

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**Tuesday, December 5, 1967**  
**Afternoon *Sesshin* Lecture**  
**Tassajara**  
**Lecture A**

In previous lecture, I compared zazen practice and usual everyday activity. In usual activity, as you know, our effort is directed to outside, and our activity is concentrated on some particular things. This activity of particularize something create many things. But this kind of creativity is—at the same time creates some fear. This creativity will result some feeling—whether it is good or bad—a good and bad feeling we have—we will have.

Before—before you do—if before the concentration happens to you, your mind is just big and something—your mind is something which you don't know. You do not have any feeling about yourself. But once you have involved in something or you are concentrated on something, there your mind will crystallize, and you will have some clear idea of yourself—subjectively and objectively. That subjective crystallized self reflect—project itself to the objective world, and you have some clear objects within your mind. There you have various feeling about the object. But as that object is the projected of mind of yourself, that—that you do—if that feeling is good or object is good, you will naturally cling to it. That—when you cling to some object, it means you are clinging to yourself at the same time because that object is the projected self. And if it—that attachment will result you some fear, if it is good. Because you attach to it, you try not [to] lose it. But nothing is permanent. Everything is changing. So even though you cling to it, that object will change even though you know that you have fear of losing it.

In this way the more your mind is particularized or crystallized, you will have at the same time uneasiness. That is what will result by your effort in its ordinal [ordinary] sense, while zazen practice will not result this kind of fear or attachment. Our effort will be directed the opposite direction. So the more you practice our way, the more you—your mind resume your fundamental state—big, where there is no feeling and where you do not think anything; no discrimination, no attachment and no fear. This kind of—this is the difference between zazen practice—the effort in your zazen practice and the effort in your ordinal [ordinary] activity.

I said sometime—I remember I says something, you know, very extraordinary [extraordinary] [laughs], you know: Even though you die, nothing will happen [laughs]. Even [though] the earth is, you know, broken piece by piece, nothing will happen, I said. If you—if your—if you practice zazen, your mind will resume where nothing—before nothing happens. In our mind, there is no star, no earth, no sun—nothing

whatsoever. But everything will come out from that nothingness where there is nothing. So even though we pass away—we die, if we know that all of us came—arise from this nothingness, to die is to come back [laughs] to the source of life. So for everything to appear means the possibility of resuming original state from where we appear.

We live in the realm of time and space. Even though the earth disappear, space exist, time exist. As long as the space exist, time exist. Something will happen in time and space. So as long as time and space is here—is there, there is nothing to be afraid of, even though there is no form appears in this time and space. No one [laughs] can doubt that there is time and space. But according to Dōgen-zenji, this kind of understanding is not deep enough, but tentatively we can acknowledge—we can[']t deny that the time and space is here.

So why do I—do we have fear of losing ourselves? Even though our form will disappear—disappear, as long as time and space exist, it is—it is all right. Nothing will happen. One after another something will appear. Actually some—that—which does not appear does not—which does not disappear does not exist [laughs]. Because we disappear we, you know, we are quite sure about our existence. If we do not disappear, we don't know what we are [laughs]. Maybe more than ghost [laughs]. If we, you know, exist forever, we should be afraid of ourselves [laughs]. You don't know where to go. But fortunately we disappears, we die. So as long as we die, it is obvious that we are—we exist in realm of time and space. So we are completely saved.

Even though you cannot deal with your fear, nothing happens to you, you know. Even though you go insane, that is all right [laughs, laughter]. Because we are normal, we have that kind of fear. That we have the possibility of going insane is [laughs]—should be lucky—we should be lucky, you know, to have possibility of going insane. But usually, you know, we are trying not to be insane [laughs]. That is opposite effort to our zazen effort. We rather [laughs] practice zazen to go to insane or enjoying [laughs] possibility of going insane [laughs, laughter]. It means, you know, we are alive—we are human being [laughs]. There is no possibility for dog and cats to be insane [laughs]. Because we are human being, we should dress up in some way. If we go insane, we will, you know, walk around without any dress, you know. If we do so you think—if we do so it may be terrible [laughs]. We don't want to do so [laughs]. That is, you know, human being. But for cats and dog there is no such fear.

Whatever happened to us, you know, after all—if we are—if we know what is our life completely and where we go completely, there is no fear whatsoever. But you—you will be—even—however, you will be very sorry for someone who lost his ordinal [ordinary] activity of their mind, because partly they are insane and partly they are not. They are still

human being. And so he will make best effort to be human, but he cannot do that. Even though he want to be human, for him it is not possible because he lost his control. But even though you are in the same condition, for you there is nothing to be afraid of. As old Zen master said, "If fire come, you should be burned. If the water come, you should be drowned." That is our way.

