

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Monday, August 15, 1966
Lecture C
Soko-ji Temple, San Francisco

Tape operator: Uh, Suzuki's lecture should begin, "It is necessary," and then "for us" follows. "It is necessary" is how it begins.

Suzuki-rōshi: [It is necessary] for us to think everything out, or else we—we find it pretty difficult to have firm conviction in our understanding and practice Zen. Originally Zen is not some practice based on some particular intellectual teaching or understanding. But Buddhism is one of the religions which is highly intellectualized. So for us, especially for us who are very much intellectualized, even though each one of us is not so highly intellectualized, but you read and what you hear is based on some highly intellectualized thought.

So what we talk about, what we read is based on some intellectual—intellectual deep understanding of—of our life and everything. So it is necessary for us to—to have some intellectual understanding of Buddhism. Before we read *Shōbōgenzō*, intellectual understanding is necessary because his teaching is very, very intellectual. It is pretty hard for us to understand without any intellectual understanding. That is why I continue—I have to continue this kind of talk.

Yesterday¹ I talked about Buddhist psychology of eight consciousness: what is five sense organs, and sense data, and sensation, and what is mind, and what is the mind—what is the faculty of the mind which makes—makes us make many mistakes. And what is the innermost mind which is universal to everyone. And this eight consciousness is not just what we see, or what we hear, or what we understand. It is the innermost origin of every existence—physical and spiritual, subjective and objective. But I did not talk about the innermost origin of the existence—every existence.

And next was the holy nature in ordinal [ordinary] sense. The holy nature is something which is always constant and eternal existence which is completely different from usual existence which we see, or which we hear, or which we think. It is a kind of thinking faculty based on our holy nature. This is the usual understanding of divine nature.

And I talked about our function of our mind in different way: the most subtle, delicate function of our mind, and more vivid function of mind. The subtle function of mind is—are the—there are three subtle function of mind: First one is so-called-it "slightest movement of the mind,"

¹ SR-66-08-14.

which is called sometimes ignorance. When our mind makes slightest movement, at the same time we will have subjective—subjectivity or objectivity of the mind. Those are the subtle function of our mind. Usually we do [are] not aware of those three functions.

The more vivid function is to like or dislike. And we—we will have idea of continuity of mind. This mind will create the idea of self—"I exist here." This is actually the continuity—the idea of continuity of mind. If the continuity of the mind take place, we will be attached to what we see. This is the attachment, the third one of the latter six.

The fourth one is terminological conceptions. We will put many labels on our ideas: "This is Buddhism, this is astrology [?], this is communism, this is capitalism" [laughs]. Those are labels. But those ideas—although—although those ideas—conceptions supposed to be a pure conception—conceptions, but actually those conception is firmly rooted in continuity of mind or attachment. It is almost impossible to separate the terminological conception from attachment or continuity of mind, which is selfish mind or faculty of the mind—dualistic faculty of mind which is—which is like or dislike, or good or bad, right or wrong.

So actually we—we can talk about pure conception, but actually there is no pure conception. And furthermore, we will put those conceptions firmly rooted in selfish attachment, put into actual action. That is why we have suffering, we have confusion in our world. So the fifth one is karma—karmic action. The last one is suffering. Why we suffer is because our structure of the mind—mind function is consisted—consists of those elements. This is another interpretation of our life.

And today I want to talk about—this is—I want to talk about cause and effect—theory of cause and effect or causation. The Buddhism is—the most important teaching of Buddhism is causation. This is very important. If you do something good, you will have good result, you know. This is—this kind of idea or teaching is pretty important for us.

But if you carelessly accept this teaching, your understanding will not be our understanding because, you know, this is the same—you will make same mistake as some heretics do. When you say, "If you do something good you will have bad result," you know, it means, you know, you—the idea of "you" is here, you know. If you do something good, you will receive—you, you know—you will receive some bad result. So what you do—there is what you do and you yourself. And you is always constant, and what you do is different and not bound. So you have permanency of the mind—idea of permanency of the mind and idea of impermanency of the objective world. This is—for us

this is not right understanding. This is so-called-it Senni-gedō's² view of life.

