

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
SHŌSAN CEREMONY
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Tassajara

[If you want to know what buddha-nature is]¹ ... which is not possible to know what it is—but if you want to realize it, you should wait until it comes to you. If you know—if you want to talk about [that] which is not possible to talk about, present some words to me.

Claude Dalenberg:² Dōchō-rōshi: Incessant change and evanescence everywhere. Life is so short. What is the most important—most important thing to do?

Suzuki-rōshi: To continue everyday practice forever.

Claude: Thank you.

Suzuki-rōshi: Good point.

Ed Brown: Dōchō-rōshi, thank you very much.

Suzuki-rōshi: Thank you very much.

Jim Norton: Dōchō-rōshi, if I look at the moon, on one hand I may think, "This is the moon." And on the other hand I may think, "This is my own eye." Is this Nirmānakāya and Sambhogakāya?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes, it is. The moon—you see by your eyes, and your eyes is the—are not different, actually. So that is Nirmānakāya Buddha.

Jim: Thank you very much.

Jeff Williamson: Dōchō-rōshi, recently in my zazen I have been putting forth every bit of effort that I can find. And before too long—before too long that I have been sitting there, I think that I should slow down, that I am trying too hard to have good practice. And then I think, "No, I am not trying too hard. I am putting forth my very best effort." And I really do not understand what you mean when you say, "Put forth your very best effort, but be careful that you do not try too hard." I do not know where to draw a line. I don't know when I'm doing one thing and when I'm doing the other. Could you please say something that would help me now?

Suzuki-rōshi: "Try your best effort" means not to lose your way.

¹ Text in brackets is from original transcript. Not on tape.

² Names of students were identified in the original transcript.

Always keep up with your practice. That is what I mean. Of course, zazen practice is difficult because we should reject the two extreme. While you are practicing, it—or while you are keep up with your practice—everyday practice, you will find out how to reject the two extreme. So when you become frustrated, when you have problem, when you are discouraged, at that time you should try your best effort to resume your own practice. That is what I mean.

Jeff W.: Thank you very much.

Jeff Sherman: Dōchō-rōshi, very often I feel your compassion. I don't understand emptiness. I was wondering where—where compassion is in emptiness, or—

Suzuki-rōshi: Compassion—

Jeff S.: —what is emptiness.

Suzuki-rōshi: —compassion will be directed, will be on always some phenomenal world, which is—which cause our attachment. Originally when—originally everything is empty. That is how our compassion arise. So compassion and somethingness and emptiness is the same—has same quality. When we understand com- [partial word]—emptiness, we become compassionate on something which exist in term of material or spiritual. So emptiness is not different from compassion. It is source of compassion.

Jeff S.: I'm not sure I understand, but I don't know—don't know what to say about my not understanding. I can't ask another question.

Suzuki-rōshi: Where there is something, there should be compassion. Compassion should be always on every being [?], like everything arise from emptiness.

Jeff S.: Thank you very much.

Doug Bradle: Dōchō-rōshi, there you sit resolute in your serenity, and here am I miserable and quivering in my confusion. And as I try to think of a question for you, I just became hopelessly tangled up in my own thoughts. And then, just now I thought, well, you probably had to go through the same thing at one time too. And you probably had to try and think of a question for your master. And what did you do? Did you become hopelessly confused like me, or did you find some way out?

Suzuki-rōshi: As you have someone to ask about, you—you don't know—you say you don't know what to do. If there is no one to ask you—ask about the confusion, then what is the confusion? The confusion itself is already the meaning of life, your own experience

which you have—get through. So to ask question, to present question, is a kind of communication—mutual understanding. It means that—to extend your experience. So you should accept the confusion as your experience of life. To be in confusion means to be in—to be amid of the boundless mercy of the Buddha. We should accept in that way. And we should lead our life in this way.

Doug: Thank you very much.

