

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
GENJŌ-KŌAN: PARAGRAPHS 1–11
Sunday Morning, June 19, 1966
Lecture A
Sōkō-ji Temple, San Francisco

Suzuki-rōshi: Someone has my—my paper.¹

Student: [4-6 words unclear.] Wednesday night—[6-8 words]—
Wednesday night.

Suzuki-rōshi: Wednesday?

Student: Yeah. Finish the whole thing.

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student: Wednesday night we finish the whole thing.

Suzuki-rōshi: No, Wednesday we do *Shushōgi*.² Do you finish until
the bottom part of Page 3?

Student: No, I think we finished the whole thing.

Suzuki-rōshi: Whole thing.

Student: Wednesday night we did it.

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. [Laughs.] Wednesday night? Oh. [Laughs,
laughter.] Oh. Big mistake. Okay.

Student: Maybe there are some here Sunday morning that weren't
here Wednesday night.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. All right. Then—paragraph—in each
paragraph, I—I think you want some brief comment so that you can
understand—

Aside by Suzuki-rōshi: It's all right.

¹ 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translation by Kazuaki Tanahashi with Robert Aitken that appeared in: (1) *Shōbōgenzō Genjō Kōan: An Analytic Study* (unpublished manuscript, San Francisco Zen Center); (2) *Wind Bell*, 1967, VI (2-4), pp. 60-62, and (3) the [*Honolulu*] *Diamond Sangha [Newsletter]*.

² See Lecture SR-66-03-13B. However, 13 March 66 is probably the wrong date.

—so that you can understand all the—whole part of—whole [laughter] fascicle.

The first paragraph is the framework of whole Buddhism. First paragraph:

All—when all things are in Buddhist way or Buddhist phenomena, we are enlightenment and ignorance, something to study, life and death, buddha, and people. When all things are without self, we have no ignorance, no enlightenment, no doubt, no buddha, no people, and no life and no death. The Buddhist way is beyond being and non-being. Therefore we have life and death, ignorance and enlightenment, people and buddha. However, flowers fall with our attachment, and weeds grow with our detachment.

This is, you know, the most basic understanding of—of Buddhism or Sōtō Zen, which include all the teaching of Buddhism. The teaching is—Hīnayāna Buddhism is based on when all things are Buddhist phenomena, we have enlightenment and ignorance, something to study, life and death, buddha and people. The teaching about ignorance or enlightenment, or something to study, or problem of life and death, buddha and people, is actually written in scriptures and actually which was told by Buddha. But although Buddha told various teaching, it is just appropriate medicine for the—for patients. So it is not absolute teaching. It is just temporal [temporary?] remedy for the people.

So from this standpoint, the Buddha's teaching is something more than that—more than which was just told by him. It is based on his [1 word] great mind. And that mind is not just Buddha's mind, but that mind—the mind include everything, or big mercy, or big mind, or—not only it is big, but also it is very subtle and intuitive mind.

So from this viewpoint there is no particular teaching. Particular teaching is just remedy for the people. So from this viewpoint there is no teaching. Some particular teaching is not fundamental teaching. So from this viewpoint there is no teaching. This is actually means *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* group, like *Hannya-shin-gyō*³—this one [probably holding up sūtra card]. "No five *skandha* or no—no death or no word [?], no people or no buddha." This kind of statement is—belongs to *Prajñāpāramitā* group. But those two groups is not—fundamentally it is not different. When we understand those two groups is not different—taking su- [partial word]—taking superior viewpoint, that viewpoint is called middle way or superior way—the viewpoint of Tendai school.

From this viewpoint, there is flower, there is weeds, and flowers and

³ The *Heart Sūtra*.

weeds is not different. And flowers and weeds comes out in spite of our discrimination. And our discrimination is good sometime, but when we attach to it, it is not good. So everything is, in one hand, it is good, on the other, it is bad. So both is right and both is not right. This is the third viewpoint. This is framework of whole Buddhism.

And second paragraph is in short—what is his talking about—what is ignorance and what is enlightenment from the standpoint of the third superior aspect. From the—so this is the terminology of enlightenment and practice from the viewpoint of superior aspect.

And it looks—and the third paragraph is very important because third—here he says:

When we understand one side, the other side is dark.

This understanding bring our—brings our practice into everyday life. "When we understand one side, the other side is dark." So for us the most important thing is to carry our activity on with sincerity. That is the only way to attain enlightenment. Because when we absorb in our activity, there is enlightenment whether or not we realize it. So this point is very important.