So when you believe in—when you accept this teaching of causation, it is necessary for you to have deeper understanding of what is time, and what is various existence, and how everything exist in this world. Things forms, you know, this world. In this world [laughs]—I am sorry this is so [laughs] sober [laughs]. Not so interesting, but please listen to me [laughs, laughter]. Things are forming one world by acting [on] each other—you are acting [on] each other. It means, you know, you say you are things acting with each other, but if you carefully think, this acting with each other—things which is acting with each other, it means there is no more you or [laughs] others if—when you area acting with each other, you know. By acting with each other—acting on each other, you will lose your character, and others will lose their character too. You cannot retain same character when you acting with each other. This is—this point is very important. You say when you do something good, result will be good, you know. When you do something good, it means acting with each other. You are acting on something else. And something else [is] actually acting on yourself too.

Then what will happen to you? There is no more constant you. and there is no more constant others. Others may change, and you will change. This is the fundamental teaching of Buddhism: Everything changes moment after moment. Everything changes from formed to the forming, you know. Something formed is—next moment something formed will change into something forming [laughs]. This is fundamental teaching of Buddhism. When you believe in the causality, you have to—you should not forget this point. Then you will have a perfect understanding of causality.

And next point, which is very important for you in believing in causality is the causality takes place on, you know, on some particular life. Moral, good action will create—will result [in] moral, good result. Material good will result [in] material good result. If you save money, you will have a lot of money [laughs, laughter]. But even though you save money, you cannot be a wise man [laughs]. But sometime you make this kind of mistake. If you offer, you know, \$100 to church [laughs], what will happen to you? You know, you will lose \$100 [laughs, laughter]. The church will get \$100. That is, you know, material cause and effect. But the mentality or your spirit who donate—that donate \$100 will result [in] religious good.

² Senni-gedō (Jap.): Senni (Senika) + gedō (non-Buddhist). An Indian non-Buddhist school led by Senika in Shākyaamuni Buddha's time. It held that the body is perishable, but one's divine nature (*atman*) was imperishable.

So this kind of understanding, a clear understanding—is very important. If you are not sure about the—about this point, you will make many mistakes in believing in religion. You will mixed up religion and some other way of life—religious life and ordinal [ordinary] life. Religious life is religious life, and ordinal [ordinary] life is ordinal [ordinary] life. You should not [get them] mixed up. But unfortunately, we mixed up—we mix up religious life with something else. But, as I shall tell you, religious life through and through will result [in] various result in various field.

A Japanese philosopher³ condensed this—condensed this kind of way of thinking in this way:⁴

Things forming one world, by acting [on] each other, means that they are thought as part[s] of one world. But [for instance], things acting on each other in space means that things have no special character.⁵ When it comes to "space" in [the] exact sense of physics, "forces" are thought in change—in [as] changes in space.

When things—when things acting [on] each other, it means it is not any—no more each existence. It is replaced by force which changes—which is changing always. This is, you know, science of—strict science—modern science will tell you this truth. And even atom is not material. It is force. It is energy, just energy. It has no weight or no—it occupy no space. It is just force. But when things are thought as parts of whole—one whole, it means that when things are thought as parts of one whole:⁶

When many things are supposed to be a part of one whole, it means that concept of acting [on] each other is lost.

When you definitely say, "Here is many things," it means that the concept of acting each other is lost, you know. When you say, "I am here and you are there," technically the concept of relationship is lost—concept of acting [on] each other is lost.

Second, the world becomes static. Three, reality is lost.

³ Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945), an important 20th-century Japanese philosopher. (See also SR-66-05-26.)

⁴ Suzuki-rōshi is paraphrasing the second paragraph of Nishida's "The Unity of Opposites," in *Kitarō Nishida: Intelligibility and the Philosophy of Nothingness*, Honolulu: East-West Press, 1958, p. 163.

⁵ Should read: "... things have a spatial character."

⁶ Suzuki-rōshi is paraphrasing the third paragraph: "But when things are thought as parts of one whole, it means that the concept of acting things is lost, that the world becomes static and that reality is lost. The world of reality is essentially the one as well as the many; it is essentially a world of the mutual determination of single beings."

