

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Wednesday, July 9, 1969
FORM AND EMPTINESS II
Tassajara

In our previous lectures we have studied the relationship between—relationship between real and seeming, or emptiness and forms. [By] "real" we mean something beyond our thinking. This is, you know,—there is no way to—whatever, you know, we say about it, it is the expre- [partial word]—just suggestion, you know, not real or emptiness itself. It is something beyond our thinking mind, so we call it "emptiness."

It is not actually something which we can understand in term of good or bad, real or not real. And seeming and all—whatever it is—all what we say, you know, everything what we say or what we see is forms. And we actually live in the world of forms and color, you know. And we don't know, actually, what is emptiness itself. Even—we call it "emptiness," you know, there is some rules, you know, how emptiness takes various form. So according to some rules, emptiness take its form and color. And we are explaining about the relationship between emptiness and form which we can see.

Right now we have been mostly discussing rather philosophical way, but tonight may be better to explain it more psychological way or physical way. According to Buddhist psychology, you know, of course, we have five senses, and thinking mind, and to—some faculty to lead our thinking mind in false, you know—to make our thinking mind mistake, you know. That kind of faculty we have. And there is also some faculty to point out the mistake of the seventh mind, you know. Five senses and thinking mind, that is six. Seventh one is, you know, to make our mind made—make mistake. That is the sixth one—the seventh [corrects self] one. That is the mind which let our thinking mind stick to something, you know. There is [laughs] no need to stick to something, you know, actually. But seventh mind, you know, make sixth mind to stick to something.

The truth we think—idea we have is not always—should not be always same. It should change. But we [are] liable to stick to some—some idea. Why we do so is because of the sixth mind we explain. And that sixth mind is, of course, mistake, you know. We should not stick to some idea always, because everything is changing. If things in reality [are] changing, our mind should change also. But we [are] liable to think, you know, something always exist, something which we see— which we saw always exist and some conclusion we reached is always true. But it is not so. Today's, you know, conclusion will not be true

anymore tomorrow, maybe. But we [are] liable to stick to some conclusion or idea. That is the seventh mind.

And eighth—eight one—eighth one told us—tell us, you know, that is also mistake. And eighth one—eighth sense is at the same time the storehouse of various, you know, ideas and knowledge. And eighth—eighth sense is just the purpose of—motto [?] of the eighth sense is just to keep things as it is, old and new. Everything is mountain and river, whatever it is, you know. What we see is always kept in our mind. That is eight—eighth one. And it include also not only knowledge or ideas but also outward object—so-called-it outward object: objective world, including mountain and stones and river and water. Everything, you know, which we call "objective world" is included in our eighth mind. So eighth mind or sense is both subjective and objective, and material and spiritual.

But most of us—most of us are very much involved in thinking mind, and we do—we ignore the more fundamental minds—mind. Because we put more emphasis on thinking mind, so we ignore, you know, our tummy [*hara*], you know, which is the center of more vegetable-like nervous system. We call it—I think you call it "autonomous [autonomic] nervous system," you know. This is the center of the autonomous system. And, you know, our brain is the center of thinking mind, you know. And it—our nervous system connect both center, you know, like this [probably gestures].

We know many things about our brain system, but we don't know whether have mind here or not. But from ancient time, Oriental people studied a lot about this mind. Just very—you ca-[partial word]—I don't think you—you have any idea of having some mind here in your tummy [?]. And to our great surp- [partial word]—astonishment, you know, the most, you know, maybe 99 percent of our nervous system [consists] of more vegetable-like system, not, you know, smart thinking nervous system. And we—Chinese people call mind here [points to brain?] is *yang*; and this mind here [points to *hara*?] is *yin*. Some people understand *yang* is better than *yin* or powerful—more powerful than *yin*, but that is not right. Both *yin* and *yang* is important.

So *yin* means, you know, some—something which produce many things. That is *yin*, like earth, you know. Earth is *yin*, and the sun is, you know, *yang*. And *yang*, you know, help producing us many things. And woman is *yin*, and man is—a man is *yang* [laughs]. I—we don't know which is more important [laughter, laughs]. Anyway, both is necessary, *yin* and *yang*.

