

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
May Sesshin Lecture: GENJŌ-KŌAN, PARAGRAPHS 5-13
Thursday, May 26, 1966¹
Sunday Morning

Page 2:²

Firewood turns into ash, and it does not turn into firewood again. But do not suppose that the ash is after and the firewood before. We must understand that firewood is at the stage of firewood, and there must—and there we find—there we find its before and after. And yet with this past and future, its present is independent of them. Ash is at the stage of ash, and there we find its before and after. Just as firewood does not become firewood again after it's—after it is ash, so does not ret- [partial word]—so a—so man does not return to life after his death.

In this paragraph, he [Dōgen-zenji] taught us the absolute independent—independency of our various existence, which covers everything. Because it include everything, it is independent being. So here we find the absolute liberation. When we practice zazen, concentrating ourselves on each breathing, we are absolute independent being.

When Ummon³ said, "follow waves and drive waves"—"follow waves and drive waves," when we completely follow the waves, waves of being, we are completely—when we are one with waves, we are absolutely independent being.

So "follow waves." "To follow waves is to drive waves." When Dōgen-zenji talks about time—time, he didn't say so, but time drive being—time follow the being, and time drive being. When time—time is originally one with being. Twelve hours is the duration of the time. When the sun rise and set in east is same thing. Twelve hours means the sun—for the sun is duration of time. It is the activity of the sun, rising from the east, setting in east [west]. So it is same thing.

So "drive"—you may say, "drive being—follow being and drive being."

¹ The two dates do not agree. The original transcript stated "Sunday morning," but 5/26/66 was a Thursday. Both of these dates are questionable.

² Suzuki-rōshi is commenting on Eihei Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* "Genjō-kōan," following the translation by Kazuaki Tanahashi with Robert Aitken that appeared in: (1) *Shōbōgenzō Genjō Kōan: An Analytic Study* (unpublished manuscript, San Francisco Zen Center); (2) *Wind Bell*, 1967, VI (2-4), pp. 60-62, and (3) the [*Honolulu*] *Diamond Sangha [Newsletter]*. "Page 2" here refers to a reproduced handout of the kōan distributed to the students.

³ Yunmen Wenyan (Ummon Bun'en): 864-949. Chan master of Tang China.

That is Ummon's practice. When you follow your, you know—when your mind follows your breathing, it means your mind drives your breathing—follows breathing and drives your breathing. So your breathing and—your being and your mind is one. So here we have absolute freedom. Here we become one independent being. We obtain absolute freedom.

So we should not say "firewood became ash." Ash is ash [laughs], firewood is firewood. Firewood is independent being. Ash is also independent being. But ash include the firewood, and firewood includes the ash with everything. Not only include—not only ash include firewood, but also it include everything. So firewood is independent being, and ash is also independent being. So one breathing after another, you obtain the absolute freedom when you practice—when you are concentrated on each breathing: exhaling and inhaling.

In *Gakudō-yōjinshū*⁴—*Gakudō-yōjinshū* is the important—ten important instruction for practice of zazen—ten instruct. And in—in the first instruction, Dōgen-zenji talks about evanescence of life. And in—in it, when he talks about the evanescence of life he says, "Exhaling—what is your exhaling and inhaling? After all, what is the inhaling and exhaling?" There is no self. When you are completely absorbed in your breathing, there is no self. What is it, you know—what is your breathing? That breathing is not you or air. [Laughs.] What is it? That is not self at all. When your are completely involved in breathing, there is no self. When there is no self, you have absolute freedom. Because you have, you know, silly idea of self [laughing], you have a lot of problems. So he said, "Your problem are home-made problem" [laughs, laughter]. Maybe very recent [?]. That is why you like it, on the other hand. If you like it—as long as you like it, it's all right [laughs, laughter].

Now it is specifically taught in Buddhism that life does not become death. For this reason, life is called "no-life." It is specifically taught in Buddhism that death does not become life. Therefore, death is called "no-death."

It is not matter of life or death. When death is accepted as death through-and-through, it is not death any more. Because you compare death [laughs] with life, it is something. But when death is understood, completely, as death, death is not death any more. Life is not life any more when life is life through-and-through [laughs].

