

Some Small Suzuki Roshi on Shikantaza

From Suzuki Roshi Archive

Student A: [4-6 words unclear] on *shikantaza*?

Suzuki-rōshi: *Shikantaza*? Oh. Practice of *shikantaza* or—? We say there is no such thing like *shikantaza*, you know, actually. But in comparison to kōan practice, we—because we don't use, you know, kōan, people say that is *shikantaza*.

Shikan means, you know, to be involved in zazen completely. That is *shikan*. *Taza* is zazen. So to—if you practice our way, even without any gaining idea, or even without any idea of enlightenment, that is *shikantaza*. So sometime it may be actually—kōan practice may be also *shikantaza*. When you are completely involved in kōan practice, that is actually *shikantaza*.

And there is—there may be various misunderstanding about *shikantaza*. If you think *shikantaza* is just to sit, you know, without making not much effort, you know: just sit, like this, is *shikantaza*. And we say, when, you know—sometime we say when some im- [partial word]—you have some image, you know, let it come and let it go away. That is *shikantaza*, we say. It looks like, you know, if you just sit with some idea in my mind, or without some idea in my—in our mind—if you just sit, you know, that is *shikantaza*. But that is not actually *shikantaza*.

Why we say, "Let the idea come in, and let it go away" means don't sit, you know, to—it means that, actually, don't sit with some purpose, you know, some purpose of to free yourself from various idea. You know, to free yourself from various idea—actually not to be bothered by various idea you will have in zazen.

That is true, but even though you are able to do it, that is not *shikantaza*. If you think this is *shikantaza*, that is not *shikantaza* anymore. So *shikan*—if I explain what is *shikantaza*. In this way, to sit, you know, with some idea which may come to you without, you know, being bothered by it, and just to sit is *shikantaza*. That is, you know—sometime that is *shikantaza*, but it is not always so. Do you understand [laughs] what I am trying to say? It is rather difficult, but—. So if possible, of course, if you are able to sit without any, you know, image or thinking mind, that is, of course, better, you know. But if I say, "When you practice *shikantaza* you will have many ideas, you know, so let the idea come in and let them go away. That is *shikantaza*." If I say so, it does not mean—it means that, for a beginner, that is *shikantaza*.

But for more advanced student or for student who sit for two, three years, you know, if he remain in that practice, you know, it is not—I don't think he is practicing *shikantaza* in its true sense. That was very lazy practice, you know. "Oh, this is *shikantaza*. I am practicing *shikantaza* [laughs]," you know. "Rōshi said," you know, "even [though] you have various idea in your mind, that is all right. Let them come in! [Laughs.] Eventually it will go away. That is *shikantaza*. So I am practicing *shikantaza* every day!" If you understand in that way, that is not *shikantaza*.

So I think if you—that is why, you know, I am—I want you right now to practice counting breathing practice, instead of, you know, just to sit, because you will have very lazy idea of *shikantaza*. So if you try to count your breathing, you know, you will find out it is pretty difficult [laughs] to practice counting breathing practice. Even though in counting your breathing, even though you are successful in counting breathing, just to count your breathing without mistake—that is not also *shikantaza*.

So when you practice counting breathing practice you—of course you have to count, but at the same time you should be very careful with your posture. The—about your *mudrā*, with straight back, and your mind should take care of every parts of—every part of your physical condition. And you have—you must have good breathing, you know. So with all of your, you know, effort—physical effort and mental effort, you should count your breathing. That is *shikantaza*.

For an instance, there is, you know, flower vase like this, you know. It is possible to hold it like this, you know. And it is—at the same time you can hold it like this. So if you—if I say "counting breathing practice" or "following breathing practice," it is same thing to hold the vase this part—by this, by the handle, or by the mouth, you know. Anyway, you should hold all the vase, you know [laughs]. If you take hold of this part, it doesn't [make] much difference, you know, whether you take hold of this part or this part. Anyway, you take hold of whole vase. So *shikantaza* points out—means to take hold of whole being, or all of your mind and body, which include all the world, you know. That is *shikantaza*.

If kōan practice [is] to take hold of this part, you know—people say this is kōan practice. But for us, this is *shikantaza*, because in perfect kōan practice he is taking hold of whole vase. And counting breathing practice may be to take hold of this vase by your—by the mouth of the vase. Do you understand [laughs]? No?

So most teacher may say *shikantaza* is not so easy, you know. It—it is not possible to continue it more than one hour, because it is intense practice to take hold of all our mind and body by the practice which include everything. So in *shikantaza*, our mind should pervade every parts of our physical being. That is not so easy. Did you understand? If you actually practice zazen you will understand it, you know. As I always say, to count your breathing like this is not zazen [laughs], you know. Just to count our breathing is not counting breathing practice, actually. With, you know, with your whole body and mind, you should count your breathing.

You know, for an instance, we say when you put your hand together or when you sit, you should feel as if you have one egg or two eggs under your arm like this [gestures], you know. Don't crush it, don't drop it [laughs]. That is how you put your arm, you know, in right position. It means that—just, you know, try[ing] not to drop it is not, you know, practice. But that—it means that in that way, you know, your arm should join our practice. Do you understand? In that way, your arm should join our practice. If you are like this [gestures], you are holding eggs under your arm, you know. If you are like this [gestures], you are not holding eggs. So your mind should be free from the idea of holding eggs or not holding eggs [laughs], you know. And join—let our arm join our practice. If you are doing like this [gestures], you know, your arm is not joining your practice, you know. Maybe all of your body is joining the practice of your holding-eggs practice [laughs, laughter], instead of, you know, joining—instead of arm joining in your practice. Do you understand?