And Chinese people thinks this mind we have here is—or this mind or nervous center—center of vegetable-like nerves is here [*hara*?], right

here. And this is actually, you know, a branch of, you know, this nervous system, according to Chinese understanding of mind. So even though you cut off our mind from this mind, you know—cutting off the connection between this mind and this mind, still, you know, you can survive. And you—still you can—you will have children, you know. Still you can eat. If you cut off this mind from *yin* mind, this center, you know, exist, but this center stop, you know, working. So that is why, you know, we put emphasis on practice of here [*hara*], you know. If you practice—if you practice zazen, you will have more active autonomous nervous system. On the other hand—on the contrary, if you use too much thinking mind, it will affect the activity of your nervous center here and will create some indigestion or some—will create some trouble to your tummy or lung which is in—in your tummy [*hara*].

We, you know—by the way [sounds of Suzuki-rōshi writing on a blackboard], it [*niku*] means "flesh," you know, and this [*do*] means earth, which is in.¹ And this character means *hara*. This is *hara*.

月	土	肚
<p><i>Niku</i>: root character for "flesh"</p>	<p><i>Do</i>: "earth, ground, soil"</p>	<p><i>Hara</i>: "abdomen, belly, bowels"</p>

The flesh—earth—or in nature's flesh, you know, here [in the *hara*]. And it is—so this is very important part [laughs]. It is not just to—tummy is not to just to keep your various things, you know—bag to keep it—various thing in it. It is very important, you know. *Hara*.

So in our practice we rather stop our thinking and encourage our activity of more vegetable-like nerve [nervous system]. And this is nearer to the understanding of reality. We—we analyze things for some purpose, you know. But more important thing is to support ourselves, you know, in healthy condition. And you can analyze things, and think about something, and try to make our life easy—easier. But first of all, we have to keep ourselves healthy.

¹ That is, "earth is in our flesh or body." Sources of Japanese characters: Andrew H. Nelson, *The Modern Reader's Japanese-English Character Dictionary*, 2nd edition, pp. 738 (*niku*), 264 (*do*), and 740 (*hara*). See also character No. 3800.0 for *hara*.

So even though—so maybe, you know, that is why we are now more interested in medicine or medical science rather than philosophy nowadays, I think. And when you become more interested in medical science, eventually we will [become] more interested in study of our own *hara*. And Chinese people say—according to Chinese people, we have five, you know, five organ in our body. And each one of us—each one of them has some special—not thinking, but nervous activity. My friend is very—now in Japan, authority of Chinese medical—medicine, and he has been—he was a good student when we were studying together. But he started to—he became interested in herbs and Chinese medicine. And he is still continuing reading many books, and [studying] relationship between Zen and Chinese medicine. It is so voluminous that I have no time to follow his books, you know.

But what he describe in those magazine or books is very interesting. And he has big confidence in our future medicine, which is almost, you know, vanished from China and from Japan after Meiji period, when we are more interested in Western medical science. So, according to our law, we cannot be a doctor unless we study Western medicine. That is only way to be a—to have license, you know, as a doctor. And we have still therapy, for an instance—what you call it?—to burn our skin,² you know, on some point, you know, or to put a needle,³ you know—by needle here we help some people. But they are just popular therapists. They have no—they have license, but they have no license to diagnose—diagnose a patient. If y- [partial word]—if they come, they will see him, and, of course, you know, unless he knows what is wrong with him, he cannot use his therapy. But by law it is prohibited to make some prescription or [to] diagnose a patient. But if you study more—nowadays it is very difficult to have—to read books—to collect books because we haven't not much books even. In China, also, those valuable classics is no more. So he has very difficult time to study Chinese medicine.

