

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
SUMMER SESSHIN SHŌSAN CEREMONY
Tassajara
September 1969

[Beginning of ceremony was not recorded.]

Suzuki-rōshi: ... it will be the foundation of the everyday activity. That is real [1 word].

Student A: Thank you very much.

Student B: Dōchō-rōshi, if our karmic thoughts interfere with our breath counting, just as do the flies in the zendō, should we not try to rid ourselves of them, even though it is a nice aid our practice?

Suzuki-rōshi: Excuse me [2-3 words]—

Student B: If our karmic thoughts interfere with our breath-counting —

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student B: —just as do the flies in the zendō—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student B: —should we not try to get rid of them, even though it is an aid to our practice?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Karma is actually something really exist—something you created, and something you feel [1-2 words] or something which you—or which drive you in some certain direction. That is karma. But that karma is not like flies. It is not substantial being. It is just our habit. So it is—there is no need to try to get rid of it. To have right understanding of it through right practice is to get rid of it. So when you practice zazen, you should not have any idea of karma.

Student B: Thank you very much.

Student C [Katharine Thanas]: Dōchō-rōshi, Trudy's¹ ashes are on our altar. And she is with us in our memories and in many other ways. How does she exist for us now in form or emptiness or neither—both?

¹ Gertrude Horton (Trudy) Dixon, one of Suzuki-rōshi's students. She died at the age of 30 on July 9, 1969. (See SR-69-07-11.)

Suzuki-rōshi: In both—in sense of form, she exist in front of you—in each one of you. And the emptiness—she is ready to help every one of us.

Katharine: *Dōmo arigatō gozaimasu.*²

Student D: Dōchō-rōshi, why is it the harder I practice, the worse I feel?

Suzuki-rōshi: Because—because you feel worse, you practice hard. And because you practice hard, you feel hard and worse, that's all. So don't—even though you feel bad—worse, you shouldn't be discouraged by it. That you could—that you can overcome is—means you are practicing our true way in its true sense.

Student D: Thank you very much.

Student E: Dōchō-rōshi, I would like to say my mind, but I have a great deal of difficulty in expressing it.

Suzuki-rōshi: In—?

Student E: Expressing it.

Suzuki-rōshi: Expressing your mind. You are expressing your mind fully always even though you don't know.

Student F: Dōchō-rōshi, what question can you ask a sweet potato?

Suzuki-rōshi: A sweet potato? Many question [laughter]. May I eat you? [Laughs, laughter.] When may I eat enough to be [1-2 words]? Many, many question. [Laughs, laughter.]

Student F: Thank you very much.

Student G: Dōchō-rōshi, in counting our breath practice, you said—you told us to put our emphasis—some effort on the exhalation—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student G: —and let the inhalation come naturally. I find my inhalation is very rugged, and it seems some—some—there seems some imbalance by putting all the effort in one direction. I wondered if there's any special reason why you emphasize the exhalation.

Suzuki-rōshi: Emphasize. I mean to have complete exhale. Maybe

² Thank you very much.

your exhaling is not complete. Even though you try to exhale fully, may not be deep enough or complete enough.

Student G: I feel my inhalation is not complete unless I make an effort. Would there be any—would it be all right to make an effort, a slight effort, on the inhalation too?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes, yes. If so [?]. But we can exhale—exhalation mean to empty your chest and to make more space for your lung, pushing everything down. So if you know how to do it—how to make complete exhalation, then naturally I think you can make good inhale.

Student G: Thank you very much.

Student H: Dōchō-rōshi, *mada*.

Suzuki-rōshi: *Mada* is—*mada* mean "not yet."³ Not yet is very important words. Already because we will have—never have—we will never have a chance to say "already."⁴ *Mada, mada, mada* is very good practice.

Student H: Thank you very much.

Student I: Dōchō-rōshi, what is there to say?

Suzuki-rōshi: Nothing.

Student I: Thank you very much.

Student J: Dōchō-rōshi, anyways, is this it?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. [Long pause before and after.]

Student J: Ah. Thank you very much.

Student K: Dōchō-rōshi, before a mirror [?] comes it has already arrived. Counting to ten never was [?] one. Walking to, there is no approaching. Crickets are chirping, and the flies fly. You tell us to extend ourself in practice. In what direction can I extend?

Suzuki-rōshi: Direction? There is no direction, but not to lose anything—to be kind to everything, one by one, is the direction of the practice. So in our practice we have no particular goal or object—special object. So whatever it is you should work on it, one by one.