It is not reality any more if you have a definite idea of each existence. There is no more reality. That is not real. Actually everything is acting on each other.

The world of reality is essentially a world of mutual determination of single being[s].

Mutual determination of single beings.⁷

Such world essentially moves from the formed to the forming.

This philosopher is the—the most famous philosopher—philosophers—philosopher in—contemporal [contemporary] Japanese philosopher. Nishida.⁸ Do you know Nishida—Nishida? His name is Nishida. And he always sit in meditation, and think, and think, and think. And sometime he just practice *shikantaza*—just to sit in *shikantaza*, and created those marvelous philosophy. This—his philosophy of course accord with the Buddhist philosophy completely. Of course he must have studied *Shōbōgenzō* and other Buddhist philosophy. This kind of understanding is necessary when you understand—when you try to understand what Dōgen-zenji said.

In Rinzai school, some—always students work on kōans—kōan. Those are actually kōan for you. The purpose of kōan is to work all kōan out, you know. Work it out. It is not just to concentrate—the purp- [partial word]—it is not just for concentration. It is not just means of concentration. So if you pass one kōan, it means you have passed the rest of the kōan. So it takes pretty long time to pass one kōan.

There is—you know, the enlightenment means many things, you know. "I attained enlightenment," you may say, but enlightenment is—perfect enlightenment is quite different. There is great different in—between *kenshō* and perfect enlightenment. Just to—just you see your true nature when you understand something more—little bit more than your usual understanding, that is so-called-it *kenshō*. You took glance at your true nature. That's all [laughs]. So this experience is the experience of—experience in term of consciousness. It is not intuition. You know what it is. You saw something. You experienced—experienced something, and you believe in something, you know, that is true—that is true experience.

⁷ The fifth paragraph: "Such a world essentially moves from the formed, the product, to the forming, the creative production."

⁸ 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 widely read. (See also SR-66-05-26.)

But the experience is just—you just experienced for few moment [laughs]. That is not perfect enlightenment. When you attain perfect enlightenment, after attaining enlightenment, you have [to] work on it for many years or sometime maybe rest of your life. This is how you study Buddhism.

Here is many words—interesting words. "To put a head upon a head," you know, "to put head upon a head." "Mistake over mistakes." "Ivy and vine over ivy and vine."⁹ "To put a head upon a head"—what—what do you think it means? It is a kind of riddle [laughs]. "To put head upon a head" [laughs].

You try to understand something, you know. It means you are trying to put one more head upon your head. There is no need for you to study anything, because you have—you exist in the way you should exist always. But you forget all about your head [laughs]. So the moment you see some good head, [you think] "Oh, that is my head!" [laughs, laughter]. You put—you try to put [laughs] some good—beautiful head upon your head. But that is not possible, you know. The way is—the two, you know—to find out your head is our way. Intellectual understanding of Buddhism is to put a head over—upon your head [laughs].

But this kind of teaching we study is not to put a head upon a head. It looks like intellectual understanding, but if you study those teaching, you will forget—you will find out how useless it is to put a head upon your head. But for the people who do not realize that you have your own head always, it is necessary to tell them you have your head [laughs]. This is, you know, why we study those teachings or *Shōbōgenzō*.

And Dōgen-zenji discussed it—discussed it with the people who have many heads [laughs]—not only one head—not only one head but also many and many heads: fame, profit, names, and ranks, and popularity, health, wealth [laughs]. They want many heads. So he was disgusted with people. So he told them you have this kind of head—you are trying to have this kind of head and another kind of head. But it is useless. The best way is to find your head—own head which you have. This is why Dōgen-zenji left *Shōbōgenzō* for us. But the people who—who is so busy in finding their many heads, it is almost impossible to find out their own heads. So he thought it may be better—it may be better not to try too hard to tell them you have your own head, because they are too busy.

⁹ Suzuki-rōshi pronounced it "vein," but he is probably referring to a vine, as in Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* "Kattō": "Branches or fruit are both dependent on and independent of vines and ivy" (revised from Yūhō Yokoi, *The Japanese-English Zen Buddhist Dictionary*, p. 108).

