

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Shōsan Ceremony
Fall 1968¹
Tassajara

NOT VERBATIM

Suzuki-rōshi: On this occasion, if you have some question [or] comment, present it to me.

Student A [Claude Dalenberg]: Dōchō-rōshi, questions come into my mind; none of them seem to be good questions. My heart comes into my throat and I do not know what to say, nor what to ask.

Suzuki-rōshi: When you have no questions, and when you have nothing to ask about, there you have true way. Thank you very much [for] all of your effort, all through this training period. [The student then gives formal bows and spoken thank-you. I will omit the thank-you unless it seems important to the question-answer ... i.e., if it is a part of it.]²

Student B [Bill Shurtleff]: Dōchō-rōshi, you have said, "Just listen to the Dharma." And you have said, "The instant the 'I' appears, it (or It?) (or eye?) vanishes." When you speak, to whom am I listening? When I speak, to whom are you listening? When thoughts seem to speak, to whom are we listening? When the stream seems to speak, to what are we listening?

Suzuki-rōshi: To listen to Dharma; to speak about Dharma—all of those practice should be Buddha's practice, which will continue forever without leaving any trace of them. You should not try to follow the trace of it. Just let them go and let them come.

Student B [Bill Shurtleff]: As a person speaks to us each day?

Suzuki-rōshi: You should react with single-mindedness. But don't leave any trace of it.

Student C [Alan Rappaport]: Dōchō-rōshi, what are you doing here?

¹ The date is uncertain. One copy of the transcript gave the date as April 1968. Another gave Fall 1968, which is more likely because it coincides with Suzuki-rōshi's Fall series on the *Lotus Sūtra* mentioned in this lecture. It was probably given at the end of the second series of 1968 lectures on the *Lotus Sūtra*. The *Wind Bell* (1968, Vol. VII, No. 1-2, p. 6) stated that the *sesshins* of 1968 were in February and in August 19–24 of that year, but the *Tassajara 25th Anniversary* book stated "Fall 1968." [Note added in 2002.]

² Notes in brackets are by the original transcriber unless otherwise indicated.

Suzuki-rōshi: Nothing special.

Student C [Alan Rappaport]: Dōchō-rōshi— [Silence.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes, I am here.

Student C [Alan Rappaport]: Thank you very much.

Student D [Stan White]: Dōchō-rōshi, Zen is impossible! I will continue to practice.

Suzuki-rōshi: If you know that you are here moment after moment, that is already practice.

Student E [Alan Winter]: Dōchō-rōshi, speak to us of the search for the true path.

Suzuki-rōshi: True?

Student E [Alan Winter]: True path.

Suzuki-rōshi: True path. Don't think there is some special path which is true or false.

Student E [Alan Winter]: Then of—each of our own paths?

Suzuki-rōshi: Do your best on every moment. Finding your position and reacting properly to everything.

Student E [Alan Winter]: That's all that I can do.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes.

Student F [Jack Weller]: Dōchō-rōshi, I wish to ask a question that I ask of all religions. In the sūtra³ that we have been reading, and in other Buddhist works, and in your lectures you speak about the infinite. Infinite time, infinite truth: a truth—true in the past for an infinite time. It is said that a sūtra has been repeated again and again in the past for an infinite amount of time, or, if not infinite, then for an uncountable number of years—of eons. Yet we know that man is not infinite in the same sense that—at least today—we believe that man evolved, physically—evolved from other animals. This happened at a period of time that is not countable or infinite. Is then the sūtra, your teaching, and other Buddhist teaching—teaching about an infinite dimension of man, a finite being?

³ Probably the *Lotus Sūtra* [note added in 2002].

Suzuki-rōshi: Finite being itself already the revealed infinite being. In this sense we should appreciate our life, moment after moment. And we should appreciate things which we observe, day after day. This is actually to appreciate—only way to appreciate the infinite—ultimate—the First Principle. So infinite should not be just idea. We should appreciate everything without discrimination, not by small mind but by buddha-mind. The appreciation—true appreciation is by our big—limitlessly big, limitlessly great big buddha-mind. You have to accept things as it is, after all.

Student G [Danny Chesluk]: Dōchō-rōshi, there's really nothing particular I'd like to say. I'd really like to say thank you for Tassajara and for being here. Thank you.

Suzuki-rōshi: Thank you.

Student H [E. L.]: Dōchō-rōshi: What is the True Law?

Suzuki-rōshi: True Law? When you ask what is True Law, I'm afraid you will lose the True Law. When you are doing something just for sake of doing it, there there is True Law. Just like the water flowing. That is true Law.

