

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
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Tassajara

As a Buddhist, of course, the most important precept is to—to believe in Buddha and his teaching and his disciples. Buddha, you know, for us is someone who attained enlightenment—not only historical Buddha but also Buddha's disciples who attained enlightenment is buddha. And still this is its—in its narrow sense. In its wider sense, whether we attain enlightenment or not we are buddha—not only human being but also various beings, animate and inanimate. Even something like stone is buddha, in its wide sense. So everything is buddha in its wide sense.

But the religion is mostly for human being who saw—when we said "buddha" usually someone who attain liberation is buddha. It may be better to understand in this way to avoid the conflict. And "his teaching," we say, but when we say "his teaching" we do not mean something which is written in scriptures. Mostly, you know, even though you read so-called-it king of the scripture *Lotus Sūtra*, it may be difficult to understand for you because it is written pretty, you know, in ancient times.

And we know that it is not directly told by Buddha, so this point makes us more difficult to—to have faith in that scripture. So nowadays or from ancient time, when we say *dhamma*,¹ *dhamma* is truth in its wide sense. So which is written by—written in scripture is not all the *dhamma* we mean. It is a part of *dhamma*, or it is *dhamma* in its narrow sense. In its wide sense, truth is the *dhamma*, especially in Zen, you know. We believe in no teaching [laughs]. [Coughs.] Excuse me.

Not only—it is also up to our attitude of living, you know. If we attach to some teaching or if we [are] bound by teaching, that teaching, even though it is good—if we think "This is the best teaching," then that is not Buddhist teaching any more. When we read it, we should be completely free from and appreciate the meaning of the teaching. That is how we understand *dhamma*. And *sangha* is, of course, his—Buddha's disciples and those who practice Buddha's teaching is sangha.

I think tonight I want to explain mostly what is *dhamma*, especially, and what is the fundamental teaching of Buddhism.

Teaching will be classified in two: pure teaching and teaching for human being, you know. For an instance, you know, science is also

¹ Suzuki-rōshi used the Pali pronunciation, so that spelling is used.

teaching for us, but science does not directly related to our human life. Of course it is related, but not directly. You may think science is more helpful than Buddha's [laughs] teaching, but it is not so. For an instance, Buddha said, "When you are shot—shot by a poisonous arrow," you know, "do you discuss the nature of poison?" you know, "What poison will it be? Is it acid or some other poison?" you know. No one discuss, you know, about the poison. To discuss what kind of chemical it is, you know, is science, and to pull out the arrow is [laughs] Buddha's teaching. So teaching how to pull out the poisonous arrow is another teaching. And what kind of poison it is, you know, to know what kind of poison it is another teaching. But both scientific true pure teaching which is not—which is always true whether human being, you know, studied or not is a truth—maybe teaching Number 1. And the teaching Number 2 [is] how to attain liberation for human being—is teaching Number 2.

I think why you become, you know, why mostly young people become interested in Buddhism is because you are tired of the teaching Number 1. And the teaching you study, you know, as a Number 2 teaching, is very old teaching. And especially the teaching Number 2 [is] based on the value over life, like which do we like: money or spiritual attainment, you know. Which is more important person who has, who is learned in sense of science, or who is—who attain liberation in spiritual world? This is a kind of value, you know.

The way you evaluate things is basic standard of the teaching of—teaching Number 2. Nowadays, you know, your way of, your standard of life, your understanding of life change. It's changing little by little. So the old—you are not interested in, you know, old standard of life, which is mostly based on comparative value. For maybe ten or twelve years or more, young people in Japan [have been] interested in Communism because, you know, the standards—viewpoint or standards of evaluating things is different.

So people started to [be] interested in it, but when you—when we study more and more, we found out that this kind of standard is not—not much different from our standard which we have being pride [proud?] in our human life. And Buddhist way of evaluation things—evaluating things is quite different from usual viewpoint. But I'm not—this evening, I'm not talking about this kind of thing because it is—it is necessary to discuss, maybe, discuss our life from various viewpoint, including politics [laughs], you know, and social science.

Tonight I want to explain Buddha's teaching as a Number 1—as a philosophy or as a more scientific viewpoint. As you know, the fundamental teaching of Buddhism is everything changes. This is the teaching, the fundamental teaching, which is always true and, which is true wherever you go. Even [if] you go to heaven, this is true. Even

though you go to hell [laughs], this is true. Wherever you go, there is nothing which does not change. We say Buddha is a teacher of all the teacher, or teacher of three world.² It means that his teaching is always true, you know, wherever you go. It is true in past and present and future. Even though you go to the moon, everything changes [laughs]. Even though you go to Mars, everything changes. So wherever we go, his teaching is true—always true.

