your everyday lives. Although our situations are different, practice is the same and we all meet Manjushri. Even though he is one, he is everywhere, with everyone and everything. Whatever you do, whatever your practice is, Manjushri is there. The true secret is not to forget. The true mercy of Buddha, who takes care of everything. If we lose this point, whatever we do doesn't make sense.

So we put emphasis on warm heart, warm zazen. The warm feeling we have in our practice is in other words, enlightenment, or Buddha's mercy, Buddha's mind. It is not just a matter of counting your breath or following your breath. If counting the breath is tedious it may be better just to follow the breath. But the point is while inhaling and exhaling, to take care of the breath, just like a mother watches her baby. If a baby smiles, its mother will smile. If a baby cries, its mother is worried. That kind of close relationship, being one with your practice, is the Point. I am not talking about anything new-the same old things!

Our monastic rules are based on kind, warm-hearted mind. The idea is not to restrict your freedom, but rather to give you freedom to act and behave in your own way. It is not so important to follow the rules literally. Actually, if you break a rule now and

Then, we will know what is wrong with you, and your teacher, without criticizing you, may be able to help you more accurately.

This is how to improve your practice in order to have good control over your desires and your everyday life. then you will have big freedom from everything. That is the goal

of our practice both for priests and for laypeople.

Please take care of your practice. Be very kind with yourself
Thank you very much.