This is not what I wanted to talk [about] tonight [laughs], but anyway what I want to say is, you know: Thinking mind—in our practice, you know, we stop—rather stop our thinking mind to make our more fundamental activity active. Sometime we say "direct experience." What does it mean physically or psychologically? More to stop our thinking mind and to open our basic mind—our practice, physically speaking or psychologically speaking. Anyway we—Western p-[partial word]—Eastern people or Oriental people—our base of—for Oriental people, base of our thinking is oneness, you know, oneness. And that one will be divided *yin* and *yo*—*yin* and *yang*. There is no *yin* and *yang*,

² Moxibustion.

³ Acupuncture.

or seeming or reality, quite separate element, you know. One—originally it is one element, and *yin* or *yang* is two side of one element.

So we catch, you know, our things in the picture of *yin* and *yang*, or seeming or reality, you know. That is just picture of one reality, you know. It is not—we don't think, "Here is seeming, and here is reality," or, "Here is *yin*, and here is *yang*," you know, and, "*Yang* is better than *yin*," or "*Yin* is better than—more powerful than *yang*." We don't think in that way.

And—our world will be divided [into] *yin* and *yang*, will be divided, you know. Our world will be divided in two. But temporary we can divide it in two, but it does not mean our world is consist of *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* plus *yang* is not our world. But we, you know, tentatively divide or analyze our world in two: *yin* and *yang*. Do you understand the difference? So it is difference of—base of the thinking mind. Your thinking mind is based on duality and our Oriental thinking is based on more oneness.

So even though we use those—this kind of formula, this is a picture of reality, you see? Just picture of reality. We understand reality in this way, that's all. It does not mean there is, you know, form and co-[partial word]—emptiness, something which is called emptiness and which is something called form. Form and emptiness is originally one. But because of our rigid, limited thinking mind, or to destroy our thinking mind, we use this kind of tools. This is a tools to destroy our thinking mind, or destroy—by "destroy" I mean to be free from thinking mind.

And tonight I think I have to explain this one: "Form is emptiness." Oh—excuse me. "Form is form." When we call "form," there is nothing but form—form—world of form only. After we understand or accept the formula of "form of emptiness, emptiness is form," and "emptiness is emptiness," we will reach the understanding of world of form only—form only.

I think you will understand the world of form only. Actually, you know, whether you understand Buddhism or not, maybe we are actually living in the world of form only. But this form include thinking mind too—everything: physical and spiritual. Whatever it is, what we think is world of form only. So actually we live in world of form only, but there is difference between Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Buddhist also live in world of form only, you know. But there is difference. The difference is, you know, Buddhist understand "form is emptiness, and emptiness is form, and emptiness is emptiness, and form is form," you know. But usual people understand—do not understand "emptiness is form, and form is emptiness, and form is form, emptiness is emptiness." That is

the difference. Usual people, you know, in short, do not, you know, have any experience of zazen practice, any experience of stopping thinking mind to reach the world "form"—[corrects self] "emptiness is emptiness."

So for usual people, you know, to lose something is very discouraging, you know. Like the old Indian—Indian old woman, you know, who happened to see in her mirror no head [laughs].⁴ She couldn't—she couldn't see, one morning, her own head in his [her] mirror, so she was very much discouraged, you know. We Buddhist will not be discouraged, even though, you know, we die because we know form is emptiness. Originally we are empty. Originally we are not here, you know, because we are changing moment after moment. I am here, but tomorrow I shall be quite different person because I am changing always into someone—something else. I cough a lot tonight, but I may not cough tomorrow morning [laughs], so I'm not same person. So [if] I die in two days, you know, Suzuki and new Suzuki will be born in tomorrow morning. That is, you know, our understanding of ourselves. That is the difference.

But I am right here, you know, and I am doing something. I am talking to you and you are listening to me, so we are involved in same activity. So we are doing same thing, but our understanding of life is different. Actually difference is, you know, whether you understand our life in this way, you know, with five ways or with one way is the difference.