Student K: Thank you very much.

³ *mada* (Jap. adjective): "not yet" (with negative).

⁴ It sounded like Suzuki-rōshi was saying "already" in contrast to "not yet."

Student L: Dōchō-rōshi, even if I go [4-6 words]. Is that—how can I be with you?

Suzuki-rōshi: [1-2 short sentences unclear.]

Student M: Dōchō-rōshi, there seems to be such a difference between myself when I'm completely involved with counting my breath or in some activity, and when I have my thinking mind. I'm always hunting for some way to put the two together. Somehow it seems very dualistic to always be trying to resist my thinking mind.

Suzuki-rōshi: Sometimes when you think, you should sit completely with pure thinking and not resisting thinking mind. But to rely on thinking mind is not so good. You can practice thinking, but the answer you get by thinking is not only answer you should know. You will have some direction to work on. If you have some direction to work, then you should be completely involved in the work, directed by thinking mind. That is true practice, and that is pure thinking. To think and to know the direction is two different things.

Student M: But it seems like those two minds are always battling each other beyond my control—

Suzuki-rōshi: Ah—that is not thinking.

Student M: —and there's nothing I can do about it.

Suzuki-rōshi: That is not thinking. That is a kind of lack of conviction. You need my stick, maybe [laughs, laughter].

Student M: Something [laughs].

Suzuki-rōshi: Maybe so. Later I will give you big stick [laughs, laughter].

Student M: Thank you very much.

Student N: Dōchō-rōshi, if zazen is to make us free of all things, how should we know the choice between one thing and another—how should we make it?

Suzuki-rōshi: If the time come, you will completely know what [5-6 words] should be.

Student N: Thank you very much.

Student O: Dōchō-rōshi, what am I asking you?

Suzuki-rōshi: I know what you want to ask me pretty well. But as you don't ask me now, I also don't want to answer you [laughter].

Student O: But I'm not sure that I know. That's why I thought maybe you would know [laughs, laughter].

Suzuki-rōshi: I know [laughs, laughter].

Student O: Will I know sometime to ask you?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes. But not now [laughter].

Student O: Thank you very much.

Student P: Dōchō-rōshi, I always have some question, but the question is always formless—can't limit it to ask.

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm Yeah. That is the nature of doubt or question. As Susan [Student O?] said, it is difficult to put your question into words—very difficult. That is why you study various teaching of Buddhism. And it will give you some way to formulate your question. That is why you study some teaching.

Student P: Thank you very much.

Student Q [Bill Shurtleff]: Dōchō-rōshi, in walking, the floor seems smooth and cool underfoot. Several winters and several summers. Push brooms, and damp mops, and brush of feet, and foreheads from people who are here, and people who are not here, and people who are living, and people who are not living. Right here, in the midst of the three treasures, with all sentient beings, where is the mind that includes everything?

Suzuki-rōshi: Whenever you feel in that way, wherever you go with that feeling, the big mind will be. But the great mind [2-4 words] more than that. But you are—you should be very grateful to know even a part of it.

Bill: Thank you very much.

Student R: Dōchō-rōshi, although no one ever touches the bell, yet sound constantly issues forth from it. How is this possible?

Suzuki-rōshi: That was—that happened [1-2 words] from beginningless beginning, and maybe [1-2 words] beginningless—endless end. That is how things exist. How to know—once you know how things exist, you know, [is] the most important point for us to

work on rather than what will become of it [?] or how it start.

Student R: What do you mean "how things exist"?

Suzuki-rōshi: How things exist is how you survive [?], and how you [1-2 words], and how to be kind to others, why don't you feel so good or feel good.

Student R: To understand the causes and the—?

Suzuki-rōshi: "Causes" means not substantial causes. How it goes, you know, is what we mean by "cause."

Student R: How the process goes?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Because there is no substantial thing exist. Only thing we can know is how one whole big being goes.

Student R: Thank you very much.

Student S: Dōchō-rōshi, on the sixth morning I stopped counting my breath.

Suzuki-rōshi: Excuse me?

Student S: On the sixth morning I stopped counting my breath. And when I inhaled I meditated on life. And when I exhaled I meditated on death. And sometimes I found that when I was inhaling I was meditating on death, and when I exhaled I was meditating on life. And on my cushion my life and death went tumbling over each other. And something I recognized was watching—something that keeps telling me it's happening the way it should. And when I am ready, I will be taken. But I still cannot accept my doubt and my fears. And when I get off of my *zafu*, I look for the way out.