Why this teaching is so important is because actually we do not accept this teaching completely. So for us, it is necessary to know—to make this teaching sure. And it is necessary to—to accept this teaching. So when you want to accept this teaching, it is—it is necessary for you, you know, to have teaching Number 2. When you just talk about Buddha's teaching, like me, you know [laughs], whether you accept it or not, or whether I complete—completely accept it or not, just to talk about like scientist or philosopher. This is teaching Number 1. But most religion, you know, put more emphasis on the teaching Number 2, teaching for just human being.

Of course, we Buddhists put emphasis on the teaching Number 1. But we Buddhist, for a long time, studied our teaching as a teaching Number 1, from historical viewpoint, or from scientific viewpoint, or from philosophical viewpoint. Not only special teachings for human being, but also teaching for every being. So when we say "sentient being," it include everything, not only human being, a dog, or a cat, or a worm—everyone—everything is—every animate being—not only animate being [but also] inanimate being is included. So accordingly Buddhism is—looks like very cold teaching, but on the other hand it is more universal and more scientific teachings.

Now, the teaching "everything changes" could be extended [to] the teaching of selflessness. Selflessness, you know, in its usual sense, you know, [means] don't be selfish. It is something—it looks like some rules. But when we say, "Don't be selfish,"—[it] means you cannot be selfish, you know. Even though you try to—to try to be selfish, you cannot be, you know, selfish because everything is changing, you know. Even though you try to be selfish, who is you, you know, when everything is changing?

We should not understand we exist in the same way always, in relation to others. For an instance, if I know, you know, I am always like me in this moment, if I know that, I cannot convince you, you know—I cannot be angry with you so much because tomorrow I shall be some other person. But because I think I am always like me, so I became angry with you. But that is not true. I cannot be angry with you. There is no reason for it—to be angry with you. Or I cannot try—there

² Possibly *triloka* (Sanskrit), the three worlds or spheres that make up *samsāra*.

is no reason why I should try to convince you in some special way because, you know, I cannot be always in this way. I don't know, I—I may change my mind tomorrow. No one knows [laughs] what will happen to me. But when I am trying to convince you [of] something, it means that, you know, I—I am always like this, and what I think is right is always right. But it is not so. Actually it is not so.

Even though I think it is right at this moment, tomorrow I don't know what do I say. That is true—very true. If we know that everything is changing, you know, even though I think here is a cup like this [moves cup across table and takes a sip of water], but this cup cannot be always like this. Moment after moment, the cup is changing. But if someone break it I shall be, you know, disappointed. But if I know that this is always changing, we will—I shall not be discouraged so much because I know someday it will be broken.

And we always expect something to be always same, but that is not true too because everything is changing. So even though we expect something to be always same, or try to—or to expect something always same, is not possible. And if you expect something to be always same, it will be the cause of suffering, you know, because even though you expect something to be same, but it change. When you change some—you see something changed, you will be discouraged. So to expect something always [to be the] same is the cause of trouble for you.

So same truth—"things always changing"—in one way it is truth itself, and it is the truth—something to do with you. And we do not—Buddhists do not ignore teaching as a teaching Number 1. Even though we say, "Don't be like this," it means that the foundation of the teaching is Number 1 teaching always. This is one of the characteristic of Buddha's teaching.

So meaning—even though we say, "Don't be selfish," the meaning is quite different. The meaning is—what we mean is it is not possible for us to be selfish. And if you try to be selfish, it will be very—it will create [for] you some trouble. And you should know that. So even though no one ask you to be unselfish, you should know whether it is possible to be selfish or not. What we mean is not **prophetary** [?]³ teaching, but some teaching which you should know by yourself and which you should study by yourself. So our teaching is not, you know, in this sense, [that] which was told by Buddha. The—our teaching is something which you should realize by yourself.

³ Suzuki-rōshi pronounced it "pra-FEET-a-ree," and he had difficulty with the word. The transcriber's best guess is "prophetary," as in pertaining to a prophet. Another possibility is "profitary," as in pertaining to profit.

The *sangha*, or Buddha's disciple, or between—relationship between Buddha and Buddha's disciple is—both is independent, you know. Disciple should not be always dependent on his teacher. We should try to study our way by ourselves. The teacher can help you, you know, in some way. But the teacher cannot help you completely because our teaching is not [that] which you can study literally. And teaching itself is—should be always changing. Today's teaching cannot be applied for tomorrow. Day after day, you should continue study our teaching according to the circumstances.

Famous Zen master Hyakujō⁴ was a disciple of Nansen.⁵ He said, "If we are like—if I am like my teacher Nansen—if we attain—if I attain—even though I have same power as my teacher, I shall lose half value of my teacher Nansen. So disciples should be better—better than our teacher."⁶ That is what Nansen—what Hyakujō said. It means that why we have disciples is because teaching should be changing always and should be extended always. And we cannot apply same teaching all the time. That is why you study Buddhism and you study our teaching. The teaching itself—so teaching itself should be changing as everything changes. The teaching that everything changes is very important teaching for Buddhist.