It is necessary for you, I think, in—when you study Zen, it is necessary to think more by yourself, you know. Not to—not just to rely on my [laughs] talk. You have to have some question, you know, or doubt, we say. Here in his, you know, statement, if you just read it you will have various question, I think. For an instance, here he says:

When the truth—

—the bottom part Page 2, bottom part—

—when the truth does not fill our body and mind, we think that we have enough. When the truth fill our body and mind, we know that something is missing.

And he says:

For an example, when we view the world from a boat on the ocean, it looks like circular and nothing else. But the ocean is neither round nor square; it is—and its feature 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.

And he says at the end of the paragraph:

It is so not only around ourselves, but also directly here—even

in a drop of water.

This statement, you know—when you—he says, "When the truth does not fill our body and mind, we think that we have enough. When the truth fills our body and mind, we know that something is missing" [laughs]. This statement and I said just now when you do something you should be completely absorbed in it [laughs]. This is contradiction isn't it? [Laughs.] When you feel something is missing in what you do, you cannot be absorbed in what you are doing [laughs]. This is contradiction. Don't you think so? I think you have—here you have one question at least [laughs].

When, you know, whatever you do, that is—if you absorb in your activity, that is enlightenment—I say and he says [laughs]. But here in this paragraph he says, when the truth is not fill—filled, you feel you have enough. When you are filled with truth, you feel something is missing [laughs]. If you take it literally, you know, you have this kind of contradiction. But what he means by, "When the truth fills our body and mind we know that something is missing," something is missing—it is, you know, this translation is maybe [laughs]—

Student A: Something is missing [laughs, laughter].

Maybe [laughs, laughter]. [2-3 words] at least. He mea- [partial word]—what he means is actual truth is not be understood completely. Here he means: you think when you see the world on the boat you think that is square—world is square. When you study Buddhism and when you have some understanding, you may think that is Buddhism. Buddhism is wonderful [laughs], you may say. But that is not Buddhism. Here he said—here he criticizing our intellectual understanding here.

So "something is missing" actually means something—the understanding is not perfect. That is what he meant. In his understanding—his understanding is not perfect. That is actually what he means. Or his understanding is just—or if he thinks his understanding is perfect, that is not right. What—that—that is what he means. We say this—so intellectual understanding is not perfect. That is what he means. If intellectual understanding is not perfect, what kind of understanding is perfect? The perfect understanding is the direct experience in your activity. That is perfect understanding. So there is no contradiction.

So the third paragraph:

When we see things and hear things with our whole body and mind, our understanding is not like a mirror with reflection, nor like water under the moon. If we understand one side, the

other side is dark.

This—this is not just intellectual understanding. By intellectual understanding you—your understanding is the moon on the water or things on the mirror. But true understanding or direct experience is not like water under the moon or mirror with reflection. That is what he is saying.

And so:

To study Buddhism is to study ourselves. To study ourselves is to go beyond ourselves. To go beyond ourselves is to be enlightened by all things. To be enlightened by all things is to free our body and mind, [and] to free—free our body and bodies—the bodies and minds of others. No trace of enlightenment remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.

Here he says, direct understand—explains direct understanding in realm of subjective and objective—objectivity. There is no subjective understanding or objective understanding in—in the direct experience there is no subjectivity or objectivity. So to study ourselves is to study everything. That is study of Buddhism.

To study ourselves is to go beyond ourselves. To go beyond ourselves is to be enlightened by all things.

So enlightenment comes from all things to us. And when we attain enlightenment, everything comes, you know—enlightenment comes from all things. You may say enlightenment. "They [laughs] made me enlightened," or "I attained enlightenment." That is same thing in direct experience, but in intellectual understanding it is not same. I understand something. But in direct experience, "I understand something" means a truth came to me, although I didn't expect to—I didn't try to understand it [laughs], but they made me understand.

So:

To study ourselves is—to go beyond ourselves is to be enlightened by all things. To be enlightened by all things is to free our body and mind, and to free our body—bodies and minds of others.

So no trace of enlightenment remains because there is no subjectivity or objectivity in our enlightenment. So, "There is no trace of enlightenment, and this no-trace continues endlessly."

So:

When first we seek the truth, we are far away from its environs.

When you say, you know, "I attained enlightenment," that—you are far away from the direct experience of enlightenment.

When we discover the truth is already being correctly [inherently] transmitted to us, we are ourselves at the moment of enlightenment.

