

One Continuous Mistake

Suzuki Roshi in Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, page 39:

When we reflect on what we are doing in our everyday life, we are always ashamed of ourselves. One of my students wrote to me saying, "You sent me a calendar, and I am trying to follow the good mottoes which appear on each page. But the year has hardly begun, and already I have failed!" Dogen-zenji said, "Shoshaku jushaku." Shaku generally means "mistake" or "wrong." Shoshaku jushaku means "to succeed wrong with wrong," or one continuous mistake. According to Dogen, one continuous mistake can also be Zen. A Zen master's life could be said to be so many years of shoshaku jushaku. This means so many years of one single-minded effort.

We say, "A good father is not a good father." Do you understand? One who thinks he is a good father is not a good father; one who thinks he is a good husband is not a good husband. One who thinks he is one of the worst husbands may be a good one if he is always trying to be a good husband with a single-hearted effort. If you find it impossible to sit because of some pain or some physical difficulty, then you should sit anyway, using a thick cushion or a chair.

將錯就錯 = shō shaku ju shaku

shō: and again, from now on, will, going to

shaku: mistake, error, blunder, wrong, disorder

ju: along, under, just, approach

shaku: mistake, error, blunder, wrong, disorder

Carl Bielefeldt translation and notes to Shobogenzo Hakujuishi (Cypress Tree):

いま如何是祖師西來意と道取せるは、問取のみにあらず、兩人同得見のみにあらざるなり。正當恁麼問時は、一人也未可相見なり、自己也能得幾なり。さらに道取するに、渠無不是なり。このゆゑに錯錯なり、錯錯なるがゆゑに將錯就錯なり。承虚接響にあらざらんや。

The saying here, "what is the intention of the ancestral master's coming from the west?" is not merely a question; it is not merely that "both people can see the same." Precisely at the time he asks, he cannot see anyone; how much of himself can he get? Going further, [we can say,] he is without fault. Therefore, it is "mistake, mistake." Because it is mistake, mistake, it is "taking a mistake as a mistake." Is this not "to accept the hollow and entertain the echo"?

"Mistake, mistake" (*shaku shaku* 錯錯): A common retort of Chan masters, sometimes used in ironic praise—which, given the context, seems the most likely interpretation here. Some readers take the expression to mean that the monk makes one "mistake" after another; others suggest that both the monk and Zhaozhou make the "mistakes." The *Shōbōgenzō monge* (CKZS 5:231) proposes that the mistakes in question here are the "object" and "person" in the monk's statement.

"Taking a mistake as a mistake" (*shōshaku jushaku* 將錯就錯): An idiom, found in Chan texts, meaning "to recognize one's mistake" or "to turn a mistake to one's advantage."

In a digital search of the Taisho Tripitaka, the phrase *shōshaku jushaku* does not appear in the agamas or other Indian texts, but first appears in the records of Yuanwu, Dahui, and Hongzhi, as well as the Book of Serenity.

It also appears in:

SBGZ Sokushinzebutsu, Nishijima vol 1, page 49: "They do not recognize their mistake as a mistake."

SBGZ Shinfukatoku, Nishijima vol 1, page 237: "Even the ancestors have made such mistakes that are to be seen as mistakes."

SBGZ Gyobutsu Yuigi, Nishijima vol 2, page 37: "Who can put this mistake in its place?"

(also includes "shaku shaku": "mistakes at every moment")

SBGZ Hakujuishi, Nishijima vol 2, page 231: "He sees a mistake as a mistake."

(also includes "shaku shaku": "one mistake after another")

So it may be that Suzuki Roshi meant to translate "shaku shaku" as "one continuous mistake" but then "shō shaku ju shaku" could imply "so many years of one single-minded effort" in recognizing mistakes as mistakes (confession and repentance)... Any mistakes in these comments or interpretations are entirely my own!

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