Student I [Jeff]: Dōchō-rōshi: If the Law is like the water flowing, it seems sometimes there's a lot of dams in the mind—in the brain. And they don't let the water well up from the *hara* spring. And it seems that the process of opening this well is a process of dying. And all the old habits and conceptions and assumptions and personalities are being washed away. And all the old ways of living are being washed away. And there's a lot of—there seem to be a lot of monsters and *kinnaras*⁴ and *nāgas*⁵ that are very full of hate and fear and pain. And if we truly die in this flow—can we truly die in this flow and just trust it to take its natural course and not disturb it? Be still? And be clear?

Suzuki-rōshi: Whatever you say, things [are] going as it goes. But we analyze things; discriminate things. But those analytical thinking and discriminative feeling is also a flow of truth. After all, we have nothing to say. The only way is to appreciate this great activity of the Buddha moment after moment. We shouldn't forget this activity, even though we analyze things and discriminate things. Don't be completely involved in discrimination or thinking. You should have

⁴ *kinnara* (Jap.): traditionally, a heavenly musician who is partly animal, partly human, and partly divine. It is one of the eight beings (*hachibu-shu*) who protect Buddhism. [Note added in 2002.]

⁵ *nāga*: Traditionally, a half-divine serpent or dragon. [Note added in 2002.]

always freedom from everything, like Buddha. If you want to do so, you should practice zazen. Okay?

Student J [Niels Holm]: Dōchō-rōshi, when the rain falls even [on the] whole world, and the moisture [is] penetrating whole universe, how come I feel like [I am] in a drying machine?

Suzuki-rōshi: You feel like [you are] in a drying machine maybe because the moisture is all over, so the drying machine is necessary. But still the drying machine is not powerful enough to dry out everything.

Student K [Dan Welch]: Dōchō-rōshi, you say this is the last day of our training period, but I believe that we will continue the spirit of this practice forever. Thank you very much.

Suzuki-rōshi: That is the way.

Student L [Katherine Thanas]: Dōchō-rōshi: When does my life express the Dharma and when does it not?

Suzuki-rōshi: When it does not? There is no time when it doesn't. It always expresses the Dharma.

Student L [Katherine Thanas]: But sometimes better than others?

Suzuki-rōshi: Don't think in that way. Always expressing. You are always expressing the buddha-nature. That is you who thinks you are expressing "better" or "not so good."

Student M [Mary Quagliata]: Dōchō-rōshi, I think that I will practice zazen for the rest of my life. Thank you.

Suzuki-rōshi: You mean forever.

Student N [Liz Wolf]: Dōchō-rōshi, should I follow myself, my body, my being—or should I follow the schedule?

Suzuki-rōshi: To follow the schedule may be better.

Student O [Sally Block]: Dōchō-rōshi, thank you for helping us all so much. I hope that someday we may be able to fully express our thanks.

Suzuki-rōshi: Thank you.

Student P [Pat Herreshoff]: Dōchō-rōshi, if there is nothing but what we have to share, and no help but what we have to give to each

other, how can we act unselfishly if we're not ready to renounce our minds?

Suzuki-rōshi: To act—actually, to act in a selfish way is also sharing something and helping with each other. We cannot—we cannot be completely selfish, anyway. That is not possible because every one of us are rooted to the same ground.

Student Q [Evelyn Pepper]: Dōchō-rōshi, you told us yesterday that we should be one—our bodies should be one with our Small Mind. Right? Last night?

Suzuki-rōshi: Last night when I said—when you say "mind and body," that body means your physical body in its limited sense. It is a way of understanding, or viewpoint—standpoint. To sit, in a limited sense, we say "mind and body." But actually it is the same, but if we take physical viewpoint, this is body. But if we take spiritual viewpoint, this body is not just body. It is body and mind too. That is what I meant.

Student R [Frances Thompson]: Dōchō-rōshi, this leaf is an exquisite construction. It has ribs to hold it out into the sunlight. It's made of two layers of cells. The upper layer is smooth and even. The under layer has many tiny holes through which carbon dioxide is absorbed. In a chemical reaction in the sunlight, the carbon is removed and oxygen is released through the tiny holes into the air which we breathe. If there weren't green plants on earth, there would be no animal life. We wouldn't be here. There'd be no air to breathe. Is this leaf an illusion?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. There is leaf. That is not illusion. But maybe what you said may be illusion because what you said is not good enough to describe. I am sorry.

Student R [Frances Thompson]: But maybe if I could really understand the leaf—the First Principle of the leaf—the other things would still be true, wouldn't it?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes. Yes.

Student S [Emmy Buckley]: Dōchō-rōshi, why have we been sitting here for seven days?

Suzuki-rōshi: Why we are sitting here seven days? Because we count one—two—three [everyone laughing obscures Suzuki-rōshi's voice here].

Student T [Pat Long]: Dōchō-rōshi, how do I really wait?

