

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
6 PM *SESSHIN* LECTURE
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In our way of Zen, we emphasize the way-seeking mind—way-seeking mind. This is, in another word, bodhisattva-mind or way-seeking mind. In Zen, people say "way it is" or "to observe everything as it is." But "the way as it is" or "to observe things as they are" will not be the same what you mean by that. I don't know what—how do you understand "to observe everything as it is." I find out there are big misunderstanding in your understanding of "way it is" or "to observe things as it is."

We mean—I think if I say "to see things as it is" means to observe things in rather scientific way or materialistic way. In your philosophy, there is two ways of—you say "things as it is" and "things as it should be." Now this is two contradictory—not "contradictory," but this is two antonymy.¹ Things do not exist "as it should be." And you do not observe "things as it is." And you observe things your own way. You observe things "as it should [laughs]—as it should not be" or, you know, you thinks "there is flower." But actual flower is changing. So—and yet you see the flower—"there is flower, and this flower is always like this." This is, perhaps, your understanding of flower. But actually the flower is changing. When you see something in scientific way, actually, you do not see "things as it is." And you knows—and yet you know what is true and what is not true. But you like—you [are] apt to—you [are] apt to see things as it—"as it should not be."

This—in this point, there is big mistake. So when we say "to observe things as it is" means "to see things as it should be" [laughs]. For you, this is opposite, you know. For you, way should—we say—when we say "to observe things as it is" means "to observe things as it should be." Do you understand? In your—for you, "as it should be" and "as it is" is quite different. "As it should be" means "it is not so, but it should be so." It means some—in this case, you have some moral—morality, or you want to be religious, or you want to be moral. But human being is not so. We are not always moral. Or we are not always religious. So we should be more moral, or we should be more religious. "This is way it should be." And when you are not religious, when you are not good, that is how you are. So "way it should be" is—means morality or religion. And "way as it is" is science.

But for us, "things as it is" is morality, not science—is morality—"things as it is." So to observe "things as it is" means to—to be moral and to be religious. It's what I mean by "way it should be." [Laughs.] So statement is same, but what we mean is opposite, not same.

¹ antonymy: a word having a meaning opposite to that of another word.

When you take religious viewpoint, everything become opposite [laughs], you know. You are talking same thing from this scientific standpoint, and we are talking from religious standpoint. So same statements makes big difference. And this misunderstanding—the misunderstanding you have about Zen, I think—when we say:

Zen, oh, Zen is wonderful [laughs]. Whatever you do, that is Zen [laughing]. Even though you are doing something wrong, that is Zen. Whatever you do is Zen. That is why I like Zen.

[Laughs, laughter.] This kind of misunderstanding I think you will have about Zen. But what we actually mean is quite opposite.

And way-seeking mind—what I'm going to talk just now is the problem of to choose one—one of the two: good or bad. Refrainings from bad to take good is way-seeking mind, not from moral viewpoint but from religious viewpoint. When we take religious viewpoint, there is no alternative way. We should choose good. And we should refrain from bad. There is no alternative way. But if you have no way-seeking mind, or if you have no idea of religion, you will wonder which to choose.

In morality, when you choose one of the two, you have freedom of choice; whatever you do it is up to you. You can take bad instead of good [laughs]. But if—once you choose good, you have responsibility for taking good, that is, moral responsibility you have. But that is responsibility. But in religion we have, we—I said, no alternative way, but it is our choice, you know. Which way to go is our—up to us. And yet, for—for us there is no other way than to take good. This is way-seeking mind. So to pursue good and truth and beauty is also our way-seeking mind, although there is some difference from ethics. This mind is the mind—traditional mind transmitted from Buddha to us, and for Zen students this is most important spirit.

Enlightenment, so, is not only kind of state of mind, a kind of psychological state of mind. When the—some psychological state of mind is supported by right wisdom, we call it enlightenment. When it is supported by way-seeking mind, when you attain that state of mind by everyday practice [1-2 words] by way-seeking mind, that is called enlightenment. Even though you attain—or you have—you obtain the same psychological state of mind by LSD [laughs, laughter], if you lack the way-seeking mind, we do not call it enlightenment. That is quite different [laughs] matter. It should be based on the way-seeking mind.

So Dōgen-zenji said when you hit the mark, that is the same effort you have been doing. After trying ninety-nine times—suppose after trying ninety-nine times of failure, you hit the mark at the one-hundredth—

one-hundredth time. That effort, that meaning of—meaning of "hit the mark" and the meaning of "losing the mark" should be the same. The difference is, now you hit the mark [laughs]. You—from, you know, materialistic viewpoint, you know, to lose the mark is not good at all [laughs]. You should hit the mark. But from the meaning of practice, actual practice, even though you lose it, the meaning of the practice is the same: to hit the mark or lose the mark is not different. That is our, you know, enlightenment.