Nishida⁵—the outstanding philosopher in Japan, says, "Stone is—people

⁴ Eihei Dōgen, *Eihei shoso gakudō-yōjinshū: Collection of Concerns in Learning the Truth* (1 fascicle), 1234.

⁵ Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945): an important 20th-century Japanese philosopher. Suzuki-rōshi entered Komazawa University, Tōkyō, in 1926, at a time when Nishida Kitarō was probably widely discussed.

say stone is—looks like frog or mountain, but stone is not—is not valuable because it looks like frogs or mountain. Stone is valuable when the stone is stone through-and-through." [Laughs.] Do you understand? When we are ignorant through-and-through, we are not ignorant any more.

So in the last page [of the "Genjō-kōan" handout], I think, he [Dōgen-zenji] says:

When we first seek the truth, we are far away from its environs. When we discover that the truth was already being correctly transmitted to us, we [are] ourselves at the moment—at that moment. If we watch the shore from a boat, it seems that the shore is moving. But when you watch the boat directly, we know that it is the boat that moves. If we examine all things with a confused body and mind, we will suppose that our selves is permanent. But we are—but if we practice closely and return to our present place, it will be clear that nothing at all is permanent.

Now the one [counting]—two—three—the four—fourth—four—fourth paragraph [of that page]:

Life is period of itself, and death is period of itself. They are like winter and spring. We do not call winter the future spring, nor spring the future summer.

We finished up to this paragraph.⁶

We gain enlightenment like the moon reflecting in the water. The moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken. Although its light is wide and great, the moon is reflected even in the puddle an inch wide. The whole moon and the whole sky are reflected in a drop of dew in the grass.

So even for a moment, when you practice zazen, whole universe is within you as the moon is in the drop of dew in the grass. This is what he meant.

Enlightenment does not destroy the man, just as the moon does not break the water. Man does not hinder enlightenment, just as a drop of dew does not hinder the moon in the sky. The depth of the drop is the height of the moon. The period of the reflection, long or short, will prove the vastness of the dewdrop, and the vastness of the moonlight sky—moonlit sky—moonlit sky.

[Repeats last two sentences:]

⁶ In SR-66-05-25, Suzuki-rōshi discussed only Paragraphs 1 and 2, which is further evidence that the dates of this series are generally quite wrong.

The depth of the drop is the height—height of the moon. The period of the reflection, long or short, will prove the vastness of the dewdrop, and the vastness of the moonlit sky.

It is—he is repeating same thing by another parable.

When the truth does not fill our body and mind, we think that we have enough. When the truth fill—fills our body and mind, we know that something is missing. For an example—for example, when we go- [partial word]—when we view the world from a boat on the ocean, it looks—it looks circular and nothing else. But the ocean is neither round nor square, and its features are infinite in variety. It is like a palace. It is like a jewel. It seems circular as far as our eyes can reach at the time. All things are so. Though there are many features in the dusty life and the pure life, we only understand what our study can reach. And in our study of all things we must appreciate that although they may look round or square, the other feature of oceans or mountains are infinite in variety, and universe lies in all quarters. It is so not only around ourselves, but also directly here—even in a drop of water.

You say you attained some stage in your practice, but, you know, that is just a trivial event in your long life. It is like—it is like to say the ocean is round, or ocean is like a jewel, or ocean is like a palace for a dragon—ocean is a palace for a fish—ocean is big house—home. For a human being, the ocean is water [laughs]. So there must be various understanding.

When ocean is palace, it is palace [laughs]. You sh- [partial word]—you cannot say it is not palace. For a dragon it is actually a palace. If you laugh at a fish who say that is palace, Buddha will laugh at you when you say it is two o'clock—three o'clock [laughs, laughter]. It is same thing [laughs]. So if we know this fact, we cannot laugh at fish. So when we do not know the truth, we think we found out something [laughs]. But when we think so—think in that way, we are far from the enlightenment.