Suzuki-rōshi: Wait. Yeah. True wait. If you want to wait, really, in its true sense, you should follow things as they go. That is how you wait. It is like—if you want to—the best way to go [on a] round trip [around] all the world is to stay right here. You are always here. It means that you are waiting for everything. If you stay always at home, everyone will have a chance to meet you. If you are always making trip, people will find it difficult to see you. So to be just where you should be is how to wait. So it may be necessary to be patient. What I mean is there is many ways of waiting [for] things, so this should be the way to wait—[to] do whatever you like.

Student U [Pat Herreshoff]: Dōchō-rōshi, yesterday afternoon you gave a lecture on the [*Lotus*] *Sūtra*. You said—I believe that you said the *Lotus Sūtra* describes reality to itself. And I feel that you demonstrate reality to yourself every moment, every day. Being a teacher I know that you—I mean, since you are a teacher, surely you want us to see this reality that you demonstrate. But my eyes are stubbornly closed to it. Could you give a word that would help me open them?

Suzuki-rōshi: Actually your eyes are not closed. Eyes are open. Even though you say so I feel, you know—I see your eyes wide open. When you feel in that way—that you feel in that way is the proof of your wide-open eyes.

Student U [Pat Herreshoff]: That's good news.

Student V [Paul Discoe]: Dōchō-rōshi, if everything is time, how can there be any past or future? And how can you get things done on time, or not have enough time to do something? This whole idea of time leaves me very confused.

Suzuki-rōshi: Even though—even you're making your effort to follow the time, time is not different from what you do. What you do is actually time, even though you are—whether you are in a hurry or not. What you do—there is no time. There is nothing which could be called time but what you do and what you see. So time is very—time itself is Buddha which is always with us. Whatever we do it is with us. But we human beings always try to control ourselves. When we try to control ourselves we—it means that we [are] supposed to feel better. And this desire is just for ourselves. Everything may have desire in its wide sense, but human desire is very dualistic. We should be in time. It is only human beings who separate the reality and idea of time. So it is our destiny to control—our human destiny to control ourselves by the idea of time, by the idea of Buddha. The Buddha existed for human being.

Student V [Paul Discoe]: And time is necessary too—the idea of time?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes.

Student W [David Chadwick]: Dōchō-rōshi, life is pretty difficult. That's a small thing to say. I don't know what it is, so how do I accept it?

Suzuki-rōshi: The only way is to continue our practice. Without our practice there is no way to find out—to reach the realm where we have not much confusion and trouble because our way is based in reality.

Student X: Dōchō-rōshi, what is the meaning of the *Lotus Sūtra*?

Suzuki-rōshi: *Lotus Sūtra*. If you understand what is this place—where you are and what you are doing—you will understand meaning of *Lotus Sūtra*. In that way you should study. Don't think there is some special meaning to anything—to anything.

Student X: No special meaning in it?

[Answer probably inaudible.]⁶

Student Y [Rick Morton]: Dōchō-rōshi, I don't understand what to do about the bad things I think about myself.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Maybe so, you know. If you don't do anything, still you don't feel good. And if you do, you feel also—sometimes good sometimes bad. So this is a very difficult problem. Maybe only way to get out of it is to practice zazen sometime, and to do some special work sometime. And you should make best effort in each moment. That is only way. Don't think too much. Thinking will not help you.

Student Z [Chris]: Dōchō-rōshi, before I came to Zen Center I used to worry a lot. But—things are better now.

Suzuki-rōshi: All of you seem to agree with him. [Everyone was laughing.]

Student AA: Dōchō-rōshi, you said that there's no special meaning to the *Lotus Sūtra*. And last night you said that Dōgen said everyone is going to attain enlightenment—everyone will become enlightened. We're all practicing now so it seems like it's okay to say that to us. But if I was some businessman in San Francisco that you just happened to meet on the street, and he said: "What's the *Lotus Sūtra*?" What would you say?

⁶ Note added in 2002.

Suzuki-rōshi: What would I say? I may say, "That is *Lotus Sūtra*," but I may continue and say, "but you will not think so."

Student AA: Would you tell him that there is some special meaning to the *sūtra*? I mean if there's—if he asks you, "Well, what will I get if I read this *sūtra*?"—what will you say?

Suzuki-rōshi: If they ask me what is *Lotus Sūtra*— [He is interrupted by the student.]

Student AA: Yeah. Why—why read it?

Suzuki-rōshi: Why you read it? You should say that "I read it, but *Lotus Sūtra* is not voluminous enough. So I want to read—I want more voluminous *Lotus Sūtra* than this."

Source: A contemporaneous typed transcript given to the Archives by Michael Wenger in March 2002. It was not in the SFZC library's collection, and no tape is known to exist. The lecture was entered onto disk by Elizabeth Thorn. It was checked by Bill Redican on March 19, 2002, and minor editorial revisions were made at that time.