Usually we understand things—as I said, "Form is form." [Laughs.] "I am I," you know. "Table is table." "Fire is fire." That is our usual understanding. And that understanding is called "dualistic understanding." So in one way, Western culture is enemy of [laughs] Oriental culture, or good husband of Oriental culture, maybe. Enemy and, you know, good husband is same thing [laugh, laughter]—not different at all. Good, you know, good couple are always fighting [laughs]—quarrel—get into quarrel. So we say, "You should not try to," you know, "[get] involved in the quarrel of husband and wife." He may be very good friend, you know. He is so good to continue their quarrel. But, you know—so whatever the relationship may be, it is all right, you know. For Buddhist it is all right. For non-Buddhist it is, maybe, big problem [laughs]. So we must be able to, you know, have various picture of same reality.

[Sound of papers being shuffled. Long pause.]

Do you have some question? By the way, can you hear me? [Laughs, laughter.] *[Turned tape over here.]*

⁴ The tale of Enyadatta. See SR-69-07-03.

Student A: You mentioned a part of the *Shōbōgenzō* that we should read? The "**Shakokate**"?⁵ And I didn't hear what it was, and I'm getting very curious.

Suzuki-rōshi: **Shakura** practice?

Student A: Yeah. You said that if it didn't sound absolutely right, there was something wrong with our practice. Something that we should read—some part of the *Shōbōgenzō* .

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. [Laughs.]

Student A: Do you remember?

Suzuki-rōshi: No, I don't remember [laughter]. *Shōbōgenzō*?

Student A: I think so; I'm not sure. *Shōbōgenzō* maybe—

Suzuki-rōshi: When? Recently?

Student A: Oh, maybe a month ago. Is that—

Suzuki-rōshi: When I was talking about counting-breathing exercises?

Student A: Uh-huh.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mmm. *Chakra*.

Student B: To check our practice. He said to check our practice.

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh, check.

Student A: Yeah, to check our practice—

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh, check.

Student A: —to see if it's all right, you know. To—if—

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh.

Student A: You said that if we read it and it didn't sound right, if it didn't sound all right, then there was something wrong with our practice? Do you understand?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. You know, when you think, you know, your practice [is] all right, you know, that is not all right [laughs, laughter].

⁵ Phonetic guess only. Possibly "Shukke" or "Shukke-kudoku."

So you just, you know—you should just sit. Whether it is all right or not all right doesn't matter [laughter]. Do you understand? But difficult, you know. When you say "This is all right, or this is not all right," that is here, right here—not here [probably alternately pointing to head and *hara*]. So we should not be bothered by this one, you know [tapping—probably pointing to head].

Student B: Rōshi, could this mind be received by this mind [probably also pointing to his head and his *hara*]?

Suzuki-rōshi: By this mind? No. No, no. This is very limited mind.

Student B: Can this mind be perceived by this mind?

Suzuki-rōshi: This mind is supporting. This mind is supporting this one. This is branch office, actually [laughs, laughter]. So he doesn't know, you know, what is going on here.

Student B: Can this mind perceive itself?

Suzuki-rōshi: No [sounding tentative or qualified]. The mind perceive something is here [*hara*]. This is—so you call it "autonomous," you know, autonomous—autonomous nerve—nervous system. And anyway some American doctor, according to him, you know, some American doctor put emphasis on mind here. I don't know who he is, but— *Hai*.

Student C: Why do we need to study about Zen and listen to lectures about Zen if we're not going [?] to be bothered by [1-2 words unclear]?

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] Because, you know, we are always involved in thinking mind only, and we have not much ability to free our mind from thinking mind. That is why. So those formula is to, you know, to destroy the attachment to thinking mind. This is a kind of thought. Because we are intellectual being, so the thought should also be intellectual or else it doesn't work. So we use this kind of, you know, logic or thinking formula. So this formula itself—themselves doesn't mean much, you know. This is just thought to cut off something—something we should not [be] involved in too much. That is—that is why we study this kind of thing. And because we are intellectual—excuse me, because we are so intellectual, it is necessary, you know, to intellectualize our intellectuality [laughs, laughter] to be free from it, you know. That is why we study those things. But actually if you practice zazen, that is enough. But what is real practice is—will be the problem, you know. So to know what is right practice also we use this kind of suggestion or tools. *Hai*.

