

BECOMING YOURSELF



Teachings on
the Zen
Way of Life

SHUNRYU
SUZUKI

AUTHOR OF
*Zen Mind,
Beginner's Mind*

SHARING THE FEELING

Because we have so much useless rubbish in our mind, it is hard to share our feeling with people, with things, with trees, or with mountains. Even though we are right in the middle of the woods, it is still hard to appreciate the feeling of the woods. When we can really appreciate the feeling of the woods, that is zazen.



Sharing the feeling we have right here, right now is the fundamental thing for Zen practice. Zen is, in a word, to share our feeling with people, with trees, and with mountains, wherever we are. That is Zen practice.

Usually our mind is filled with something like ice cream or bananas or how much the soap costs in one store compared to another, or by looking at the newspaper and seeing an ad for a sale. So it is almost impossible to share the actual feeling we have where we are right now.

Our life is going on and on, endlessly filled with rubbish. It is not rubbish at first. At some moment it is important for you, but it is not necessary to hold on to it past that point. It is the same with our everyday life. Because we have so much useless rubbish in our mind, it is hard to share our feeling with people, with things, with trees, or with mountains. Even though we are right in the middle of the woods, it is still hard to appreciate the feeling of the woods. When we can really appreciate the feeling of the woods, that is zazen.

Before attaining enlightenment, Buddha practiced under many teachers, studying many things and becoming caught up in various philosophies or religions. When he realized he was caught by this, he lost interest in such things. He got tired of that kind of effort, and he gave up everything.

Finally, he sat under the Bodhi tree, where he attained enlightenment. We say, “he attained enlightenment,” but it may be better to say, “he completely forgot everything!” He had nothing in his mind at that moment. When he saw the morning star rising up from the east, it was the first thing he saw coming out of his empty mind. That is why he had such joy at the sight of the morning star. In other words, he shared his feeling with the morning star’s feeling. It is difficult to analyze whether it was Buddha’s feeling or the morning star’s feeling. Anyway, he shared his feeling with the morning star. That was his enlightenment.

That he was Buddha meant that he was being himself, being completely with everyone and with everything. To be Buddha it is necessary to give up the various bits of rubbish in the mind.

Buddhist teaching is the teaching that arises from emptiness of mind. In other words, it is what arises from pure mind, or, you may say, “holy mind.” If your words come from pure emptiness, whatever they are, I think they are Buddha’s words. And if you do things with purity of mind, that is Buddha’s activity. It is possible for us to do that. We meditate, recite Buddha’s name, or read scriptures on the one hand in order to empty our mind, and on the other hand in order to appreciate Buddha’s words that arise from empty mind.

To sit in zazen posture with an empty mind, some technique or explanation is needed. The purpose of our practice is to open up our mind. You must open it like you open a tin can. You must cut hard and open the tin so that you can eat what’s in it.

But just to open is not enough; the spirit of repetition is also necessary. If you do not have this kind of spirit—if your everyday life is not based on this kind of spirit—you cannot cope with the problems you have day after day. As long as you live, you must eat something. After you eat, you may have a big rubbish pile of cans and wrappers. So, you should continuously work on it. You should clear your table every day. Even if you feel that you are clearing everything from your table, it must be done with the spirit of continuing to do so forever.

If your practice lacks this continuous spirit, it will be just like the experience you may have after taking LSD or drinking alcohol. The big difference between a psychedelic experience and an enlightenment experience is that one is based on the Bodhisattva vow and the other is an accidental experience that happens with the aid of some substance. One is the experience that you can have always, over and over, continuously; the other is the experience that you have only with the

help of some aid. I'm only comparing these things in order to make our practice clear. I easily become critical, and I don't feel so good after criticizing things, so I shouldn't go too far!

We should clear our table every day, and even when it is clear, we should continue to make the effort to keep it clear. This is another important point. If you are cleaning your table because you think it is dirty, that mind is dirty. To think something is dirty means your mind is dirty. So we should let go of this kind of mind that discriminates "dirty" or "clean," "right" or "wrong." The point is to let go of discrimination. The point is to clean things, not because they are dirty, but just because this is something we should do as long as we are alive.

There is no reason why we should practice zazen. When I came to America, I was very interested in why so many people wanted to practice zazen, crossing their legs, sitting upright, and keeping their backs straight. I couldn't understand why. I would ask them, "Why did you come here to this zendo?" and they would say, "Oh! I don't know." Some people felt that they should give me some reason, so they gave me some reason, but it didn't make much sense, and I still wondered why. But "I don't know" is right, I think. Even if you don't know what it is or why you do it, if you understand this point and practice zazen and the associated activities, you will have the fundamental religious attitude of our Buddhist practice.