So some—some day, someone will understand my teaching. And someone will find his own head. But this is not the appropriate time for people to find out their head if you study Japanese history—what kind of life Japanese people had at that time. So I want you to—just to understand—my talk is just to make you realize how useless it is to be—to devote yourself in material—material life—just material life. Or to devote yourself to strive—to build up some big ego. This is quite useless for us. When we find out what we have within ourselves, all the rest of the treasure is—are ours.

"Mistake over mistakes." Mistakes—mistake over mistake—mistakes means to—means that we are always making mistake, and we are striving for—we are developing our mistakes without knowing what we are doing. "Ivy and vine over ivy and vine," you know. This is also to find out various useless understanding of religion.

But he used—he used those words in the opposite sense. Where he used this word, for an instance, "to put a head upon a head," means to use one head in various way [laughs]. Although he—you don't put head upon a head, but you use your head in various way. If you have—if you realize what is your head, you can use it as if you have many heads. So "to put a head upon a head" for him means to use your original head. "Mistakes over mistakes" is to express true way in various way. Why we call it mistake is because we do not attach to some—something which you do. Tentatively it is right, but next moment it may be mistake. So after you did it: "Oh, that was my mistake. Excuse me [laughs]. I will do it better next time." And you may say, "Oh, that was mistake too. This time I will make it right."

So this is the way we should be, you know, we should do. "Mistake over mistake" is right. "Right thing after right thing" is wrong. You are forcing something to others. "This is right. You should obey [laughs] what I—you should obey me," you know. "This is not completely true—right." Tentatively: "Excuse me I want you to—I have a favor to ask you. Please help me." That is all right. But it is not—it should not be complete anyway. When you say, "This is right," that is wrong [laughs].

So he said "mistake over mistakes." This is right. They—"ivy and vine over ivy and vine." This is how we help—how we act on each other. It is not so simple. We should be prepared for the hard work we will have. We should not—we should be always prepared for—we should have firm conviction to work it out. But the way should little by little, step by step. If you want to do it with hasty mind, you cannot do anything. So to find out "ivy over ivy" is right way, right observation. But usually we prefer easy way—simple way. But that is—it means you are not sincere enough.

So we should be always prepared for those fact—ultimate fact. Whatever you say, this is true. So Dōgen-zenji always used this stock word in opposite way. So he said, "You should pile up ivy over ivy," when usually people say, "Don't pile up ivy over ivy." When people say "Do—do things correctly," Dōgen-zenji says "You should do—you should do so- [partial word]—mistake over mistake" [laughs]. That is right. You should—"to put a head over—upon a head" means "to turn one's own face to his own [?] [1 word]." This is maybe—in English it is quite different, but in Japanese both way is possible. "To turn your face—your own [1 word]." You know, to do like this. This is—it means to—to have two or three or more heads [laughs]. Sometime you will try, sometime it is too much. This is—should be the way. You should not attach to some holy expression of yourself [laughs]. This is not right.

This kind of preparation is necessary when you try to understand what Dōgen-zenji said in the fascicle of [*Shōbōgenzō*] "Sokushin-zebutsu." "Sokushin-zebutsu" is "Buddha—Mind Itself Is Buddha." This is maybe rather hard—this is maybe pretty unfamiliar way of thinking, but we have—we have too much concrete ideas. So our mind does not work properly. So it is necessary to cut off those concrete idea when you want to study, when you work out, or when you think out.

But proper way of practice is just to practice, and teaching is next. Practice is past. Teaching is next. Instruction or lecture is last [laughs]. But some accommodation [laughs] should be—may be necessary. I have to accommodate your way [1 word], as Dōgen-zenji did. But his way of accommodation is quite strict [laughs]. And so we have to be prepared for his strict understanding of things.

Thank you very much.

[Tape stopped and restarted.]

Let's have—it is five past two. But schedule says "Zazen from two o'clock." But we will have five minutes' rest.

Source: Original City Center tape. Verbatim transcript by Adam Tinkham and Bill Redican (8/2/01).