

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Monday Evening, August 25, 1969
Tassajara

Tonight, maybe, we will have question and answer. As usual, will you give me some questions? No questions?

Student A: Rōshi?

Suzuki-rōshi: *Hai.*

Student A: Could you explain how if improvement is one of the causes of suffering, how does our practice relate to it? Zazen seems to me to be one of things that is changing my life to the better.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. "Changing better," you know, there—there is problem, you know. Do you mean you have some problem or suffering, and by practice you think you can stop or you can—you will be more free from suffering, or what do you mean?

Student A: Well, for instance, in—in the practice of *ōryōki*—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student A: —seems to avoid a lot of bodily [1 word] suffering.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Student A: That seems to be why we practice *ōryōki*.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Practice—actually, the purpose of practice is to be completely, you know, devote ourselves to the something which you do. You know, that is the main point of practice. When you don't or when you do it carelessly, then your mind is not there. So your mind—when your mind is not there, then you are separated by your, if I say, if I use big word, by your surrounding. And you are here and you are separated by your place [where] you live. If—when you are separated by objective world and there is suffering, you know, but when you are completely devote yourself to what you do there is no separation, and [that] which exist there is not subjective world or objective world for you. *Ōryōki*, just *ōryōki* exist, you know, and that *ōryōki* covers everything—not only you but also everything will be covered by it or included by it. When this oneness appears there is no suffering. Do you understand? Suffering is—this is suffering [writing or drawing on blackboard]. When there is only one stick there is no suffering. Do you understand? When —when this kind of oneness take place there is no suffering. That is—

Student A: [1-2 word] all to yourself?

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student A: The impulse—the motivation to oneness—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student A: —itself seems to be a cause of suffering.

Suzuki-rōshi: Excuse me?

Student A: Unless I misunderstood what you said the other night about the motivation to improve it as being right—right there—right there we—we—that that itself is ignorance.

Suzuki-rōshi: Ignorance. Ignorance means, you know, in other word, "concrete." To be caught by concrete idea is ignorance. Here is *ōryōki*. Here is me, you know. That is ignorance. Actually there is no separation between *ōryōki* and you. But I don't why but we—we think: "There is *ōryōki*, and here is me." And most people think, you know, that is true, but it is not.

Let me explain more about this point: reality. People talk about difference between Western culture and Eastern culture, but I don't think there is nowadays. Japanese people are very much Westernized [laughs]. And our way of thinking and your way of thinking very much similar. But there is, anyway, which is Western or which is Oriental, I don't know, but there may be two ways of thinking. One is, you know, maybe more dualistic way of thinking, more analogical [analytical?] thinking—way of thinking. Analogy is, you know—it is not analogical, but, you know, when you analyze things, when you are not clear about it, you know, when you are not so sure about something, you analyze it. Psychologically or [in a] more scientific way you analyze things. And after you analyze it [is] why you suffer in dualistic sense, you know [laughs]? "Oh, this is why you suffer." That is analogy maybe. And you think this is the reality, you know. "In reality this is why we suffer," and you feel as if you solved the problem or question. That is more or less one way of thinking. I don't know if it is Western or Eastern.

But there is another, you know, quite different way of solving the problem. For an instance, there is man and woman, you know [laughing]. To solve the trouble between men and women to—to be get married. If you get married, you don't know which is which—which is man or woman [?]. When you get married man will be woman, and woman will be man. When you live in the same—in one family, you don't know which is which. That is how you solve the problem [laughs, laughter]. But some people don't feel, you know—when you don't know

which is husband and which is wife you don't feel so good. So you start to analyze the family life, you know, which is man and which is woman. If you feel like a man he is quite happy, and if she feel, you know, like a woman she is quite happy. And there are at least two ways of solving problems.

And ignorance, you know—we say ignorance does not mean—I don't think—sometime it means ignorance is something if you don't know about something, that is ignorance. But ignorance—in deeper sense it is source of the activity—our activity. Why we, you know, do something is because of ignorance. If you don't know exa- [partial word]—if you know exactly what you are doing, I don't think you will make such a great effort [laughs], you know. If you know, you know, it is not possible to save all sentient beings, maybe, you know, if he is not Buddhist he will give up. "Oh, it—that is impossible, so maybe better not do it from the first place." So it is good not to know things so clearly and to have some—to expect something.

