

Shunryu Suzuki Lecture – 68-06-28
Esalen Institute
First of two lectures

I find it's difficult to keep contact with you when I, whenever we talk, I talk, especially when I think of difficult...very difficult to talk with some because I [several words unintelligible due to tape problems] our own study? students? but anyway I try to communicate.

First of all I am supposed to talk about our teaching. Zen is, Zen is, for you, some special teaching. But, for us Zen is, Buddhism is and not special teaching from the other schools of Buddhism. So, if you ask me to talk about our teaching I have have to, what I will talk is mostly teaching of Buddhism started by Buddha and developed by their teachers in India, China and Japan.

Buddha's teaching put the emphasis on selflessness because even Buddhism it's, is not special culture heritage. It is part of Indian thought. And so before Buddhism there must be some similar teaching or some opposite teaching which form a pair of opposites with Buddhism. As you see in Upanishad there are many similar teaching based on selflessness. Why, I think, why he put the emphasis on selflessness is because people at that time had very difficulty because of the strong idea of self, ah self.

So Buddha on the contrary put emphasis on selflessness so that there you have more balanced understanding of our life. And for the people who find, who were trying to find out something a pleasure of life in this actual modern world, he put the emphasis on suffering so that they can understand their life from both sides. So naturally even so his purpose of sitting or his teaching is through or form some harmonious teaching. So, sometime he put emphasis on self, you know, instead of put the emphasis on selflessness. He sometime rather emphasis on self.

We call this kind of nature of our teaching is double construction, or double construction [SR groping for word] or double nature of Buddhism. And actually without paradoxical or opposite, two opposite understanding, we cannot think things clearly. And what we think will be clear if we only, when we take at least two opposite viewpoint then you will have some reality without being caught by some one-sided idea. But, mostly, in general, Buddha's teaching is based on the teaching of selflessness. But later his teaching was more settled down in some static? teaching, like everything changes or teaching of interdependency or teaching of cause and effect.

And in Mahayana we have more advanced philosophical setting of that teaching, like, I don't know how to translate something it into English but ah some teaching you will study by Kegon Sutra or Lotus Sutra. Kegon put emphasis on jijimuie?.

Jijimuie is harmony of each beings and jijimuie means harmony with the truth and the phenomenal world.

And Lotus Sutra puts the emphasis on the understanding which you will have after attaining the idea of emptiness or the experience of emptiness. This is something like Zen. Zen extended this kind of idea by practice and brought this philosophical teaching into our actual experience and how to bring this philosophical teaching to life by practicing Zen. In Zen school, in short to, you know, to wipe up everything, on the, every dust on the mirror. And to see everything, to see everything on the reflection of the mirror is our way, you know. Or to write to, to erase everything from the blackboard and to write something on it, is Zen.

And we continue this kind of activity, you know, wipe it up and write something on it and wipe it up. But, because I try to, from, try to explain it you know, more psychologically or more as a, our human experience, I put it in this way. But actually what we are doing is to continue this kind of effort you know. This is in other words detachment.

Detachment means, you know, to erase something but, actually we can not, you know, erase what we did [laughs]. Actually that is not possible. But, you feel as if, you know, you, you, wipe up everything and you delude yourself. When you are absorbed completely absorbed in your activity or in your everyday life, you experience this kind of development of our life, our life force in this way.

So, but actually nothing happens [laughs] even though you study Buddhism. And nothing happens even you practice zazen. But when you feel in that way, in your practice, that is enlightenment, you know. Because mostly it is difficult for us to wipe up everything, you know, from our mind. And actually there is no need to do so and it is foolish to eliminate all, everything what you have done or result of your previous activity. That is not possible. And it is foolish to try to do that. But there is way to, to develop our everyday life without being bothered by, you know, our previous activity or result of that previous activity. This is how I could explain, you know, how I can explain what I have in my mind about teaching of Zen.

Now, one by one, according to this little piece of paper? [He says something really fast and you hear the rattle of paper] [laughter] I want to explain this kind of double structure of our teaching. To me everything real could, should be understood in this way. For instance, you know, idea of time has, you know, double structure. One is cont - idea of continuity, it's of course time, you know, continuity, at the same time this continuity is the idea of time. If the continuity of time is the idea of time there is no need to have watch here. When I say it is half past ten, you know, it means that, at that time I have discontinuity of time, my idea of time, is discontinuity. You know it is, it is not actually half past ten, you know, maybe more, or while I'm watching it, it goes more, continuously it's going.

But I have to say, you know, as long as I have watch, it is, if someone asks me what time is it, I have to say half past ten. So that is the idea of discontinuity of time.

But, it is not actually so, it is continuous, time is, the idea of continuous. So discontinuity of time and continuity of time, in this way, real, you know, reality has double. Only by double structure of our reasoning we can figure out what is reality. And self is also, selflessness and self is same thing, you know, not different.