Chris Flynn: Dōchō-rōshi, some Zen masters, both contemporary and historical, have put a great deal of emphasis on reaching *kenshō*.³ They—they put emphasis on method and posture, but here at Tassajara and Soko-ji we don't do that.

Suzuki-rōshi: Then what will you do—will you do, here? Here—it is necessary to have confidence to keep up with everyday activity which is going here. If it is difficult to do everything perfectly, then choose something like zazen practice or like sūtra reciting, like study—sūtra study. Choose one or two out of the many activities, and try to—try to be concentrated on the activity you have chosen, and try to do it satisfactorily.

Chris: Thank you very much.

Rick Norton: Dōchō-rōshi, how may this *Lotus Sūtra* be used to gain salvation?

Suzuki-rōshi: We don't know how [it] may. Still the salvation is going. It may go forever.

Rick: Thank you very much.

Elias: Dōchō-rōshi, there are many questions about how hard and how long. The stream outside Tassajara has been flowing a long time. I wish to ask it now how long and how hard must it flow? Listen.

Suzuki-rōshi: If you notice that point, that is Buddha's—that is Buddha's sermon.

Elias: Thank you very much.

Arnold Silberman: Dōchō-rōshi. [One sound of clapper, then silence for a few moments.] Thank you very much.

David Chadwick: Dōchō-rōshi, I am so grateful to you and Tassajara and Zen Center that I'd like to study Zen. What should I do first?

³ *kenshō*: to see into one's original nature; to attain enlightenment.

Suzuki-rōshi: You should do something in right time in the right way. Try to keep up with our practice.

David: Thank you very much.

Pat Herreshoff: Dōchō-rōshi, I do not understand the meaning of my life. We have been given to understand that meaning is eternal. Is it possible for me to relate eternal meaning to this transient body?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes it is possible, and eternal meaning is actually in your everyday life. So there is no need to figure out what is the meaning of life—especially for you. I—I say what you are doing is very good, so don't try to figure out the meaning of your life. If you—to me your life is meaningful, but I don't know right now [if] it is meaningful for you or not. But whether—whatever—however, your life is meaningful, very meaningful, and that you are struggling with it is also meaningful. Don't lose another aspect of your life. Don't stick to one aspect only.

Pat: Thank you very much.

Pat Lang: Dōchō-rōshi, could you explain what it means to be a serious Zen student?

Suzuki-rōshi: Serious? Excuse me—serious Zen—

Pat L.: Serious student of Zen Buddhism.

Suzuki-rōshi: Serious student Zen Buddhism. Don't try to be serious [laughter, laughs]. Just keep up with our practice. Don't, you know, try to get up earlier than other people [laughs, laughter]. Stay in bed. Okay?

Pat L.: Okay. [Laughter.] Thank you very much.

Emmy Buckley: Dōchō-rōshi, I carry a very weak light to help me find my way through the darkness that I feel breathing all around me. I go very slowly. And I am very deeply grateful for your patience and understanding you have in helping me. Thank you very much.

Suzuki-rōshi: Go slowly as much as you can.

Francis Thompson: Dōchō-rōshi, your kindness touches my heart.

Suzuki-rōshi: Maybe because I am not so kind [laughs].

Francis: Thank you very much.

Evelyn Pepper: Dōchō-rōshi, you say that we're all one. Then why are we—is everything so different?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Because it is different, they are all one. Do you understand [laughs, laughter]? If it is same, you know, it is not even one. We say "one" because they are different. If it is, you know, same from the beginning, it is— there is no need to say one. Okay?

Evelyn: Thank you very much.

Angie Runyon: Dōchō-rōshi, I too want to know the meaning of human existence. The meaning of human existence?

Suzuki-rōshi: Human existence? Yeah—human existence, you know, is—the characteristic of human existence is duality. We are dualistic being. That is our characteristic of life. So if you attach to one—on one side of our life, we will lose—we will be completely lost because we have double nature. So our understanding of life should be double structure.