So in that way you should understand what is *shikantaza*. Did I explain? Does it make some sense? Your eyes, you know, is not watching anything, you know. Even though there is flower like this in front of you [puts vase down on table with a thump], in your practice, your eyes are not watching it. Even though our focus is around here, like this [gestures]. Now I am watching, you know, you like this, but now I am not watching you [laughs, laughter]. My focus is right there. You may see the difference, you know. You may see the difference in my eyes when I am watching something and when I am not watching anything. The—my eye focus is right there. Do you understand? [Laughs.]

So, you know, if I say: "*Shikantaza* is to do—or like this is *shikantaza*," is same thing I say: "To watch you is *shikantaza*," you know. But it is not so, actually. Even though people who do not

have this kind of experience—maybe look—looks like same, you know. But if you carefully, you know, see my eyes you will find out the difference. Did you understand?

You know, "One is everything," we say. We have a kind of stock term: "One is everything, and everything is one." This is, you know—you can explain intellectually, "One is everything and everything is one." Because everything is changing, moment after moment, one is not always one. It may—it will change into something else in next moment. So actually, one is everything, and everything is also one.

So if you—so we say if you pick up a part of a net, you know, you will have whole—all the net, you know. It—it means that our—it does not mean some intellectual explanation of the relationship [of] one and many, but it points out actual practice. When I am not watching anything, you know, with this kind of eyes, you know, if someone moves I will immediately catch you [laughs]. If you don't, I—I don't see anyone. If someone move, you know, I—I will feel something, you know. That kind of eyes, you know, covers everything [laughs]. When you don't see anything, you see clearly everything [laughs, laughter]. If you are watching something, you know, you lose the rest of the things, you know. *Hai*.

I think most of you participate one-week sesshin from tomorrow.¹ So far, we have been practicing counting breathing or following breathing. But maybe tomorrow—from tomorrow, in one-week sesshin, we will, you know, practice *shikantaza*.

I want to explain, you know, what is *shikantaza*. *Shikantaza* is, as you know—excuse me—just to sit, you know. We say "*shikantaza*." Just to sit. But there is—if you, you know, it is not proper or it is not enough to say "just to sit." For an instance, you know, everything is just there, you know. Things are just where they are. But that is not enough. If we say just things are just where they are, the relationship between things is ignored. When we think about the relationship between things, we will reach the idea of one whole being, you know.

We say "things," but actually things are already some divided materialistic and idealistic being. So before we have—when we have idea of things, you know, we actually have the idea of one whole being. And one whole being exist in the state of divided being. That is actually how things exist.

And things are incessantly, you know, changing. So, you know, time span—things is not just things as they are. It is changing as a one whole being. This point is—should be understood when we practice zazen. So Dōgen-zenji says, "If your practice does not include everything, that is not right practice." That is why we, you know, bow to Buddha and why we, you know, call our practice—practice of Buddha's—Buddha's practice, not your practice.

But usually in counting breathing or following breathing, you feel as if you are doing something, you know—you are following breathing, and you are counting breathing. This is, you know, why counting breathing or following breathing practice is, you know, for us it is some preparation—preparatory practice for *shikantaza* because for most people it is rather difficult to sit, you know, just to sit. When we haven't good, you know, breathing it is rather difficult to just to sit. Of course, even though you have pain in your legs, that is just to sit [laughs], you know. Pain should be just pain. Not—not much extra fancy [laughing] interpretation of pain. "My legs"—if you say "my legs," that is extra. "Legs" is enough [laughs, laughter]. Then pain is just pain,

¹ The *sesshin* started the next day.

you know. Pain—if you pain, if you say "pain," the pain include everything. And if pain exist—pain exist just like pain as a whole being, that is not pain anymore. If there is nothing but pain, what is it? That is Buddha.

Actually, you know—but it is rather difficult to accept actual pain in that way. And as soon as you have pain you want to, you know, escape from it. Immediately you are involved in idea of self already, so that is not just to sit.

So Dōgen-zenji's *Fukan Zazen-gi*, you know, it—he says, "Originally we are enlightened. Why is it necessary to sit?" [Laughs.] There is not necessary to sit. Even though we don't sit, we are practicing zazen originally. But he says, "If there is slightest"—and this is not literal interpretation, but translation—but "if there is slightest idea of self," you know, "the true practice," you know, "will change into," you know, "quite different practice." *Shikantaza* cannot be anymore *shikantaza* if slightest idea appears in our zazen. Even though your—our practice is not perfect, if we haven't, you know, any idea of self, in other word, if we completely—completely devote ourself—selves to the practice, to the Buddha's practice, then without having any idea of self, that is *shikantaza*. And that is how we devote ourselves to the—to our practice. And to have this kind of spirit is to have way-seeking mind.

—

after telling a story of near drowning at Tassajara:

Since then, you know, I started *shikantaza* expecting, you know, another moment, moment after moment I tried to sit, you know, as if I am dying, you know, in the water. That helps a lot, you know. Since then my practice improved a lot.