So enlightenment only is—it is not only enlightenment that is valuable. The failure by true spirit is also valuable. It has same meaning. So even—so that is why even though your zazen is not perfect, it has same meaning if you have way-seeking mind. If you do not have way-seeking mind, even though you attain enlightenment, that enlightenment is so-called-it "dry enlightenment" [laughs, laughter]. Dry enlightenment. No meaning in it.

This is bodhisattva-mind. So this mind is universal to everyone. There is no difference between priest or layman. There is no difference [between] wise man or for—when we have way-seeking mind we are all—all bodhisattva. This is so-called-it bodhisattva-mind.

Again, this bodhisattva-mind is impossible to—to value. It is "non-value" practice. And this bodhisattva-mind—if you have some question this—about this bodhisattva-mind, I think it may be interesting to discuss about this point. Enlightenment, or way-seeking mind, or to help others before we attain enlightenment is bodhisattva-mind—spirit. Even though you—before you save yourself, you should save others. This is also bodhisattva-mind. So about those problem, tonight we want to discu- [partial word]—we want to have discussion.

Student A:² Suzuki-rōshi, how would it be possible to truly help somebody else, unless you have some enlightenment yourself, you know?

Suzuki-rōshi: How to help others?

Student A: How would it be possible to really help unless you possess some degree of enlightenment yourself?

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

² The letters identifying students are only approximate. When there was a continuous exchange between a student and Suzuki-rōshi, the letter was repeated for that series of exchanges. But it was not possible reliably to identify the various students' voices throughout the lecture, so a particular student may have asked a question early in the Q&A session but was later identified with a different sequential letter.

Student A: How would you know how to help?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, this is [laughs] very good question, I think. Do you have some—some [1 word unclear]—it is quite simple to—for me to answer, but do you have some opinion about it, or do you have some—

Student B: [1 word] you yourself have said the only true way to help is to help without helping, and perhaps that is the best way to do [1 word].

Suzuki-rōshi: What did you say? [Laughs, laughter.] To—

Student B: The only true way of helping is to help without consciously helping, that is not to help as a project of helping—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student B: —but just to be almost unconsciously helpful.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Student B: That, of course, isn't the way you put it [laughs].

Student C: To be enlightened is to know that you need no help, and therefore know the other needs no help. You know what I mean [?], enlightenment does not give help. Enlightenment need help. No problem [laughs, laughter].

Suzuki-rōshi: Enlightenment wants no—or—help?

Student C: To be enlightened is to need no help.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: It's to know that you need—it's to know that you need no help—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: —because there's no—no [1 word]. So it's no problem, then.

Suzuki-rōshi: It is possible, you mean?

Student C: It's—it's not possible to give help. And—so that's the term. How is it possible to give help? It's not possible to give help. And this enlightened man you speak of knows. That's what he knows. And it's that there's no help needed. So when he goes to his friend who

needs help, he knows that there's nothing to do, and that's how he helps him. [Laughter, S.R. laughs.]

Student D: [4-6 words.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. [Laughs, laughter.]

Student E: Sensei, maybe the enlightened man knows that he needs help endlessly, you know, that he doesn't stand by [?].

Suzuki-rōshi: I couldn't follow.

Student D: As equally, as well, as not needing any help. [Laughter.]

Suzuki-rōshi: What did he say? [Laughter.] Will you put it some other way so that I may understand him?

[Several students speak at once.]

Student F: He said that perhaps the—the enlightened man knows not—not only that he—that he doesn't need any help, but that he needs help forever, that he doesn't seem alone—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student F: —in any sense, or independent—

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh, I—

Student F: —but that he's dependent on all.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. But the—how to help others was his question. [Laughter, laughs.] How to help if you are bodhisattva? How actually can you help others? [Laughs.]

Student G: By remembering—remembering you're—just by remembering you're a Buddhist. That helps.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student G: You don't remember the sickness, you remember the Buddha image.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student H: Is it something we can actually discuss? Is it actually possible to talk about?

Student F: You could haul a drowning man out of the water. And you could give a sick man—

Suzuki-rōshi: No, oh, oh, yeah. You know, this is not discussion, actually. How do you want to help others? Actually.

Student I: Well, as long as we're thinking about it, probably for some selfish reason—and that's all right [laughs], because it seems to be a prime motivation of how this "to help other people."

Suzuki-rōshi: Mmm.

Student I: And so as long as we realize that we're helping, some people even get—feel guilty—Christians get into quite a guilty thing about it—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student I: —but it's just to, you know, to help, and whatever that means to us, to do it.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student J: Before a person is able to help another person, doesn't the person who needs the help have to want this help?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, this is true, because before, you know, before you help others, you want help [laughs]. That is true.

Student J: Do we necessarily know this, though?

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student J: Do we necessarily know this? Or, I mean, are we aware of —

Suzuki-rōshi: But, you know, there is some—should be some way, you know—what—here, you know, to help others—why we help others is not only to help others but also to have—not—to try not to have regretful life for us.

Student K: Could you say that again? I didn't understand.

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. Try—to try not to have regretful life for us—that is most important point. Don't you think so? You—you say, "I must help others" for sake of others [laughs]. But if, you know, you become regretful later, that is not so good. So the—first of all, you should do it from your inmost heart.