Angie: Thank you very much.

Sally Block: Dōchō-rōshi, you have told us that we are not alike at all, and also you tell us that we should develop consideration for each other. How can we develop a feeling for what goes on in other people's minds, or how they think, how they react, why they react, and how they live, so that we can develop consideration for them?

Suzuki-rōshi: To be able to understand reality from various angle—even though it is not possible to understand things from various angle, we should reserve always some understanding for someone else and try to understand other's feelings, other's understanding. Other's understanding may not be always right: sometimes wrong, sometimes right. As you understand is sometime right and sometimes wrong. But without being caught by the idea of right or wrong, we should try to understand something which is something wrong as well as something which is right. This is—if you try to do it, this is very difficult. But the only way is to practice zazen—to be concentrated on your zazen practice, not—the way you practice zazen and the way you do something in your everyday life is not the same. Your everyday life will be good when your practice is good because your everyday life will be supported by your power of practice. So best way for us is to be concentrated on our zazen practice. This is, anyway, the most important point. Something everyday practice will be taken care of if you—if your everyday life is concentrated on your zazen practice.

Sally: Thank you very much.

Liz Wolf: Dōchō-rōshi [one sound of clappers], I have many questions,

and I can't choose between them. And so I just want to say that you are the only faith that is here for me, and I want to thank you.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. But choose, you know, something and be concentrated on something you have chosen. Choose some problem and try to be concentrated on that—

Liz: On that what?

Suzuki-rōshi: —on that problem—on the problem you have chosen.

Liz: What if it seems insurmountable?

Suzuki-rōshi: Choose something easier [laughter].

Liz: Thank you.

Mary Quagliata: Dōchō-rōshi, I always forget what I am going to say at this ceremony because it is so formal, but I hope you had a good day today and we can practice together in a group.

Suzuki-rōshi: [Silence. Sounds like Suzuki-rōshi bows.]

Harriet Hiestand: Dōchō-rōshi? You told us once that we are each our own teachers, and so every question I thought of for you I could answer. But I felt that I should ask them anyway. How can I trust my own answers?

Suzuki-rōshi: Your own answers? Maybe you cannot completely trust any answer. Whether it is your answer or my answer, you cannot trust it completely. But when you ask me question, it is a kind of communication. To share the problem is the point of asking question.

Harriet: But I get very frustrated because you never answer. You just substitute words, and there's never—never an answer.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. To understand in that way is better, you know, not to rely on the answer so much. But to present some question, that is enough.

Harriet: Thank you very much.

Katherine Thanas: Dōchō-rōshi, who are you?

Suzuki-rōshi: Good question [laughs]. To whom you are asking [laughter]?

Katherine: To all of you.

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm? All of me [laughs]? You know, "all of me" is bad [?], you know. All of—are you really understand all of me, you know? All of me—what you see and what you do not see?

Katherine: I don't know that I understand it all. I feel there is much there.

Suzuki-rōshi: I am here. But before I am here, you know, what exist here? Something you don't know existed [laughs]. I am, you know, someone who exist here who is speaking something. And I am also someone who—someone which does not appear in this way. Before I say something—before I exist here, something is here with all being. And I am both someone who has form and color, and someone who has no form and no color. And you are speaking to someone who has body and mind.

Katherine: Thank you very much.

Dan Welch: Dōchō-rōshi, may we all understand our true home by the use of these words in the ceremony.

Suzuki-rōshi: I couldn't follow it.

Dan: I hope—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Dan: —that we all come to understand our true home—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Dan: —by the use of these words in the ceremony.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh. Yeah. I hope so.

Dan: Thank you very much.

Niels Holm: Dōchō-rōshi, will you please tell me why I judge myself and other as good and bad student?

Suzuki-rōshi: I couldn't follow it.

Niels: Will you please tell me why I judge myself and others as good and bad students?

Suzuki-rōshi: Judge or discriminate, you mean?

Niels: Yes.