Student D: Once you said in a lecture that if we are thinking while we are eating, we are not doing good practice of eating, but we're doing good practice of thinking. Should we as Zen—as beginning Zen students, try to avoid occupations that require using the thinking mind, or is there a way to keep up our practice in jobs that—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student D: —make us think?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. And, you know, there may be, you know,—if you, you know—maybe tentatively you can classify our work in two ways, you know: physical work and mental, you know, work. So physical work, when you, like when you scrub floor, you know, we don't have to think. In that case, a student who is practicing on kōan *mu* he can, you know, practice kōan study even [when] he is scrubbing floor because he is not, you know, using his head. And kōan practice is mostly—the purpose of kōan study is to give up thinking mind. Anyway, it is practice of mind. So you can do it—do that, you know.

But when you are counting something, you cannot, you know, study kōan practice. So in that case, I think it is—your practice should be to—to do your job, you know, or to think only your job and without thinking some other things. That is, in that case, our practice. We say, "one-thing-only practice," you know. When we—why this is practice is when we are involved in only one thing, you know, it is only one activity, only one kind of activity. Then your mind will not be disturbed because you do not—you are not involved in some other things. So it means that your thinking activity include everything, or there is nothing but your thinking world at that time. That is, you know, the world of "form is form" only. There is no other thing. Just exist is your—your thinking activity at that time. So if that kind of thinking activity continue, that is the world of form only. That is one—a kind of practice.

Student E: Is it possible for Zen monks to disagree among themselves? [Laughter.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. [Laughter, laughs.] It is possible. But, you know, at the same time, you know, you should, you know, understand some others' understanding too. You know, there are so many formulas, you know [laughs]. So you shouldn't be, you know—although there are so many formulas, you know, it is—actually it is just one formula. One formula will be, you know, understood in five ways, that's all. So not to disagree is, maybe, agreeing with it, you know [laughs]. To agree with it may be not to agree with it, or whether agree or whether or agree or not agree or not not [laughs] not disagree. We don't stick to it, that's all. You can say no, but that's all.

Student F: Since we are constantly changing, is there anything you know that doesn't change?

Suzuki-rōshi: No. Nothing. Nothing. [Pause and slight laugh.] If there is something, point out what it is. You cannot. This [thumping desk or floor] doesn't change, you cannot say. That is, you know, our understanding, you know. For you, you know, there may be "something changes and something which doesn't change," but that is not true with Buddhist. Everything changes, including Buddha himself. *Hai*.

Student G: Well, if we are constantly changing, moment by moment, what gives the continuity of being the same person?

Suzuki-rōshi: Continue—same person?

Student E: What seems—what gives the appearance of being the same person all the time—the quality of that same person?

Suzuki-rōshi: Continuity, you know. Continuity is like some, you know, some current, you know. "Continuity," we say, but that continuity is like something—some thread, you know. You may think this world consist of, you know, long, long thread [laughs] like this. Continuity may be the thread, you know. And that thread will be—if you roll like, you know, this [gestures] will be a big ball. That is our world, maybe. That is not our understanding.

So we say—as some—as Nishida⁶ said, "If we understand our world is unfolding of the—a truth," you know, "we will lose one side of the truth." The one side of the truth is, "What is the relationship between long thread," you know. This is just one thread. It means the unfolding of one truth, you know, "just thread." [Laughs.] What is the, you know, relationship between A and B? This side is missing in this understanding. So when we say, "Everything changes," you know, it means that we are related to everything, you know, this way. And we are related to future, you know, to the future being and past being. So this is rather difficult to explain, you know, how this world is consist of. And your questions is, you see, when you ask that question, your understanding is based on, "This world is," you know, "consist of long, long thread." But it is not actually so, you know. This kind of lecture is, you know, to the—for the training of our thinking mind, to get—to be

⁶ Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945): an important 20th-century Japanese philosopher. In *Zen no kenkyu (A Study of Good, 1911)*, he discussed his theory of "pure experience." In *Hataraku mono kara miru mono e (From the Acting to the Seeing, 1927)*, he discussed the meeting of Western and Eastern thought. He also wrote about the Buddhist concept of emptiness from a Western standpoint. Suzuki-rōshi entered Komazawa University, Tōkyō, in 1926, at a time when Nishida Kitarō was probably widely discussed.

free from our thinking mind, and to utilize thinking mind fully, we study this kind of thing. Did you understand? [Laughs]

You—it—what I want to say is you are still, you know, stick[ing] to [laughs] thinking mind, and there is something, you know, which I should explain, you see? Your question is based on the understanding of—unfolding of the truth about this reality.