Suzuki-rōshi: When you count your exhaling and inhaling? Or exhaling only?

Student S: When I counted, I was counting exhalations.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student S: When I did this I was meditating "life, death, life, death."

Suzuki-rōshi: Which?

Student S: Both.

Suzuki-rōshi: Counting or—?

Student S: No, just the words. Life. Death. And—and—

Suzuki-rōshi: Is there any difference between "one" and "life and death"?

Student S: They tumbled over each other.

Suzuki-rōshi: Tumbled over each other?

Student S: Yes. Sometimes—

Suzuki-rōshi: [Hits *kyosaku* (wake-up stick) twice—possibly hitting the student.] Is this "death" or "one"? Or life or death? Which?

Your practice is—your understanding of practice is not right. Okay? Think about it. What is death, and what is life? What is one, and what is two? And is there some difference between them or not? Your practice should not be tumbling over.

Student S: Thank you very much.

Student T: Dōchō-rōshi, how long have we been sitting together, and how long will we continue to sit together?

Suzuki-rōshi: No one knows. [Laughter.]

Student T: Thank you very much.

Student U: Dōchō-rōshi, there are many beautiful rocks in your garden. Do they follow the same breathing practice we do?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes.

Student U: How do they do it? [Laughter.]

Suzuki-rōshi: It is no wonder we can't know [?].

Student U: Thank you very much.

Student V: Dōchō-rōshi! HO! [Shouted by student.] Not me. Not even a sound. What is it?

Suzuki-rōshi: Sound.

Student V: Thank you for everything.

Student W: Dōchō-rōshi, wind blows, bell rings, pain in the legs [laughter]. Who enjoys this?

Suzuki-rōshi: You enjoy it. [Laughter.]

Student W: Who suffers this?

Suzuki-rōshi: You suffer.

Student W: Then I am ignorance.

Suzuki-rōshi: [1-2 words.] [Laughter.]

Student X: Dōchō-rōshi, my mind says "yes," my stomach says "no!" and the result is "maybe." Yes! No! Maybe. What are these?

Suzuki-rōshi: That is confusion. [Laughter.]

Student X: How do I clarify the confusion?

Suzuki-rōshi: When your tummy says "yes", you should accept it. When your mind say ["no"?], you should accept it. If you cannot accept both, you should accept "maybe."

Student X: Thank you very much.

Student Y: Dōchō-rōshi, everything is changing as I walk down the aisle. [Laughter.] I don't—I have no idea what to say. I had about a—I've had many questions, and they've all changed, and I—but I— [laughter]. I want to assert myself [laughter], so I feel I should say something. But it doesn't matter at all.

Suzuki-rōshi: I don't mind at all about you. Is that okay?

Student Y: Sure.

Suzuki-rōshi: Go to city right now. [Laughter.]

Student Y: As a matter of fact [laughter], can I wait a couple days? [Laughter.] Just for a while, though.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student Y: Thank you very much.

Student Z: Dōchō-rōshi, the rice bowl is next to the soup bowl. [Laughter.] **Hinyo—hinyan** [Hīnayāna?] are not well-understand in our—and judgment is mechanical and censorial. Breathing practice is

interrupted by the croakings of conceptual thought. What is it that will deliver us from our ignorance and bring us to the true light of perfect wisdom?

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm. If you seek for perfect wisdom, in that case there is no perfect understanding.

Student Z: What will lead us to the perfect understanding?

Suzuki-rōshi: When you have brown rice, you should eat brown rice. When you have soup, you should eat soup. Whatever it is, you should be ready to take it and eat [?]. I think you can [1-2 words].

Student Z: Where is our intuition?

Suzuki-rōshi: Intuition? If you know where it is, that is not intuition.

Student Z: Thank you very much.

Student AA: Dōchō-rōshi, what is that in your hand?⁵ [Silence.] What can you do with it? Is that all? [Laughter.]

Suzuki-rōshi: I think you are alert enough to feel before I hit you [hits stick somewhere—sounds like table]. [Laughter.]

Sometime with laughter, sometime with tear, we could express—we could communicate our perfect practice. Now *sesshin* looks like over, but our actual practice started right now, like you count your breathing from one, two—and one, ten, to one. This practice will continue forever.

Thank you very much.

Source: Original City Center tape transcribed verbatim by Diana Bartle and Bill Redican (3/26/01).

⁵ Possibly a *kyosaku*.