Suzuki-rōshi: You are good student. There is no need to compare you to someone else. You have your own good quality which, you know, no one has. So you are independent. And when you become you yourself, you will be with all your friend. Okay?

Niels: Thank you very much. [*Sentence finished. Tape turned over.*]

Jeff Broadbent: Dōchō-rōshi, why do I feel hatred, repugnance, and disgust?

Suzuki-rōshi: Maybe because you want to solve everything, every problem in limited sense and by limited way—that is why. You should wait, you know. You should do one by one. Then there is no hatred or no bad feeling.

Jeff: How do you mean one by one?

Suzuki-rōshi: One by one? Just to do something in time. To keep up with other's practice. That is the main point. And don't discriminate your work too much within your limited time and material or space. You should do your best. Whether it is good or bad, no one knows [laughs], you know, whether it is good or bad.

Jeff: Thank you very much.

E. L. Hazelwood: Dōchō-rōshi, I have a question, but I can't see it. And so I can't grasp it. And so I don't know what it is. And so I don't know how to ask it.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. The basic problem is the same for everyone. Anyway as long as you are here, don't be too much concerned about yourself, or what you do, or what others do. Just observe Tassajara as one body, as one person who has every parts of body—hands, legs, head, ears, eyes. And let it work without it—not much mistake. If you try to practice our way—everyday practice our way with this idea, then there is salvation for each one of us.

E. L.: Thank you very much.

Dan Chesluk: Dōchō-rōshi, why have you told us this morning to concentrate on one—on one activity?

Suzuki-rōshi: What I mean is not so diff- [partial word]—complicated thing—you know. To do—try to get up, you know, before, you know, alarm [laughs], or, you know, try—try not to eat too much—that kind of thing is—anything which will—which you think you want to try.

Dan: I thought you meant that for a long period of time we should—we should concentrate on one thing.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah [laughs], that is something which you should do always for long period of time.

Dan: Concentrate on one thing? Pick one thing?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. That is very good practice.

Dan: 'Cause for myself I tend not to do that, you know—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, maybe so.

Dan: —[2-4 words unclear].

Suzuki-rōshi: So stick to one practice forever [laughs]. That is very good [laughter].

Dan: Thank you very much.

Jack Weller: Dōchō-rōshi, I am troubled by your saying that you don't trust us.

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] Yeah. I want to encourage you to, you know, stick to something, you know, not in term of good or bad, but anyway [laughs], you know. Like a water stick to [seeks], you know, lower place. That kind of—without that kind of spirit, I—we cannot trust anyone, you know, until we can see that kind of practice in some other person.

Jack: Then we can trust them, right?

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] Yeah.

Jack: So we can trust you.

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughing.] Ho!

Jack: But you cannot trust us.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, maybe. I am trying, you know, always to stick to something, not because this is good or bad, you know—whether it is good or bad. To stick to one thing—when you stick to one thing only, you know, it may be sometime understood as something good. Sometime it may be understood [as] something which is bad. But whether it is good or bad, it is out of question. If it is helpful, you

know, for—to me and for others, we should stick to one practice.

Jack: Thank you very much.

Allan Winter: Dōchō-rōshi, how can we make our marriage with Buddha more real?

Suzuki-rōshi: Marriage?

Allan: Yes.

Suzuki-rōshi: More real [laughs, laughter]? That [is a] good question. Marriage is not so real [laughs, laughter]. I agree with you. So if you want to have real marriage, you should polish yourself, and you should try to relate yourself to someone else whether your friend is man or a woman. Your wife should be your lover in [on] one hand and should be your—someone who is nothing to do with you—someone who is quite independent from you. That is your wife. Wife is some—some human being which you don't know, which you can—some usual person which you do not—which is nothing to do with you. And at the same time, she will be your friend, or your best friend, and someone who you love most. Your wife has two side—ordinal [ordinary], just ordinal [ordinary] person and someone who you love. Okay?