It is not, you know, matter of effort or practice anymore. Our practice is not just effort or [laughs]—our practice is—should I say?—you know, you—you—you come here and study or practice zazen so that you understand what is Buddhism, I think so [laughs]. And I [laughs]—I'm making effort to give you some understanding of Zen. That is true. That is actually what we are doing here [laughs]. But until—I shall be very much disappointed if you do not come when you think, "I know what is—now I know what is Buddhism." [Laughs.] So there will not be no need to [laughs]—to practice zazen, to study Zen. That is, you know, I shall be very disappointed. I want you to come here even though you understand what is Buddhism [laughs]. I am not selling you something [laughs, laughter], you know, but I want you to be my customer [laughs, laughter]. And I want to live with [laughs] your support, and I think I shall be very glad if you have some joy in practicing with us here. That is actually Buddhism. It is not matter of [laughs] enlightenment or understanding.

And why we are continuing this kind of practice—we will—what should I say?—we will be a perfect, you know, character, we say. The character-building is—we cannot force anything, you know, to others. But it is necessary for everyone to do things over and over again until the—you acquire some acquisition—perfect acquisition which will—which will not vanish from you. It is like a to—like to press your dress, you know, trousers. It is—you want iron, you know. Just to fold your trousers is not good enough. You [laughs] should press. If possible you should put something on it, you know, after—even after you put iron. This kind of effort is necessary, but this effort is—when this kind of effort is forced on you, that does not work [laughs]. That kind of effort should be continued without effort, with mutual encouragement. In this way, our practice will be continued.

So when we—when we know—when we think we know what is truth, that is not enough, and that is "far away from its environs. When we discover that the truth has already been correctly or—correctly transmitted to us, we are ourselves at the moment." When we find our true nature or our way of life as the most suitable way to our inherent nature, that is enlightenment.

At first it looks like, you know, you are trying to do something, but

when you understand what is the purpose of practice, you will understand that that was my nature but I didn't know. I feel someone is always [laughs] mean to us, and someone is forcing his—the practice to us. Or you may think, "I practice for a long time. It may be [laughs] enough for me. And it doesn't look like I made any progress" [laughs]. So that may be not, or if you go to Eihei-ji, you may say, "I have been Eihei-ji for one year [laughs]. I cannot speak any Japanese, and intellectually I don't," you know, "I cannot study anything here. Just what we are doing is eat and work and recite sūtra and practice zazen in the same way always [laughs]. What does it mean? I know everything already, quite well." [Laughing, laughter.] That is what you may say.

But he says, when you say so it is "far away from its environs." When you discover that the truth has been transmitted to us inherently long before, and now I have found—found it. That is true understanding. You have to continue it until you find your true nature in your practice. That is realization of the truth. What you study is, as he says, what—"to study Buddhism is to study yourself"—ourselves, you know. When we find out ourselves in our study, in our practice, that is realization of the truth.

So as long as you try to find out your true nature by practice, you know, you cannot find out. But if you find out your true nature in practice, or if you think the practice itself is your true nature, that is enlightenment. And our past sages found out their true nature in our practice. So—so we should find out our true nature in the same practice. That is true realization.

The practice is not something—some means to attain enlightenment. In—in practice, you should find out your true nature. Before you attain enlightenment, you are just ordinal [ordinary] people. After you attain enlightenment, you are sage [laughs]. Before—so he says—he says, "That we move ourselves and understand all things is ignorance." You know, when we try to attain enlightenment by practice, we are ignorant. But things—when things come to us and understanding themselves, including us, that is enlightenment. So even [partial word]—truth will come by itself, and we will find ourselves in the truth, in the practice. That is enlightenment.

So practice is first, enlightenment is second [laughs]. Next. So we—anyway, we should be absorbed in practice until you become one with practice, until you build up your character by practice, you—until you become Zen itself—Zen practice itself. Like a rock [laughs]. That is enlightenment. A rock doesn't know who he is [laughs].

"When we discover that the truth has been transmitted inherently," even before we are born [laughs], that is true enlightenment. And we

find ourselves in transmitted, inherent buddha-nature in our practice. That is enlightenment. So, "When we discover that the truth has already been inherently—correctly—"inherently" is better. Correctly, you know, is not strong enough. Inherently is better. "Inherently transmitted to us" before—before—even before we are born, it was transmitted to us, and when we realize that true nature in our practice, that is enlightenment. "We [are] ourselves at the moment." The moment we practice our practice with our utmost—utmost effort, that is enlightenment.

If we watch the shore from a boat, it seems that the shore is moving. But when we watch the boat [directly]—

This is just parable.

—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 self is permanent. But if we practice closely and return to our present place, it will be clear that nothing at all is permanent.

We are caught by some ideas—some permanent or impermanent or ourselves or others. As long as we practice our practice in this way, we cannot realize what is true. Just when we do it, we will understand what is our true nature.