Nowdays people understand—people are very much interested in [*tape defective and unclear for 8-12 words*] ..., but we should, you know, know the depth of teaching that everything changes. And we should try to understand this teaching directly. As Dōgen-zenji said, "The teaching 'everything changes' is not something—some teaching which you realize after many years' practice. It is teaching you should directly know."

When we, you know, we say "to have direct experience of it." What do we mean is to appreciate things not because of something is useful or not, not because of something is favorable for us or not. Usually, you know—at Eihei-ji there is bridge named **Hanshaku-kyo**.⁷ Hanshaku-kyo means Half-Dipper Bridge, because Dōgen-zenji, after using, you know, water from the dipper—half of the water from the dipper, and he returned it to the river always. Half-Dipper Bridge. Usually, you know, if there is—at Eihei-ji there is—it is a valley like Tassajara, and the stream is full of pure water. And there will be no need to, you

⁴ Baizhang Huaihai (Hyakujō Ekai): 720–814. Dharma successor of Mazu Daoyi (Baso Dōitsu), as was Nansen. Suzuki-rōshi may have meant to say "Jōshū" instead of "Hyakujō."

⁵ Nanquan Puyuan (Nansen Fugan): 748–835. Dharma successor of Mazu Daoyi and master of Jōshū Jūshin (778–897).

⁶ See also SR-70-06-17.

⁷ Hanshaku-kyo: a bridge beyond the entrance gate of Eihei-ji. (See also "Nirvana, the Waterfall," in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, p. 92.)

know, return it to the river after he used half of it. But he always return it to the river.

Usually, you know, water is valuable because when—only when it is not so much, you don't use so much water as we do in sip. But at Eihei-ji monastery we cannot use—we cannot wash our face by—with— with bucketful water. We—we always use 70% of the water.⁸

Usually, you know, we evaluate things because [depending on] whether it is—whether we have a lot of it or not. If we haven't so much, the water become valuable. And our economy—economic principle based on, you know, our labor and the things we have. And if, you know, something is—if we don't have some particular things ...
[Sentence not finished. Tape turned over.]

... this is, you know—whether you think some other principle and evaluate things or not is the point.

Things are valuable because—usually because the things are, you know, produced by labor. But labor is—of course, we should count labor, but more important thing is the place we stand up with earth,⁹ you know. So labor or something which—something which we have plenty of it or not, is not count so much if we know how we exist in this moment like. This is very elaborate intellectual explanation.

But what I want to say is when you sit, you know, you should not think whether this practice is necessary or not [laughs]. Anyway, what I mean [is] you should sit. That is what I wanted to say, in short. [Laughs, laughter.] I go round and round. This is direct experience, you know, to accept yourself as you are. If you always look around like a hungry dog, you know, you will not gain anything. When you are ready to be there, you know, and to accept things which is given to you, then you will be—you will find out everything valuable. This point is missing, you know, in our life.

What we are always trying to is always finding some measurement, and we are trying to measure ourselves or measure our life. And if you don't feel good, you try to change your measurement. That is what we are doing. Now, you know, most of our young generation trying to change all measurement to new one [laughs]. But you don't try to, you know, measurement—measure things by your eyes, you know. You don't have to depend on measurement. You can measure it, you know, by your body, not because someone said this is valuable

⁸ That is, the monks fill their washbasins only 70%.

⁹ Possibly an allusion to Dōgen's statement, "Those who fall to the earth should stand up by the earth," in *Shōbōgenzō* "Inmo." Dōgen in turn was quoting the fourth Indian patriarch Upagupta in *Keitoku Dentōroku* (*Keitoku Era Record of the Transmission of the Light*), Chapter 1. (See also lectures SR-69-09-00-B, SR-69-09-00-C, and SR-71-08-21.)

or this is not so valuable, bec- [partial word]—not because someone said this is old or this is new.

You must have—accept before you, you know—we don't have to think so much. Mostly you can depend on your intuition. But you—you want, you know, always you depend on something always. And [*tape defective and unclear for 8-12 words*] ... to accept things as it is and try first by your intuition.

So whether we have plenty of water or not, we should best use of it—you should have best use of it. Whether you can sit—whether you can complete your practice or not, you know, you should try first, and when you returning to do it, you can do it. When you hesitate, you cannot do it. When we are completely [free?] from everything and try to open your mind, then you find your own way. And your, you know, behavior will change, and your face will change. Everything will change—not only you, but whatever you see. Things will change. Then, sometime, you can enjoy your measure to explain [laughs], you know, various way. But you shouldn't depend on measurement.

This is pretty difficult practice, but we will—you will see it [?]-try. This is how we accept the teaching [that] things changes. Because things changes, you should—we should be concentrated on each moment.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Sara Hunsaker.
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