Allan: Thank you very much.

Stan White: Dōchō-rōshi, the only words I have this morning are not words.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. We are, you know, discussing which is not possible to discuss by words. So how actual words should go—this is how actual words should go. Words is—by words we should communicate something which is not possible to put—to limit by our words.

Stan: Thank you very much.

Craig Boyan: Dōchō-rōshi, who is practicing harder now, me or the clock?

Suzuki-rōshi: Which? Both. When you practice hard, clock practicing hard [laughing, laughter]. Clock will not practice anything [by itself?]. I think so.

Craig: Thank you very much.

Allan Rappaport: Dōchō-rōshi, I am very afraid a lot of the time. I am afraid now. Can you help me?

Suzuki-rōshi: Afraid of what? Some—something—afraid of something of which you cannot figure out, you mean?

Allan: I think I'm afraid of being hurt, and then lost.

Suzuki-rōshi: Lost? No, that is not possible. You are here, you know, and there is no need to be afraid of—because, you know, to be a—because anyway you are changing. If you are afraid of being always changing, that is, you know—maybe that is why you are afraid. But if you are changing always, why don't you try to change for better? As long as you are making that effort, there's no need to be afraid of anything. Even a little bit, you know—even little bit change for the better will work.

Allan: Thank you very much.

Bill Shurtleff: Dōchō-rōshi, the sound of the water in the stream seems to wash away all of the questions that I had. The questions still come, but they seem to flow away. Trying to hold a question and to give it a form keeps me from hearing your words this morning and from hearing the sound of the stream. It feels strange for me to be without a question, and so I just like to thank you for your wisdom, and for your kindness in being here with us today.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. People take [?], listen, and talk. In this way, everything is going. Like electric lamp, you know, the current is always going back and forth. It looks like very certain, but it is not, you know. Actually it is not as we see it. So the moment we appear, we vanish. We are—we still practice always. That is our life. That is everything—how everything exist, and that is how Sambhogakāya Buddha exist. So when we understand our life in that way, there is no problem at all.

Bill: Thank you very much.

Tim Buckley:⁴ [Silence.]

Suzuki-rōshi: [Silence.]

⁴ From original transcript. (Silence on tape.)

Butei,⁵ the Emperor of Liang, asked Bodhidharma, "What is the first principle?"

Buddha [Bodhidharma]⁶ said, "Who is it in front of you?"

Buddha [Bodhidharma] said, "There is no holy person or common person."

And the Emperor said, "Who are you in front of me?"

Bodhidharma said, "I don't know."

Bodhidharma in his answer appeared to be someone who is just sitting without thinking, without doing anything, being with everything—without form, without color. He revealed himself in that way for the emperor. But emperor wanted to know someone who is wise, who is powerful, who is learned, who is very helpful. So this question and answer did not—was not so successful.

We should know—we should understand ourselves in two ways: as some person and as someone which has no name, or no body, or no mind. To understand ourselves in this way is liberation from myself. And true understanding of ourselves when we say "things as it is," means that to understand ourselves from viewpoint of being and non-being. That is how we understand ourselves. That is how we should exist as a human being in this world, or else we will be lost. Right now, most people live—lead their life as someone who is known to each other, but we lose the another point. That is why this world is so busy and noisy.

When we understand our world in this way, with calmness of your mind—our mind, we will have compassionate mind for the people who is just involved in one-sided view. Our practice should be concentrated on this point by doing trivial, near-at-hand practice.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Adam Tinkham and Bill Redican (7/17/01).

⁵ Emperor Bukei (Liang Wudi, Bu, Wu) (502-550) founded the Liang (Ryo) Dynasty in southern China. This exchange is found in Case 1 of *The Blue Cliff Record* and Case 2 of *The Book of Serenity*.

⁶ Suzuki-rōshi probably meant to say the Emperor, which is why he repeats the exchange and substitutes the Emperor for Bodhidharma.