But actually—what—actually we make—we are completely involved in ignorance. That is why we make our effort. [1 word]—things actually—the ignorance is actually the source of the energy in its deeper sense. So the ignorance—when we understand ignorance as a source of energy, the ignorance is not any more ignorance, you know. That is buddha-nature. There's no difference between ignorance and buddha-nature because when we realize our nature, you know, whether you are Buddhist or not, you will make your best [effort] to save all sentient beings. So there is no difference.

But when you, you know—when you—but you will make some mistake, you know, in your everyday life. When you do not know that your origin of or your source of energy is from the ignorance or buddha-nature, you will make some mistake. And you will [be] involved in the idea of good and bad. When you have good and bad—the idea of good and bad, you know, you are somewhat wary of doing something, you know, you're already, you know, became idle. "Is this good or bad? If it is good I will do it. If it is not good maybe not to do it." And you hope [if] it is something bad then there will not be no need to do it. Before you come to Tassajara you may ask, you know, "What is Zen?" Perhaps, sometime, you know, you—you hope Tassajara is good place. Sometime you hope—you think Tassajara may not be so good place. It is very hot. So may be better not go to Tassajara.

When we start to think about good or bad, there is some gap between you and reality—real life. And when you are very much, you know, eager to do something, already your idea of self is involved, you know. When you, you know, really—when what you do is just because of ignorance or buddha-nature, there is no problem. May be better, you know, to think, "Because of ignorance I am doing this," you know. This is maybe better

understanding of life. Learn to think, "Because of buddha-nature, I am doing this," you know, "because there is not much danger." When you think, "Because of ignorance I am doing this," you—you—I think people often say, "This kind of thing is something for a foolish one like me," you know. Clever smart one will never do this kind of thing.

You may—people say—I don't know how you say it in colloquial English, but you say something like this, "That is more," you know, "I think, better, and when you think I am not—I am—I'm maybe I'm doing something wrong, maybe I'm doing something foolish," you know. Then there is not much danger in your work.

Here again, you know, when we think in this way ignorance does not mean something bad, you know, something maybe foolish [laughs] but not so bad. The buddha-nature is not also include everything, you know. Good and bad is included by buddha-nature. Ignorance also include buddha-nature. So when we say ignorance we don't mean something bad or something good but something which is not—which we cannot escape from it. That is ignorance because everything is—appears because of ignorance, you know, like buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is—there is buddha-nature in all being. So buddha-nature is also something from which we cannot escape from. So that is a condition when man and woman live in the same house to solve the problem. This is more, you know, Buddhistic way of understanding of life. Do you understand?

When I say ignorance, you know, ignorance sometime maybe compared to anger or greediness, you know. Greedy mind is also ignorance. Anger is also ignorance. But in its more shallow sense, ignorance maybe to always to complain something or grumble at something is ignorance, you know. And to be always angry is anger. And to be always greedy of something is greediness.

But this is very superficial sense. Sometimes ignorance is as important as buddha-nature. So Dōgen-zenji says, "Practice should be established in delusion or ignorance" [laughs]. "Practice should be established in ignorance." Do you understand?

Student B: Could you explain further why it may be dangerous to practice from the viewpoint that one who is practicing buddha-nature—expressing buddha-nature—that why it may be more safe to practice from the standpoint of ignorance than from the standpoint of buddha-nature?¹

Suzuki-rōshi: You know, when your—when—if you practice, you know, our way, you know, whatever is the understanding like "Whatever you do

¹ Much of this question is inaudible on SFZC's copy of the tape (one microphone was being moved). It was restored from Dan Gourley's version of the tape.

that is," you know, "because of buddha-nature," you know—whether our practice is good or bad, you know, this is Buddha's practice, you know, then you cannot—you lose your point to which you work on. That is one. And you will be mixed up, you know. Your practice will not be so sincere enough.

