

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Thursday, August 21, 1969
Tassajara

Suzuki-rōshi: If you want, please come here.

I am sorry I haven't prepare anything for lecture—for this lecture. So I should be very happy if you have some question and—so that I can say something about it. Do you have some questions? *Hai*.

Student A: Rōshi, you speak about the relationship of conditioned origination and free will and our everyday life? Is it possible to say anything about that? [Laughter.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Condition of?

Student A: The relationship of conditioned origination or the—

Suzuki-rōshi: Origination?

Student A: —the chain of causation and free will—free will to determine our own actions in our daily life.

Suzuki-rōshi: Free will? I don't—you know—what will—conditioned origination, what is it, do you think?

Student A: The twelve-fold chain of causation?

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student A: The twelve-fold-chain of causation—

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh, oh I see.

Student A: —and free will—the relationship of those two things.

Suzuki-rōshi: That's deep. [Laughs, laughter.] Do you know twelve links of causation? Twelve links of causation. The—our life originated from—started from ignorance. We came out of ignorance.

Excuse me. I have something in my mouth still [laughs, laughter].

Do you know something about it?

Student A: No.

Suzuki-rōshi: Why we came, you know, this world is because of

ignorance. Ignorance is the origin of—not "species," but origin of being, maybe. Yeah. Why we say so is because we think we exist here with some self-nature. So—but actually there is nothing to be called as self-nature. So that we think, "I am here with some self-nature" is actually not right. Why we have this kind of imperfect understanding of being—not only our self but also all being. Mis-[partial word]—not "misunderstanding," but a kind of delusion. To see something which does not really exist is delusion.

We say "eye-flower"—"eye-flower," you know. *Gan—ganka*.¹ Literal translation is "to see something," you know. Sometimes we see in the sky something like flower, you know. Or if you watch someone and see the sky, you will see some white, you know, some image in the sky. That—to see something which does not really exist is *ganka*, or "eye-flower." And we—actually, you know, what we see is not—does not actually exist in that way. Tentatively, you know, in the smallest particle of time, we exist in this way, but next moment we change into something else because we become older and older. In ten years you will be amazed at you—when you see yourself into the mirror [laughs]. "Oh, this is me? I have no hair here! [Laughs, laughter.] That cannot be me," you know. "Maybe someone else." [Laughs, laughter.] That is right, you know, someone else. We changed already into someone else. But I think I am still young and I am still exist here as I was. But that is not true.

And so when nothing exist permanently, to see something as some idea of a concrete being is ignorance. So everything comes out of ignorance. So being, real being, between—relationship between the real reality and real being which we see is originality [originally?] from ignorance. So first of all we count ignorance.

And we, you know—as soon as we have ig- [partial word]—from ignorant, you know, we see some activities, some concrete being, you know, start to act with each other. This is—and when, you know, some activity start we will have some idea, and we will have—will—as soon as we have some idea, we will have names for it. In this way our knowledge of this world or understanding of things will develop. This is, you know, causation.

But this series of—or, what should I say? This kind of explanation of causation is actually something which happened in disorder, you know. But it explains inter-relationship between our idea—many ideas and—and reality. And by this kind of explanation we will understand how we exist here or what kind of knowledge about our life we have. So to know—when we know this—when we understand our life in this way, we will—we will have deeper understanding of life.

¹ *gan* = eye; *ka* = flower. A disease of the eye. Hence, delusion.

Before we have this kind of understanding, you know, we just think we were born at certain time, and we start some activity, and we—we start to have some experience of life and—or knowledge, and we will become older and older until we die. This is, you know, usual understanding of life. But if we understand our life—if we understand our life started from ignorance, you know, and what is ignorance, and what is our life in its usual sense, then you will not be attached to our life, and our understanding of life will be quite different from the understanding we had before.

This is actually—while we—if we count in this way until sickness and death, that is twelve links of causation. Even Buddhists in ancient time—or when—some Buddhists understood the twelve links of causation is the explanation of how we came to this world and how we become old and die. But this is not perfect understanding of causation, of twelve links.