Actually to help others and to help yourself is the same, not different. Not to have—try not to have regretful life is to help myself and to help others. It is true that we feel better when we help others than to help ourselves because we are so selfish [laughs], in other words, you know. Actually, we are pretty selfish. So—and we know to—to be selfish is not so good, so we always try not to be selfish. Your voice of conscience will tell you, "Don't be selfish. That's too much. You are too selfish." So usually we always try not to be selfish.

Actually, to help others is to help yourself. And to help yourself without paying any attention to others [laughs] is also to help others. Don't you think so? If you are observing your way carefully, that will help others. When almost all people will be discouraged, you—if you are brave enough or good enough to observe your way, that is—will be the great encouragement for others.

Student L: Well, when I look back, there's a time in my life when I changed my mind as to what was the important thing in life. And at that time, I changed my mind as to which things had helped me. Before I thought other things had been helpful—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mmm.

Student L: —and then when I changed my mind, I looked again, and I saw that there was a whole different set of things that had happened that helped me define this. But these things were different from the others in that in the first case, they were things mostly that people did that were trying to help. In the second case, [3-4 words] there were things that I saw people did but that they did not necessarily see me see them doing. They did it because they wanted to do it, and it helped me because I saw it.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mmm. I see. That's true. So to help others is not so difficult. If you only know how to help others, usually people thinks if you want to help others, you have to have some material power, or you must be quite healthy—healthy enough to be always happy, always have smiling face [laughs, laughter]. But even though you are like this [gestures?], you can help others [laughs, laughter]. If you do not lose your spirit, that is good enough. [Laughs.] Even though you have nothing, if you do not lose yourself, that is, maybe, the—the greatest help for others.

Student M: Excuse me. You say, "If you do not lose yourself?"

Suzuki-rōshi: Lose yourself—lose your, you know, confidence or—

Student N: This—but this has not come to the question that he asked at all. He asked, "How can you help others when you're not enlightened?" And I think you're talking about helping others as an enlightened person.

Suzuki-rōshi: No, no—not enlightened person.

Student N: No, just helping?

Suzuki-rōshi: In—you know, before we attain en- [partial word]—perfect enlightenment, just to seek for enlightenment is great help for others. That is what I'm talking about. Even though you—you haven't enlightenment—you haven't attained enlightenment, but to try to attain enlightenment is good enough to help others.

Student O: Must we live in community to help others? Is it possible—

Suzuki-rōshi: No, no, no.

Student O: —to live in a cave and help others?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, it is possible. Even though you seclude yourself, it is possible.

Student P: I—I don't think it's a matter of helping others or not helping others. If you—if each moment you are fully responsive to the situation in which you find yourself, you'll do everything you have to do.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student P: You don't have to try to do anything. You just respond to the situation.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah [laughs]. That is complete answer. But when you bring that problem in—in more emotional, you know, realm, this kind of feeling, is necessary, you know—to go this way is to come down; to go up is to come down. Even though you do not attain enlightenment, it's all right.

Student Q: But if I myself am able to respond honestly to a situation which—the minute I open my mouth now, I'm responding dishonestly—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student Q: —what is the distinction between this and enlightenment? If I can respond honestly, it would seem to me that [laughs] this is something which is—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. That is what I was saying, you know. Just to respond to some outward stimulation is not right, not right. That is, you know, to behave like just [laughs] animal-like, you know. That is not what we mean by "to be natural." To be natural means to follow the pattern of human life, not animal. We have clear distinction from animal life, natural as a human being, or natural as an animal. So the way should be—is "way as it is," we mean. This—this point is opposite. If you make—if someone hit you, to hit back. That is, you know, animal-like response. You should not forget your true nature, inmost nature. We do not feel good when I hit someone. It is much better than³ to be hit [laughs]. As a human being, it is much better. You will be regret if you hit others. But even though you were hit by others, there is much—there is not much discouragement in it.

Student R: How do we distinguish between a concern which is healthy and unhealthy with people? We know that somebody needs help, but when we—how—how do we—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. That is very difficult to distinguish which is which. Pretty hard. We should know it is hard. Not so simple. Looks like very simple [laughs] question, but it is not all—not at all simple. That is why we have—we want some training with right understanding. Not at all easy to tell.

But even though you reflect on what you have done, you know, in past [laughs], you cannot tell which is which [laughs, laughter]. That is no good to count, you know, date—animal's age is not so good. So to have bodhisattva-mind [laughs]—strong bodhisattva mind in here [points] is only way to tell, or you will have intuition. You should have always intuition. Without trying to do something, your intuitive action should help others. If you actually have bodhisattva-mind, you can help others anyway. The bodhisattva-mind is to pursue good and truth and beauty is bodhisattva-mind. To follow the way should be—is bodhisattva-mind. If one person follow the right way, that one person will help hundreds of people.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Judith Randall and Bill Redican (5/16/01).

³ Suzuki-rōshi probably meant, "It is much better to be hit."