So even after you attain enlightenment, you know, after you have enlightenment experience or—it is—you should practice zazen after you enlight- [partial word]—after you have enlightenment experience. Even though you attain enlightenment, you know, there is sign of ignorance. Ignorance is like a—maybe when it's like maybe like a kerosene lamp, you know. When it is in—the flame is in complete combustion, you know, that is enlightenment. When this is smoky, you know, that is ignorance. But the kerosene oil could be smoke, you know; sometime could be complete flame. So it if possible, you know, if it always smoky you don't feel good, even though you know whatever you do, that is because of kerosene flame. But actually [laughing] you will be [?] smoky. Kerosene oil is not so good. You know, it—I thought so same thing will happen to your practice. "Sōtō practice is not so good [laughs]. They say we have buddha-nature, so even though your practice is not so good, that is Buddha's practice." So anyway you should practice zazen, but actually you don't feel so good. So you think zazen practice—buddha-nature is something so smoky and so drowsy [laughs, laughter]. That kind of misunderstanding will happen. But if you think kerosene oil is something to make smoke, you know, then buy it.

Student C: How did—if we can—if we have no attachment to the gravity, we have no attachment to the gravity—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student C: —we can forget ourselves, forget our own interests, forget our families, and forget everything.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student C: By that way we will see our buddha-nature so that what we do or what we think will be no ignorance, and all beliefs will be buddha-nature, and no ignorance means no—no—no—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, yeah.

Student C: —[5-7 words] then there could be an easier way?

Suzuki-rōshi: Easier? No, I don't think so. [Laughs, laughter.] To say is very easy, but that is why, you know, before you start practice, student has this kind of question, you know. "Ignorance? What is

ignorance? And what is buddha-nature?" And we want to understand what is ignorance and what is buddha-nature. There are various way of thinking, you know. I realize that my way of thinking sometime is quite different from our students' way of thinking. So if I say something they will have big misunderstanding. So if you—we say forget all about—if you have no attachment to family or to this world, then we will have, you know, clear mind by which we can see the world as it is. That is very much so. But when we say, you know, forget all about everything. That is—to them the understanding to forget all about family is not same as we understand.

Student C: As you know and as I know, in Japan and in China I think we are—[3-5 words] of the links to—no—has no—has no attachment to everything because they live in the temple and try to bring salvation or bring enlightenment not for himself—not even for himself—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-hmm.

Student C: —[1-2 words] for all sentient being.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. That is what we have been taught, you know. But I am studying American Buddhism now [laughs, laughter]. As you make various questions, you know, I have to think also.

Student C: In a—for—in this—in this conjunction I would like to ask a question.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: As you know, and as I know, when a great nation, a great country which has their own culture and their own tradition like China and Japan, and when we adopted Buddhism, in case of China, because Buddhism and Taoism in some thing are very similar so that it is in a very natural way the Chinese people adopted Buddhism in a very natural way, no?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student C: At first [1-2 words] in modern times, in the last year, one or two hundred Christian emissary came East—

Suzuki-rōshi: Excuse me?

Student C: —Christian emissary—Christian [1 word]—the Catholic clergy—even Christian church—

Student C: Uh-huh.

Student C: —came to China and came to Japan—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student C: —and they have been there at least two hundred years, you know, at least two hundred years—maybe three hundred years.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student C: And they make very, very little progress—very, very little bit of progress in China or in Japan.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student C: [3-5 words] Buddhism and then Chinese people adopt it so easily, you know, so willingly. So willingly we are willing to adopt Buddhism. Right now when the Buddhism came this country, come to United States of America, do you think it has already been changed [?] for the American people to adopt Buddhism? This question I know might be difficult for you to understand; it might be answered by the American people.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student: That's who we are.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, we are, you know. We are. I think so. I think already it is time to study Buddhism for American people. I think—what I was going to say?—oh—some difference between, you know, to find out —to—way of solving problem. And, you know, what I want to say is, you know, by analogy [analyzing?]-I don't think to find our way of solving question by analogy [analyzing?] will not work, I think, because, for an instance, you respect creativity, you know, in your culture very much. And on the other hand you have highly improved science, you know. This is very opposite. The creativity is, you know, is personal effort, but science—

Student C: We are going to the moon now—the American people.