According to Buddhism, the basic teaching maybe for it's settled, more logically, it's everything changes. This is basic teaching of Buddhism and because of this teaching his descendents or his disciples treated Buddha as a teacher of heaven and earth, you know. He is not only a teacher of this world: he is a teacher of heaven. Because even though you go to heaven this teaching, that everything change, we must be different, you know, is also true in heaven. So he called a teacher of heaven and earth because of this teaching that everything changes. And this is the basic foundation of Buddhism - Buddhist teaching.

So, if everything is changing, you know, how about yourself? You know, self is also changing. If so, you know, even though he says self, there's not such substantial being as self. Self is as, I, we learned last night, we, have learned last night a self is not typically? temporarily? we call our function of mind and body - self. But there is no such thing as self. This is also true with Buddhism. So we say, we put the emphasis, as long as everything changes self cannot be exception.

And the teaching of suffering comes from this point, from this teaching too. We, you know, although everything, including self, changes always we expect, you know, everything not to change, you know. [Laughs] This is also true. [Laughs] This is also marvelous fact (?), of our, you know, nature. In one hand everything change and on the other hand we try not think everything changes. And so there we have suffering, you know. When we expect things not to change, but actually [laughs] everything is everything is, everything betray our hope. That is how, you know, we suffer.

But if we understand the reality that we hope everything not to change is true and that everything is changing is almost [laughs] not true [laugh] [could be 'also not true', 'always true'?]. So if we accept, you know, the two side of the one reality then there is no problem when we say everything is change; it's ok. [laughter]When someone says everything does not change then that is true, but [laughter] when you could accept in this way, even for a moment. [Laughs] That is enlightenment.

Enlightenment will happen to you, you know, when you are very, very, very truthful to the fact or truthful to, not to, truthful to, although you are not truthful

toward reality or fact on both sides, but even, you know, if you very truthful to one sided view of life, you know, then you have chance to attain enlightenment, you know. And whether you attain enlightenment or not, you know, this is true. [much laughter] So other intellectual, intelligent people, you know, there might be no need to attain enlightenment. [laughter]

[Next sentence begins very fast, not really intelligible]...you know, you would break into this pattern, this way of thinking and you will more get accustomed to this kind of, way of life or understanding of life and some day we will actually experience, you will enjoy this kind of paradoxical world. So enjoyment, you know, we mean is very much different from the enjoyment made by the people who just go along one-sided view. One-sided understanding of life. This is completely different, you know, we, so Buddhists are in one hand they are very, sometimes they are very, they look very joyous people. On the other hand they are very, you know, dismal and gloomy people. [Laughter] We are very gloomy. This is also double structure.

One person express, you know, their feeling in two different way. That is possible you know. He may be very strong and tough in one way but on the other hand, he may be very gentle and very soft. My teacher used to give us some, refer to, some, refer to famous, the most famous, the best sword maker Massamway.

One day Shihero, you know Shihero, not sword maker but spear, spearhead maker, visited him, but spear or blade, visited him. Fortunately or unfortunately, you know, Massamai was not there, was not at home. Before Hiroshimai asked his wife to show him some of his sword. And she brought a small sword, as long as this [he gestures length] sword, you know, and he was watching it, but he did not, his expression was not talking he's wondering, you know, if he if this is good or bad he is wondering about it. So wife asks him is there something wrong with his sword and if he has some criticism please tell her, she said. And Hiroshimai, you know, take out that spearhead from his pocket and putting his sword on the floor and when he you know, think like this, big hole, you know, was on the sword Massamai made. His wife was amazed at his, you know, strong power, strong quality of the spearhead. And Hiroshimai went back. But his wife promised him, as he was going, to come again to and to meet her husband. And one week after one week or so, he came back and Massamai was not moved a little, was not moved even a little. And he, you know, he asked him to show him, you know, his spearhead. And he was watching. And Massamai said give me that, I want to see your spearhead. And as soon as he receive it he draw, drew his sword and cut his, cut the spearhead in two. With that sword which had big hole in it. [Laughter] And he said, so your spear not able to ?? because if you need to, is this spearhead, this spearhead is easily cut so this is rather dangerous, he said. Massamai, you know, saw it as double structure. It is soft, soft it is not easily be cut, but it is sharp enough to cut everything. So this is one of the example of double structure or double nature of the reality.

This is also, this, you know, is also selflessness. When you, when the meaning of selflessness is to annihilate all the evil desires or then to give up the idea of fame or profit - that is selflessness. That is one-sided idea. So, selflessness is also mean strong self. The toughness of the self and which is always free from personal attachment. Which is –able?, that is self- selflessness.