And here the second paragraph on Page 2:

Firewood turns into ash, and it does not turn into firewood again. But do not suppose that ash is after and the firewood before. We must understand that firewood is at the stage of firewood, and there we find its before and past.

Its own past and future.

And yet with its own past and future, its present is independent of others—of other. Ash is at the stage of ash, and there we have—we find its before and after. Just [as] firewood does not become firewood again after it's—it is ash, so man does not return to life after his death.

We say we attain enlightenment—we ordinal [ordinary] people attain enlightenment, just as—just like firewood become ash. But this is mistake, he says. We cannot suppose—we cannot—we should not think in that way. You say, "I attained—I will attain enlightenment tomorrow." And ordinal [ordinary] people become [laughs] sage, like firewood become ash. But he says, ordinal [ordinary] people is ordinal [ordinary] people [laughs]. Ash is—sage is sage, and ash is ash, and firewood is firewood. Firewood has its own past and future, and ash

has its own past and future. So ordinal [ordinary] people has its own past and future. Future will be a sage [laughs], and sage has also its own past and future. In past, he is ordinal [ordinary] person [laughs]. What is the difference [laughs]? The same thing. So we should not say fire—we should not say ordinal [ordinary] people become—became a sage, as we shouldn't say firewood become ash. What—that is what he says.

So when you practice it, that is it. Don't say, "By practice I shall be buddha [laughs] tomorrow." That is what he—he said. So when you just practice it, you are at the moment a buddha. That is true [laughs]. Don't you think so? You are buddha anyway [laughs, laughter]. You cannot escape from it [laughs]. But you make some excuse [laughs] why you are not buddha [laughs, laughter], that's all. Maybe it is convenient for you [laughs, laughter]. But because you are actually buddha, you do not feel so good when you make some excuse [laughs]. That is what he is—what he says here.

So:

Now it is specifically taught in Buddhism that life does not become death.

Ordinal [ordinary] people does not become sage.

For this reason, life is called "no-life."

For this reason, ordinal [ordinary] people called no-ordinal [ordinary] people [laughs].

It is specifically taught in Buddhism that death does not become life.

Sage does not come back to ordinal [ordinary] people.

Therefore, the death is called "no-death."

Therefore, sage is called "no-sage" [laughs]. Ordinal [ordinary] people [laughs], no difference. When we practice in this hall, there is no teacher or no student. We are all sage [laughs]. Even though your practice is not good enough, we cannot say your practice is not good enough. It is good anyway. You have your own past and future. You have future—bright future to be a sage [laughs]. Don't worry [laughs, laughter].

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

"Life is a period of itself." Enlightenment—sage is a period of itself, and ordinal [ordinary] people are—they are like winter and spring. We do not call winter the father [future?] of spring. We do not call ourselves—so we shouldn't call ourselves future sage [laughs]. You are sage, not future sage. "Nor spring the future summer." You are sage.

*We gain enlightenment like the moon reflecting in the water.
The moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken.*

If you practice it by yourself without any aid, you are sage. Even though you are sage, you do not lose your nature or form or character.

We gain enlightenment like the moon reflecting in the water.

Even though your practice is not good enough, you may say—

The moon does not get wet—

The moon itself in your practice no—nor the—

—nor is the water broken.

You will not broken. You are just as you are. And when you are just as you are, through and through, there is enlightenment.

Although its light is wide and great—

Although enlightenment is—truth is wide and great—

—the moon is reflected—reflected even in a puddle in—one inch wide. The whole moon and the whole sky are reflect—reflected in a drop of dew in the grass.

So in your practice there is enlightenment.

And he continues:

Enlightenment does not destroy the man just as the moon does not break the water. Man does 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 [moonlit] sky.

And here he emphasize oneness of the practice and enlightenment from various viewpoint.

And next paragraph I already explained. This is—in next paragraph, he emphasized you should not think enlightenment is some state of mind or some intellectual understanding. It is beyond our consciousness, or it is—enlightenment is there before you become conscience of it. He emphasize this in next paragraph.

Will you please, you know, read the next paragraph from the—yeah, after—from the—

Student: Second paragraph.

Suzuki-rōshi: Ah. From the second paragraph. "When the fish swims in the ocean"—what does he mean with it? If you think over and over, you know, you will find various meaning in it.

Thank you very much.

Student: Sensei [?], do you want us to keep these this time, or do you want to collect them now?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mmm. Yeah. Yes. If you come next time, please take it and read it at home, before you come for next Sunday service.

Source: Original City Center tape. Verbatim transcript by Adam Tinkham and Bill Redican (2/20/02).