Suzuki-rōshi: —yeah—and seek for some—seek for some universality, you know. And I find Tassajara is going very well, you know. I am thinking [about] this point. I am—start to realize this point how—why Tassajara is, you know, developing so fast. It is because of you seek for —because you seek for universality. When you develop your life in some universal way, you know, there must be some rules. And you observe our rules, maybe more than Japanese or Chinese people do. This is very good, but there is some danger in it, you know. I feel some danger in it

because if Tassajara is under the complete, you know, control of rules, you know, we will lose the creativity of students.

So we seek for—Buddhism seek for—we don't seek for, you know, universality so much or creativity so much, but we seek for more validity, you know, to—validity is not universality or is not something personal. If it is personal, it will not have value. Just personal thing does not have value. Even though an artist, his work is so unique to himself and so creative work, but if people do not buy [laughs] or do not appreciate, you know, I don't know [if] that is art in its true sense. If it is very good, real art, it should be creative and it should not be something which people have seen it before. It must be something very unique and something quite new which people have never seen it before. Something like that is real art, I think.

So when our life is split in two, you know, universal life and individual life, you know, this kind of culture will not exist so long. When the culture is developed including creativity and universality, then that is true human culture, I think. And Buddhist—we call it "middle way" you know, which is not too much universal. If I say so, it is already [laughs] lose its meaning—true meaning, but I have no words to select so I have to say too much universal or too much individual.

Buddhist say—I don't use this kind of expression—Buddhist say if true culture if—should be universal—completely universal and completely personal [laughs], and should not be universal or coming—personal, you know. We—back and forth we use various expression, various statement on one fact. And whichever statement you—we use, this statement point out point exactly. When we have this kind of culture that is, I think, Buddhist culture. You know, "Our life is originated by ignorance. Yes, it is so. Our life is originated from buddha-nature. It is so." [Laughs.] Sometime our life is originated by ignorance. "No, it is not so. Our life is originated from buddha-nature. No, it is not so. I make many bad things!" [Laughs.] You know, whatever you say, that is true because we know what is our practice. This kind of, you know, understanding is beyond our words, and² this kind of understanding include various understanding of life. There is no, you know, confusion in it.

But if you stick to something, that is, you know [laughs]—what you said, you know—stick to the result of analysis. Or if you stick to not to analyze anything—just to grasp something as it is—just to grasp something as it is is not always good, you know [laughs]. It is like blind man to grasp something, you know. This is not good. To analyze something is not so good because, you know, you will grasp something dead instead of alive.

So our way of thinking is—our way of understanding or grasping things should not be just universal way, or scientific way, or artistic way, but

² From here onward is from Dan Gourley's version of the tape.

Buddhist way [laughs, laughter].

Student D: If I understand you right, what you are saying [is] you should not work toward a specific goal, because that's the same as grasping or craving, and we should not worry that we are hurting from ignorance or from buddha-nature. We should not worry which way we are going, because we are there already. Is that what you are saying?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student D: It is very difficult to actually abandon the idea of goals because it is a whole goal-oriented culture.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Mm-hmm. Yes. We should not give up, you know, our goal. That is—we shouldn't. But, you know, we should not be discouraged even though we cannot have it. So actually, as long as we are making effort, that is actual goal. That is what we always say. The real goal cannot be, you know, ten years after or [laughs] eleven years after.

Student E: Rōshi?

Suzuki-rōshi: *Hai.*

Student E: The problem I have—it's definitely a verbal problem—a word problem. It seems to come up over and over again. Right now, for myself, for example, if I don't have a goal, I lose right effort.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Student E: In other words, if I—if I see you, and your way, and I like it, I think [?] "Suzuki-rōshi's way is good. I'll follow Rōshi's way." In other words, there's a goal. And it creates energy in me to make an effort.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student E: Now if I look at you and I think, "Rōshi's way is just any old way, and someone else's way is just as good." Then I have no goal, and I make no effort.