Dogen the founder of Soto School of Zen explained this point. You should not think firewood, you know, become ash. Firewood does not become ash. You should not think firewood become ash, firewood has it's own period (?) and ash also has it own period (?). And ash has its own person future, so does firewood. So firewood is independent and ash is independent. When we understand self in that way, you know, that self include everything: its own person future and everything which exist with firewood or ash. That is, that it does not mean to have some substantial idea of ash or fire. It is not some substance but it something ash, something named ash, include everything and related to everything. This is also the understanding of reality and understanding of self. When we – only when we understand in this way, we can understand Buddhism, not only Buddhism. I think, I hope, your understanding will be available to understand your life and to understand other's life and to understand science and everything.

When we just rely on one-sided understanding you lose the purpose of our study. For to study Buddhism to, according to him, to study Buddhism – Buddhism means here, not only, you know, Buddhist teachings everything, to study, everything is to study ourselves. And to study ourselves is to forget ourselves. And to forget ourselves is to be enlightened by things we study, you know. Some thing you study will teach me, teach us something, you know, it is real and true. So he say, he said, to study ourselves [is] to be enlightened by everything. And this enlightenment goes forever, in this way, wiping the enlightenment and having enlightenment again. In this way this enlightenment proceeds you where you go on and on and on and you will understand everything in its true sense.

So this is what is reality according to Buddhism and what is the teaching of selflessness of Buddhist. And this selflessness is one of the three important banner? or seals for Buddhism, that everything change, that everything has law? , when we say say so, it includes many things. There is nothing is also. Nothing is ? meant by this teaching of selflessness. We think, you know, it is possible to attain or to get contact with something, yeah, to understand or to grasp something perfect. But to attain some stage of perfection but according to Buddhism that is not possible, [laughs] it is not possible. When you understand that is not possible, that understanding is perfect understanding and that is [laughs] enlightenment. [Laughter]

We understand, that is second point and when we realize or when we have this enlightenment or as long as we have this enlightenment, then here we find nirvana. Right here in this moment that is the three seals, seals of Buddhism.

If some teaching or if some teaching have whatever on the teaching its, if that teaching has this three elements, that is Buddhism. For we call it the three important seals of Buddhism. And this basic teaching will be extended to the Four Noble Truths or the Eightfold Holy Path which was told by Buddha when he saved four of, five of his men who escaped from the castle with him. This world is world of suffering, that this world, that, that is the cause of suffering, and the way to get out of the suffering and what is Nirvana. Where do we attain Nirvana? Where is Nirvana? This is the Four Noble Truth. But those teaching are a different version of ? ,you know, truths. And then whatever the way of understanding about life may be, if we do not miss this point that is Buddhism. If there is no, if there, if it is, if we are certain or clear on this point that is Buddhism. (Whispering)

Student: What are the Four Noble Truths?

SR: Maybe better to take some thoughts. And will you and if you have questions please ask us. Quickly (?).

Student: What are the Four Noble Truths?

SR: The Four Noble Truths are that this world is the world of suffering.

Student: That's number one?

SR: Yeah. And cause of suffering.

Student: That's two?

SR: Two. The third one way to have diversions from, way to get out of it and...

[end of side one of tape]

[Beginning of side two]

SR:Enlightenment or Nirvana. Nirvana is Sanskrit word.

Student: That's three, isn't it?

SR: No four.

Student: Fourth is Nirvana.

SR: Fourth is Nirvana.

Student: And the way you get out of it is the third truth?

SR: Yeah, the third one. Cause of suffering is the second one, that this world is, maybe better to explain more at this point. Origination, you know, origination of suffering, you know, that something exists here is already suffering, for what is, for us, for me that I'm here is suffering. [laughter] [laughs] and how you take this suffering is, you know, the point. [laughs] I think you will, you know, have clear picture of, you know, cause of suffering, you know. That I'm here is suffering and maybe it is joy too. [laughs] It is all right to be here. And it is a kind of joy. Joy is also suffering. [laughs] Not only after I have joy, but simultaneously we, I have suffer too, I have to suffer. Because I suffer I have joy. So, to have, to, you know, suffering and joy at the same time. Two side of one coin.

So, and how we get out of it is to have wisdom, to see truth as it is. That is not possible, by your thinking that is not possible. But your thinking will help you know, when you think from various angles, then thinking will help. But actually we have to fight it out – [Laughs]. If you want to have sudden enlightenment, you should fight it out. If you want to, if you do not concerned about, if you do not want to feel that you are fooled by, you know, something, then you should try, for it little by little according to your wisdom or thinking. Wisdom we mean sometimes wisdom, we mean it wisdom followed by teaching. Wisdom sometimes it's direct understanding but to have direct contact with the reality is wisdom.

This direct contact, to have direct contact with reality is Zen practice. In zazen, we try not to think. I have to explain it later, I think. About our practice. [Baby crying in background] But this is why the.... [break in recording]

Transcribed by Shinshu Roberts circa 2004. She got the tape from Michael Wenger and didn't realize that it was the first of Shunryu Suzuki's Esalen lectures. Might be from a different tape. Was labeled "At Sonoma Mountain Center, no date." Should be checked against the audio in the archive of this date which is a copy of the commercial tape. - dc