If we know the truth, we think something is missing—not "missing"—"something"—not "something is missing"—we—we think that is not all. In Japanese, you know, famous writer Fumiko Hayashi,⁷ you know, she always said, "This—this is not all my ability. This work is not all my ability." [Laughs.] This is very interesting statement. He wrote—she wrote and wrote and wrote. And at last she became a very famous writer. But she al- [partial word]—people say she is a good writer, but, "This is not all my ability. This is not what I want to write." [Laughs.] People say he is—she is good, but she says, "I am not good

⁷ Fumiko Hayashi (1903–1951): Japanese novelist and short-story writer.

writer. I—I cannot express my feelings yet. This is more what I want to express [explain?]." "Something is missing" in this sense, you know. When you are ignorant through-and-through, when you are—when you are unable to explain yourself through-and-through, it is good, you know. When [s]he says, "This is exactly what I [laughs], wanted to say," she—she may not be so good one [writer].

When—when a fish swims in the ocean, there is no end to the water, no matter how far it swims. When a bird flies in the sky, there is no end to the air, no matter how far it flies. However, the fish and the bird do not leave their elements.

Elements being water or sky.

The bird—the fish and the bird do not leave their elements. When the use is large, it is used largely. When the use is small, it is used in a small way. Though it flies everywhere, if the bird leaves the air, it will die at once. Water makes life, and air makes life. The bird makes life, and the fish makes life. Life makes the bird, and life makes the fish. There are the further analogies possible to illustrate, in this way, practice, enlightenment, mortality, and eternity.

Mortality or eternity or practice or enlightenment or ignorance should be understood in this way. But before you understand the true meaning of mortality or eternity or enlightenment or ignorance just by intellectual, without having a deep understanding, mortality is something which is different from eternity. Enlightenment is something which is different from ignorance. Practice is something to attain enlightenment, and practice and enlightenment are two completely different things. After you attain enlightenment, there is no ignorance, but if you understand what is enlightenment in its true sense, enlightenment is ignorance too. When he is not aware of his own ignorance, that is not enlightenment.

Do you know Asahina Sogen?⁸ He is the abbot of Rinzai—Engaku. After his long practice—after—long after he attained enlightenment, he get married [laughs]. And his followers, I think, must have been disappointed [laughs]—very much sad, I think. But what he says, recently, is very very meaningful and interesting. And he knows that people may [be] disappointed with him [laughs]. But he has, you know, some confidence or some faith in it. He did not get married just to [because], you know, he wanted his friend—his particular friend. But he felt, you know, "something is missing" [laughs] with his [1 word]. So he wanted to be that ignorant, ordinal [ordinary] feeling [fellow?] after he attained enlightenment. He wanted to know—he acknowledged

⁸ Asahina Sogen: Primate of the Rinzaï school and abbot of Enkaku-ji Temple, Kamakura, Japan.

his humanity. I think that is true enlightenment. He does not say so, actually. He is laughing at himself [laughs]. This is very very meaningful.

Once he secluded—once he retired in remoted mountain with his good friend. That friend was Sōtō priest [laughs]. He secluded himself with Sōtō priest in remoted mountain. They practiced in the mountain because they could not satisfied with their practice. That—the house they built was—I don't know how many miles in your counting—but very very far away from the last house in the village. And they raised their own food in the mountain and supported themselves. His practice was so hard, and after hard practice [laughs] like that, he got married with some lady [laughs, laughter]—he married his boy- [partial word]—girlfriend. The usual people, you know, who understand mortality and eternity—enlightenment ignorance, in something different way will be disappointed [laughs] with him.

But eternity is in mortality. When we are a mortal being, through-and-through, we are—we will acquire the immortal life. When we are absorbed in the fear [pure?] ignorant practice [laughs], you have enlightenment. So after all, how to be the true Buddhist is to find the meaning of life in your limited activity. There is no need for you to be a great [person]. In your limited activity, you should find out true meaning of yourself. If you pick up a small—even a small stone, you have whole universe. But if you try to pick up pebbles of the gallon [?], you will be crazy, and you will be sympathized with [laughs] people.

When a fish swims in the ocean, there is no end to the water.