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] My way is not some special way.

Student E: I know. You've said that, but—

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.]

Student E: —if I were to look at that, if I were to look at your way and not think it was special, then I would have no effort to do zazen or to be

here. Many students may not have the effort either to do zazen or be here if they didn't feel that your way was special.

Suzuki-rōshi: Not special but—

Student E: Now how does—

Suzuki-rōshi: —you know, I am making effort. That's all [laughs, laughter].

Student E: —how—how do we—how do we deal with this kind of duality, this kind of—I don't know what you would call it [?]

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. To—to be patient, first of all, and [laughs, laughter] to do it little by little. Try not to, you know, have it—all of, you know—immediate. Same thing, you know. And our way is very, you know—the more you go, you more you find it difficult, you know. That is Buddhism [laughs]. And that is good. If, you know, our way become more and more [1 word], you know, it will not help you so much.

There are many stories about this point. Did you talked—have I told you about Ungo—Ungo-zenji³ story? Tōzan,⁴ you know, Tōzan was a founder of—founder of Sōtō school, and he is—he was a great teacher, of course. And his disciple [was] Ungo—Ungo Dōyō. Ungo is name of the mountain. Dōyō was his name and his good disciple. And perhaps Tōzan was practicing zazen some place like Tassajara in remoted mountain. One day—or for many days—or for maybe one week or two weeks, I don't know—his disciple Ungo, you know, Dōyō didn't appear to zazen. That was all right, you know, because Tōzan told him to practice zazen in some other place, you know, and because you have enlightenment experience, and you are pretty well [?], so maybe you might as well practice alone in some other place.

So he went to some Four—Three Mountain—named Three Mountain,⁵ maybe like, you know, Horse Pasture [laughs].⁶ He—he had a—he made himself for—he made a small house for himself and practicing zazen there. But he has no kitchen facilities there. So he had to come to main zendō for meal.

But some—for several days or more, I don't know how long, maybe one week, two week, you know, he didn't appear in mealtime. So his teacher, you know, send someone to find one—to find out what he was doing. So he himself came to his teacher and said:

³ Yunju Daoying (Ungo Dōyō): d. 902.

⁴ Dongshan Liangjie (Tōzan Ryōkai): 807–869.

⁵ After leaving Tōzan, he went to the Three Peaks Hermitage.

⁶ A 180-acre parcel of undeveloped land near Tassajara.

"I am quite all right. I am practicing. I am fine."

And the teacher asked:

"What are—what do you eat?" You know, "You don't appear at mealtime." "

"Recently," you know, "some celestial being brings me some food for me. So I don't have to come to main zendō. I am eating something which was—which is—which is given to me."

And usually, you know, it is—it means a great progress, you know, to be a friend of celestial being [laughs]. May be very, very good. But Tōzan was scolded him—Tōzan scolded his disciple:

"Your practice—I thought your practice was much better than that. But your practice is still," you know, "in the area of celestial beings."

What do you mean by—do you know what does it mean to be—some attachment, you know, of good and bad? Celestial being is good, and to have—to have some food from him or from her is something, you know, good, maybe. But for Tōzan it is not so good. There is, you know—his practice is still in area of good and bad. And, you know, he told him—Tōzan told Dōyō to stay in main zendō [laughs]. "Maybe you shouldn't practice zazen alone." And he burned his small, you know, hut. That is very famous story.⁷

That is, you know, how we practice zazen. There is no limit in our practice. And at last the teacher accepted him as his successor. And Dōyō went to Ungo—Mount Ungo and established a monastery there.⁸

So, you know, there is no limit.

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Sara Hunsaker and Bill Redican. Checked by Bill Redican (9/10/01).

⁷ Versions of this story appear in *Denkōroku* 40 and *Record of Dongshan* 49.

⁸ Jenru (True Thusness) Temple on Mt. Yunju (Ungo), Jiangxi Province.