

EXPERIENCE, NOT PHILOSOPHY *“There is something blasphemous in talking about how Buddhism is perfect as a philosophy or teaching without knowing what it actually is.”*

Although there are many people in this country who are interested in Buddhism, few of them are interested in its pure form. Most of them are interested in studying the teaching or the philosophy of Buddhism. Comparing it to other religions, they appreciate how satisfying Buddhism is intellectually. But whether Buddhism is philosophically deep or good or perfect is not the point. To keep our practice in its pure form is our purpose. Sometimes I feel there is something blasphemous in talking about how Buddhism is perfect as a philosophy or teaching without knowing what it actually is.

To practice zazen with a group is the most important thing for Buddhism—and for us—because this practice is the original way of life. Without knowing the origin of things we cannot appreciate the result of our life’s effort. Our effort must have some meaning. To find the meaning of our effort is to find the original source of our effort. We should not be concerned about the result of our effort before we know its origin. If the origin is not clear and pure, our effort will not be pure, and its result will not satisfy us. When we resume our original nature and incessantly make our effort from this base, we will appreciate the result of our effort moment after moment, day after day, year after year. This is how we should appreciate our life. Those who are attached only to the result of their effort will not have any chance to appreciate it, because the result will never come. But if moment by moment your effort arises from its pure origin, all you do will be good, and you will be satisfied with whatever you do.

Zazen practice is the practice in which we resume our pure way of life, beyond any gaining idea, and beyond fame and profit. By practice we just keep our original nature as it is. There is no need to intellectualize about what our pure original nature is, because it is beyond our intellectual understanding. And there is no need to

appreciate it, because it is beyond our appreciation. So just to sit, without any idea of gain, and with the purest intention, to remain as quiet as our original nature—this is our practice.

In the zendo there is nothing fancy. We just come and sit. After communicating with each other we go home and resume our own everyday activity as a continuity of our pure practice, enjoying our true way of life. Yet this is very unusual. Wherever I go people ask me, “What is Buddhism?” with their notebooks ready to write down my answer. You can imagine how I feel! But here we just practice zazen. That is all we do, and we are happy in this practice. For us there is no need to understand what Zen is. We are practicing zazen. So for us there is no need to know what Zen is intellectually. This is, I think, very unusual for American society.

In America there are many patterns of life and many religions, so it may seem quite natural to talk about the differences between the various religions and compare one with the other. But for us there is no need to compare Buddhism to Christianity. Buddhism is Buddhism, and Buddhism is our practice. We do not even know what we are doing when we just practice with a pure mind. So we cannot compare our way to some other religion. Some people may say that Zen Buddhism is not religion. Maybe that is so, or maybe Zen Buddhism is religion before religion. So it might not be religion in the usual sense. But it is wonderful, and even though we do not study what it is intellectually, even though we do not have any cathedral or fancy ornaments, it is possible to appreciate our original nature. This is, I think, quite unusual.