This is actually—sometime we count ten, you know, instead of twelve. Sometimes we—there is no need always to be twelve, you know. It is actually the truth of inter-relationship between things. As Buddha said, "As 'A' is here—as 'A' arise, 'B' arise. As 'A' vanish, 'B' vanish." This is, you know, the original teaching of Buddhism. As "A" exist—when "A" arise, "B" arise. When ignorance arise, you know, our being arise. So the relationship between ignorance and our being is inter-dependency. The truth between ignorant—ignorance and some being is inter-dependency. We are inter-dependent being. This is actually, you know—the—in short, twelve links of causation should be understood like: As "A" arise, "B" arise. As—when ignorance arise, the suffering like birth, or old age, or sickness and death, will arise. This is, you know, the real understand- [partial word]—true und- [partial word]—better understanding of causation of—causation in twelve links.

So if you apply this teaching to your everyday life without sticking to some idea, without perfect freedom from things, we can work on everything. That is how we apply this teaching to our everyday life. I think you may have some books about—those teaching is—belongs to very old teaching like Theravāda Buddhism or early period of Buddhist thought—Buddhist thought. You—you have to study—when you study history of Buddhist thought, you have to study this kind of teaching.

Okay? That is just bone of the teaching of twelve links of causation. Do you have some question about—maybe about this—related to this? If possible, I want you to ask some question about this topic of twelve links.

Student B: Rōshi?

Suzuki-rōshi: *Hai.*

Student B: Usually in the Japanese Zen explanation of the twelve causal links is that it takes place over many lifetimes.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student B: Three lifetimes, I think, at least. Would you speak about that?

Suzuki-rōshi: That—that is, you know, as I say, more, you know, maybe I can say primitive, you know, explanation. They, you know—before, you know, many people understood in that way, but if you study the history of early Buddhism, you may—you may find out how, you know, this teaching came to twelve links. Before twelve links we have ten or eight, you know [laughs]. And—so maybe, you know, teaching why we suffer, you know, like four noble truths, it is originated—that kind of teaching, and more and more that is something which we should know.

Originally Buddhist teaching is not so complicated. It was quite—quite—it is—it was more easier to understand. But while, you know, priests started to become a priest which is some—who is something different from layman, you know, they studied and studied, and they made our teaching more, maybe, professional [laughs, laughter], more philosophical with some convincing, you know, power. But like music, you know, if you study many music, you know, you will, you know, understand how contemporary Japanese music, you know, became in this form. In this way we will, you know, go back to the old teaching which was told by Buddha. I think to study complicated philosophy is maybe good, is maybe necessary. But to st- [partial word]—to understand it more simpler way, so that we can apply it directly to our everyday life, may be more important, I think. *Hai.*

Student C: Rōshi, many times when we ask you questions we want to know what your idea is. You tell us that you have no particular idea. And I think in one of the *sesshin* lectures in San Francisco you taught—I think it was two words in Japanese and it was three words in English: "Not always so."²

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] Yeah.

Student C: And I wonder if these ideas which you talked to us about are maybe before the arising of ignorance or of their—what—when a thought arises are we then trapped by the links, by these twelve links?

² "The secret of Sōtō Zen is, you know, just two words: 'Not always so.' Oh—oh—~~three~~ words [laughs, laughter] in English. In Japanese, two words. 'Not always so.' This is secret of the teaching" (SR-69-08-07).

If a thought arises but we know it's not always that way, are we possibly a little bit freer?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. A little bit freer. But it does not mean to ignore things as we see, you know. But we must be detachment—we must be detached from it at the same time. This is the main point of practice, why we practice. *Hai.*

Student D: When we moved rocks with you today—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student D: —this—and then we talked philosophically—"But these aren't always rocks." Or we put them in one form, but they can go in another form. I sometimes experience this difficulty of what I experience everyday and yet trying to be detached from that at the same time. Do you know what I mean?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. I—I know what you mean, but there is no special way, you know. There is no secret [laughs, laughter]. That is why, you know, we practice with you and we practice zazen. Even though you try, you cannot, you know—something which you cannot. Or it is not something which could be done by trying to, you know, do so. It is something which will come to you or which will happen to you. So anyway, you know [laughs], the only way is to come to Tassajara [laughs, laughter]. [2-3 words]. That way—that is the secret [laughs, laughter].