So whatever happens to you, as long as you know the bottom of the suffering, bottom of the fear, you are—you feel quite safe. When you do not know the bottom of it, there you have real fear. You don't know what to do with yourself. Even before you go—before you die, you don't know how to live in this moment when you think of it. But as long as you know what will happen to you after your death, there is nothing to be afraid of. Our practice is to resume our ordinal—original state of being which is universal. All the being in the world or in the cosmic scale in space—time and space.

Dōgen-zenji said, "Think unthinkable." We think, but direction of our thinking is opposite. Instead of trying to attain something, we try to forget. Instead of keep thinking, we try to stop thinking. What you will acquire through this kind of—this practice will be tremendous, and every activity should be based on this kind of readiness of your mind.

So all the practice—Rinzai or Sōtō, or five schools of Zen, or seven schools of Zen, and many other practice should be based on this power. In old time—in ancient time, the people practiced or applied various way in our practice. Sometime they meditate on white skeleton; sometime they meditate on water; or sometime they practiced zazen to obtain detachment—thinking filthy bag containing [laughs], you know, lung and stomach and many nasty things within it.<sup>1</sup> Even the beautiful [laughs] person contains many things [laughs] in her.

So we are all a bag of filthy [laughing] things [laughter]. To forget, someone who cannot get married, they sit thinking about [laughter] things like—.<sup>2</sup> Actually they did it. There are many kinds of practice for us. You are just laughing at them, but if you are in the situation, you will do it. But in America, this kind of thing will never happen [laughter]. All those practice, when it based on this true way of zazen, it works. But as long as those practice is directed to one way only, it doesn't work.

Because this—the attainment by this way of practice is—something is missing, and that is only delusion for us. It is not real. So true understanding of zazen is necessary, whatever practice you apply, if you

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<sup>1</sup> Suzuki-rōshi may be referring to a traditional meditative practice of concentrating on the body (including a beautiful one) as an object subject to decay in order to diminish greed or craving.

<sup>2</sup> Possibly: "For someone who is celibate, to forget about their attraction to others they follow this practice."

do not understand our way as it is—our way of life as it is.

Evolution of living being is going on in the course of specializing the original nature. You know, something like our human life started from some—a kind of amoeba, you know, in the muddy pond [laughs] in which something was lived, and they divide their body in two and four and eight. In that way our life started. The more and more our life specialized as a human being or animal or plant—the more our life is specialized, the more complicated our life activity become. So a human being has more complicated life. Human being has the more complicated life. So to be divided or to be specialized means to evolve ourselves—evolution of life going in this way.

Nowadays we have very complicated life. But in this direction, as long as we are making effort to reach the moon or the Venus, if that is only way we know, there is no hope for us to be—to attain liberation. The other day—the last year, or the—no—the year before last year, I went to Yosemite and saw a waterfall.<sup>3</sup> I was watching it. It was one sheet of, you know, white pearls hanging on the rock. But a part of it, you know, separated from—by the rock. Part of the water separated from the rock and falling down. When I saw it, I felt very sorry for the [laughs] separated water, you know. It is—it was almost going to be mist, you know, but still water. If it become completely mist, there will be no problem [laughs] for it. But they are not mist yet and water. So it has to travel one thousand feet, you know, all the way down to the bottom. If, you know, when—if I didn't see that separated water, I have that kind of feeling for the water. But separation from the original source creates some feeling for us.

The evolution of life creates many problems for us. So I don't—I do not regret—I am not regretful about our civilization to be—to enjoy this civilization. I enjoy it very much. But at the same time, we should know that there is no complete freedom or complete renunciation in this kind of civilization. Only when we know that even though evolution of life brought our individual life to this point where we have many fears, we know how to resume our original life—source of life. Then, you know, we can enjoy this civilization at the top of evolution of life activity. So without this kind of understanding, we cannot enjoy anything. When you are involved in it you may be all right, but what will happen to next time? You will be very regretful.

In Chinese character—no, in zazen, we should get rid of, or we should be—in zazen, our mind should not be instead of contamination or in the state of sleepiness, you know. If [we] are sleeping, we cannot practice zazen. But on the other hand, if our—we are—our mind is state of agitation or state of extreme joy, we cannot practice our way. And describing this extreme joy, Chinese people used two words—two

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<sup>3</sup> See also "Nirvana, the Waterfall," in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, p. 93.

characters. One is culminating joy, you know. One is culmination of joy. And one character is regretfulness [laughs], you know. This is very, you know—it describe to the point if the culmination of joy happens to us, next moment will be the regret [laughs].

So if we do not know how to resume the ori- [partial word]—source of life, what we will have is the culminating joy and regretfulness. We cannot enjoy our life in its true sense without this practice. That is why Dōgen-zenji put emphasis on this practice. It does not mean to slight the other practice, but if we forget this point, whatever practice it may be, it doesn't work. It doesn't help us in its true sense. On the other hand, if we understand this point, to apply whatever way you apply—way of practice you apply, it will work.

In this way, to open up your mind for everything and to be ready for accepting various difficulties is the purpose of zazen.

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Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Adam Tinkham and Bill Redican (4/2/01).