The reality is something which is not possible to explain what it is. If we say, you know, "We are part of reality," you know, that is also mistake. As you said, you know, as you said, if we are a part of it, you know, what is the relationship between, you know, "you" in this moment and "you" in next moment? [Laughs.] We don't know what to think [laughs], you know—what to say, you know, that is right. And I—we don't know what to say is the last one here. "Say something!" "No." [Laughs.] We say, if you say something you will get thirty slap, and if you don't you will get [laughing] thirty slap.⁷ That is, you know, true understanding.

Student F: When we listen to your lectures, should we—I find it very hard to listen to the balance to my thinking mind and my *hara* mind—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student F: —and if I just, maybe, count my breathing during lecture, I don't hear anything [laughter]. If I—if I use my thinking mind, I find in my eyes [?] a lot, I start—I have some question—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student F: —and then I start following that, I lose—I lose your lecture again. So should we listen to a lecture—to your lecture with—

Suzuki-rōshi: With thinking mind, yeah. This is, you know, the training of our thinking mind. And if you give lecture like this, it will be good training. Following the thinking mind and giving freedom to thinking mind—that is how you give—how you make *teishō*.⁸ *Teishō* means, you know—does not mean to give you some idea, you know, but to give good suggestion to the reality. That is—*tei* is "to take up something," or to, you know—"This is it!" is *teishō*.

Student G: Rōshi, if everything is always changing—

Suzuki-rōshi: *Hai*.

⁷ Quoting Deshan Xuanjian (Te-Shan Hsuan-chien, Tokusan Senkan): 782-865. "Thirty blows if yes, thirty blows if no."

⁸ A lecture by a Zen master conveying some aspect of the essence of Zen.

Student G: —would that not mean, in effect, that nothing ever changed?

Suzuki-rōshi: Affect?

Student G: Well, would not that—if everything is always changing—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student G: —then nothing is changing. Then there is no change, if everything is always changing—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student G: —the change would in effect cancel the change, making nothing change, wouldn't it? Everything is always changing—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student G: —then nothing is changing—

Suzuki-rōshi: Nothing change.

Student G: —because everything is changing—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, nothing change.

Student G: —nothing changes.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. That's right understanding. So this is just game of the word. Everything changes. [Laughs.] It mean nothing changes [laughs, laughter]. You know, everything change, you know, so, you know, nothing change. But if you—because you see, you know, just one part of it, you know, it changes. But if everything changes, you know, one before big thing is—is not changing. Something is always there, but it is changing. [Laughs, laughter.]

But as *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* it said, "Doesn't," you know, "increase, doesn't decrease. It doesn't be tainted, or it doesn't be—it will not be pure, or it will not be impure." And this is, you know, actually—there are two ways of listening to the lecture. One is to listen to it as a exercise of your thinking mind, and the other is, you know, to know—to —to know our practice precisely, you know. How much we, you know, we have—how much freedom we have from thinking mind.

So if you are disturbed by my lecture, you know, there is something that is—it means you still stick to some idea, you know, some way of thinking. So how you—I answer to the question is to, you know, to find out what kind of thinking mind he has, and explain his, you know, own thinking mind, and let him realize his thinking mind is not always right so he will give up his own thinking mind—his way of thinking mind which he always stick to.

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Sara Hunsaker and Bill Redican (4/10/01). One previous lecture that Suzuki-rōshi may have been referring to at the beginning of this lecture is SR-69-07-03. A note included in the original reel backup tape for this lecture stated that SR-69-07-09 was recorded July 5, which would place it closer to the July 3 lecture.