Student E: Is it possible that before one gets to a point where one can accept that nothing exist, that one can see things in a different way so that they not only do exist but exist much more substantially as one sees them the way they are apart from one's own ego or one's self. Does that kind of happen?

Suzuki-rōshi: Who is talking [laughs, laughter]? I hear a voice only. Huh? Oh, I see, excuse me. I became old, you know [laughs, laughter].

I think you understand pretty well. So if you understand that much and practice our way, that is how you should do—how you should make progress in your practice and in—in your everyday life, I think. Do you have some special difficulty? No? I think that's very good, I think.

Some more question? *Hai.*

Student F: I wonder about the question of how concerned and in what way would you advise us to be in relation to the rest of the

sangha, the other people that we're practicing with. For example, suppose we're working with other people, and we're talking, and one of us feels—suppose we're working with other people, and we're talking, and one of us feels that we should not be talking, we should be quiet. Would you advise that person to please ask the others to be quiet? [Laughs.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Sometime but [laughs, laughter]—may be better not to—try not to, you know, but sometime you have to, maybe. All of us are trying, you know, pretty hard. So naturally if you live in this way, actually we are helping with each other. Anyway let's try little by little. *Hai*.

Student G: Would you speak about the relationship of one moment to the next moment—one moment to another moment?

Student: A little louder please.

Student G: Would you speak about the relationship of one moment to the next moment?

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] Two ways—what will be the one way and what will be the other way. One—relationship—one moment after—one moment and next moment. One answer is no relationship. Another answer is relationship—there is relationship [laughs]. That is why I'm laughing, you know. If I—if I have to say something, you know, I must say in two ways.

Do you know the story of Hyakujō?³ Hyakujō. I—yeah, I told you, you know [laughs, laughter]. When Hyakujō, you know, started his temple there were an old, old man who were listening [to] his lecture all the time. One day, after all the student left he didn't leave. He was stay there—staying there. So Hyakujō asked him, "Why do you stay?" And that old man said, "Actually I was in this temple before you come to this temple. And because I gave wrong answer [laughs] to student, I changed, you know—my life changed. Next—in next life I became a fox. But in disguise of human being as I am a fox I am here, right here." Hyakujō asked, "What was the mistake you made?" Someone asked the old [man], "When someone asked me if the causation—the truth of causality—result [cause] and effect—always exist in the same way." And the old man said, "No, it doesn't exist. If you—if you are—if you practice zazen you will be beyond the truth of the causation." So it means that there's no relationship between I and, you know—in this moment and the next moment.

³ Hyakujō Ekai (Baizhang Huaihai): 720–814. Chan master of the Tang period. Dharma successor of Baso Dōitsu and master of Ōbaku. The story about Hyakujō and the fox is from *Mumonkan (Wu-Men Kuan, Gateless Gate)*, Case 2.

Because that answer was not right, he became a fox in his next life. "And I cannot get out of the life of fox since then. So if you have some—if you give me some good perfect teaching, I will be free from the karma to be a fox."

So Hyakujō said repeat the question, you know, and he repeated his question. And this time Hyakujō answer, "Yes! It exist [laughs]." "You will be a fox next life too because [laughs, laughter]—because you are fox in this life. So next time you will be a fox too. Maybe American fox or Japanese fox, I don't know [laughter]. Anyway you will be a fox," he say. At that moment he attained enlightenment [laughs, laughter].

Sometime yes, sometime no. So if you stick to some understanding—dualistic understanding of yes or no, that will be the wrong answer. Because reality does not—is not exist in that way. "Yes" is right, and "no" is right too. Or "yes" is not right, "no" is not right. *Hai*.

Student H: Rōshi, in order to feel compassion for yourself and for others, one must be detached. But to be detached would mean not to have memory of suffering, and I don't understand how you can feel compassion without remembering suffering.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, suffering—when we suffer there may be two ways, even though we say here is same problem, yes and no, you know. When we suffer, you know, actually we suffer—suffering exist, you know. But suffering does not exist like, you know—we do not suffer like usual person suffer. Still suffering is there—here in the same way, but how we feel about it is different—how we accept suffering is different. So it does not mean to—even though we say we should be—go beyond suffering, but it does not mean to have no suffering. We suffer, but, you know, way we suffer is not same. Okay? And the difference is—the suffering—the other side—we know, because we know, you know, we—we know how—why we suffer and how we suffer.