This is a very interesting point. There is no end—there is no end in our practice. Because there is no end in our practice, our practice is good. Don't you think so? But usually, you expect our practice could be effective enough [laughs] to put an end in your hard practice. If—if I say, "Practice hard just two years" [laughs, laughter], then you will be interested in our practice. If I say, "You have to practice whole life" [laughs, laughter], then you will be disappointed. "Oh, Zen is not good. Zen is not for me." But if you understand what is practice, and if you [are] interested in practice, the reason why you interested in—you are interested in practice is the practice is endless. That is why I am interested in Buddhism. There is no end. If there is some end, I don't think Buddhism is so good. There is no end. Even [if] human being vanish from this earth, Buddhism exist. That is why I am interested in Buddhism. Buddhism is not always perfect. It is not perfect at all. Because it is not perfect, I like it. If it is perfect, someone will be—many people will be interested in it, so there is no need for me to work on it. Because people are very much discouraged [laughs] with Buddhism, so I feel someone must practice Buddhism.

The other day, when we had wake-up service in the first [2-3 words], I thought it might be better to bow in our way. But they said if you bow in that way, people may be discouraged [laughs, laughter]. It is true—very true. I know people will be discouraged. I know we are giving a lot of discouragement. For a long time—when—in Japan they bow to each other [laughs, laughter]. I know that very well. So I bow nine times. I will not practice zazen so hard as I do in America [laughs, laughter]. So same thing will be understood in completely different way, you know. And I know how they feel—exactly how they feel. But why I am interested in Buddhism is it is not complete at all. And Buddhism wants our effort always. Eternally it wants our [laughs] constant effort. That is why I like Buddhism.

So until you are interested in this point, you cannot understand Buddhism. In this way, practice, enlightenment, morality, and eternity: morality—normal- [partial word]—mortality makes eternity. Eternity makes mortality. Enlightenment makes practice. Practice makes enlightenment. In this way, there is—"further analogy is possible to illustrate our practice." Bird makes sky, sky makes bird. Fish makes bird, bird makes fish [laughs]. In this way, there must be further analogies possible—further possible illustration of our practice. So, in short, it is enough if you do one thing with sincerity. That is enough, after all. There is no need to try to know the vastness of the sky or depth of the sea.

Now if a bird or a fish tries to reach the end of its element before moving in it, this bird or this fish will not find its way or its place. When we find our place at this moment—when we find our way at—at this moment—

[*Aside:*] Might mean this is [1-2 words].

—when we find our place at this place, when we find our way—

[*Aside:*] —oh, no, no—it's all right— [Sounds like he is talking to a student and declining an offer of something—not rejecting the translation.]

—when we find our place at this moment—when we find our way at this moment, then practice follows, and this is the realization of the truth.

"When we find our place at this moment—when we find our way"—when we do something at some moment, at some place, in some way, that is the realization of truth.

For the place and for the way are neither large nor small—

It is not matter of big or small, good or bad.

—neither subjective nor objective—or—neither subject nor object. They have not exist from the beginning, and they are not in process of realization.

"They have not existed from the beginning." The realization of the truth did not—was not existent from the beginning, or before we realize it—before realization, you know. You may say now realization of the truth take place through my activity. But it is not so. Or you may say it is the process of the realization. It is not so. The—each realization of the truth is one absolute realization of the truth. It is not happened in—on this moment, or it is not—it will happen in some other time again. For you, the realization of the truth is—realization of the truth you have now is the absolute realization of the truth. You cannot compare your realization of the truth with some other realization of the truth. Each one who realize this fact and who practice your way with sincerity has absolute freedom.

So he says:

It is not—they have not existed from the beginning, and they are not in the process of the realization.

Your realization is—does not become other's realization. Not at all. But we—all the realization of the truth is exactly the same. Your realization of the truth is same as Buddha's realization of the truth. There is no difference at all. So it is not just happen to you at this moment or it has happened three thousand years ago. So this is not mortality or not eternity.

Fundamental truth—excuse me [laughter]—some [?] piece of paper.⁹
Thank you very much.

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Bill Redican (2/20/01).

⁹ Suzuki-rōshi appears to be borrowing or returning one of the pages of the kōan.