When we know, really, why you suffer, you will know how to get out of suffering. If you know why you, you know, come to Tassajara, you know, you will know how to go back to San Francisco [laughter]. So even though you are at Tassajara you don't feel so bad, because you know how to go back to San Francisco. But when you don't know how to go back to San Francisco, you know, the difficulty we have here may be the same, but there are big difference between the person who know how to go back to San Francisco and who don't know how to go back. This kind of difference is there. And to suffer—to help others, you know—to suffer just for—because—just for ourselves is different. Sometime we suffer, you know—we stayed someplace

where there is suffering and we suffer with people. There is big difference. Okay? *Hai*.

Student I: When you were talking about the [gap of 1-2 seconds] our parents give us and the face that our practice gives,⁴ would you—you mentioned that at certain times in life, one should have laid a foundation,⁵ and I didn't understand exactly what you meant by a foundation for the life or what it was a foundation of. [*Sentence finished. Tape turned over.*] ... you said at a—

Suzuki-rōshi: Our—how—I explained about the foundation of life. The foundation—when your practice is right, you know, you will make actual progress. But if your practice is wrong, and [you] continue your practice like you do someth- [partial word]—like you practice something else, it doesn't make any progress as a, you know, Zen student. Because, you know, direction is quite different. Do you understand the direction? *Hai*.

Student J: If we're moving in this direction, then Zen students might say: "Are we to forget about other directions or are we to be here and now and just be students?"

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Maybe, you know, for most of us because our—we are family rooted, you know, we have very strong habit. So to go the other way is pretty difficult. Unless you make big effort, it is not possible to go the other way. You cannot do it—you cannot do both way at the same time. Direction is, you know, opposite [laughs]. So you cannot, you know—if direction is similar maybe you can, but quite opposite. If you go this way you cannot go that way.

Student J: There seems to be—it may be my dualistic mind, but—but when I practice here it eliminates, right away, many things in the secular world—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student J: —totally because the practice is very different—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

⁴ "We say when you are young your face is given to—was given by your parents. But after forty, you know, your face is—will be given to you by your practice" (SR-68-08-18).

⁵ "[In your early twenties you] have to study something, you know. That is the time you make foundation of your life. We should make background or foundation of our life. And after twenty-five, we should ... try out things ... by all means. And when we become forty, you know, we should be able to manage our life without using some special means or special things" (SR-68-08-18).

Student J: —and the way is different, the path is different.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.⁶

Student J: And so I have dropped those things. So in a sense my world becomes different. But I get a feeling while I'm here that we're only supposed to be here a short time to train. And then we're supposed to go back to that, you might call it, "other world" where the practice is very much in opposite direction. And could you talk about that?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, good question. It is good question to me too. You know, we should know, you know, we should observe ourselves very carefully. It is not matter of, you know, to go to San Francisco or to stay here. Even though you stay here, you have same problem. And this—about this kind of thing I explained already in previous lectures. To get up and—with people is practice. There you have very strong root of—you have strong root of opposite practice. So even though you are here, there—it does not mean that if you are here everything is okay. Even though you are here, there are many things to work on, even though you are sitting, you know. Of course, there is —you shouldn't say—you shouldn't make some excuse for it: "Because I am sitting, I cannot practice my way." That is wrong. If you observe yourself closely there is many things which you can do, which you can practice, or which you can work—work on it.

Student J: My feeling is that while I'm here if I go back—say I went back in the city tomorrow, I would just encourage and continue this twelve chains of causation. That—my practice, in the city, wouldn't be good for other people as well as for myself. And I feel, this may be selfish, but I feel that my practice here, in a sense, is for everyone. And the feeling is to want to stay here or stay in this type of environment, maybe not here but somewhere else, and sort of be on the path, well along the path, to be able to help other people, rather than to go stay here awhile and get a little bit of light, and then go back in the city and get all covered in soot, and—and contribute to the soot in the city. It's a great difficulty for me.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. The "great difficulty" mean—is not same difficulty I mean, you know. That difficulty is something which you—could be solved quite easily. If you stay here, that's all [laughs, laughter], you know. That's—that is not so big problem.

Student J: Isn't there a rule you can't stay here beyond a certain length of time? I thought that our practice was to stay here and train

⁶ SR says "Mm-hmm" or "Yeah" several more times throughout the student's question.

and then go back. Maybe I was wrong.

Suzuki-rōshi: You are wrong!

Student J: Good! [Laughter.]

Suzuki-rōshi: *Hai.*

Student K: You said that if we understand why we suffer, then we can get out of suffering. So maybe you can [laughter] explain why we suffer.

Suzuki-rōshi: Why we suffer, you know, is because we expect something which you shouldn't expect, and you want to gain something which you cannot have it. You know? That is why. You think you can, you feel you can accept [expect?]. That is not possible. For most of the people something which you think you can is not something you cannot. If you think [about it] more that is very true, because, you know, our life started by ignorance [laughs]. So here is big, you know, truth or being called, you know, immutable truth. First of all we should know that, and, you know, we should do something with ourselves. This is too big problem to, you know, to talk about. That is true. *Hai.*

Student L: How are we to know that what we expect is something we can't get, unless we try to get that? [Laughter.] For example, the questions of war and peace. Now I think of spiritual—

Suzuki-rōshi: For?

Student M: War and peace.

Suzuki-rōshi: War. Yeah.

Student M: Yes. And I think spiritual people would like an end to war —

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student M: —and they might suffer if they expect it and don't get it.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student M: But who's to say that they might, in fact, get it if they work for it?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. War, you know, it will not be, you know—we cannot put an end to it, you know. I don't think so. But if we do not

make any effort to put an end to it, you know, what will be happen to us? So anyway, we should—even though it is not possible, we should—knowing that it is not possible, we should try to keep our effort to stop it. That is more Buddhist—our way. Although we know that that is not possible, we—we should not be discouraged by it, by knowing. If something is right, anyway we should try and keep—continue to try, keep continue to work on it. But usual effort of putting end to war is—they—most people may think that is possible. But in some way, you know, not by gun, but in some way war will be continued in our life. I think in this way.

So to—if all of us try to, you know, put an end to war, even though we have actually some war between us—tragedy—we will not have this kind of tragedy. By fighting some big confidence, you know—with some big confidence to win or to put an end to it is, you know, again the cause of the war. You will cause war because you think it is possible and because you think you are completely right, you know. That is not so, you know. That is not always so. That you expect—that you think it is possible is already wrong. So, you know, you shouldn't think you are completely right. But still you should try to be right. I think this is very important point for—for us right now especially.

So people may [be] divided in two and fighting with each other in the same country. One may say, you know: "We should not fight. We should stop war," you know. "You are wrong, completely wrong." And the other may say: "You don't know," you know, "what is going on in this world. We should fight. If you don't fight, we will be lost." And he thinks he is completely right. So there is big gap between two party, and they have to fight again with each other. Same thing will be repeated. So if both of them knows they are not completely right there may be some way to help with each other. Because our understanding is very naïve, and, you know, rigid, and we have too much confidence in ourselves, we cannot help with each other. So "not always right" is very important teaching, very strict teaching. *Hai.*

Student N: Rōshi, the first of the vows, the three of our vows, we say, "Sentient beings are numberless, I take a vow to save them all." And I have two questions. One, what is there to save them from? And two, how do we go about saving them from whatever it is? [SR laughs, laughter.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh, that's terrible question [laughter] to ask. Go away! [Laughter.] You will get 30 blows. From what, you know? Why do you came here, you know? I must ask you [laughs]. Endless—to know the sentient beings are endless, you know, numerous, innumerable is very important. But like the answer would be the

same. Same answer. Why we should try to stop war, you know. So we will—anyway we will not be discouraged in our practice because we have no idea of perfection or attainment. Something which should be done, should be worked for anyway or else you don't feel so good, first of all. If you say, you know, "This is," you know, "complete practice, this is perfect," you know, then you will not have so much friends [laughter]. "You think so?" you may say. Japanese people do like this, you know [laughter—perhaps demonstrating]. You know, when fox—fox should—it—"Oh my, I became fox!" [Sounds like SR discovers the late hour.] [Laughs, laughter.] Excuse me.

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Sara Hunsaker. Checked by Diana Bartle and Bill Redican (9/6/01).