

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Tuesday, October 14, 1969
San Francisco

Suzuki-rōshi: Since I resigned from Soko-ji Temple, I—my mind become more busy than before. It is ridiculous, but actually it is so.

Physically I am feeling much better. But mentally [laughs]—I'm not confused, but I'm reflecting on what I have been doing for ten years. And as I do not stay with you so long time when our members [are] increasing a lot, I feel a great distance, you know, between you and me. That is another problem for me. Anyway, I think we must find our way. And I think it is a time for us to find out some way to develop our buddha's way.

As I have nothing to talk about tonight, so I want you to give me some question. And I want especially new students to give me some questions. Whatever it is, that is all right. So please give me some questions. *Hai.*

Student A: I just finished reading something that said everything in life is necessary. Do you agree?

Suzuki-rōshi: Excuse me?

Student A: I just finished reading something that referred to everything in life as necessary: the actions, the things that happen, are all necessary. In other words, the war, peace, love, hate, they're all necessary in life. Is that right?

Suzuki-rōshi: Necessary. You mean there is some reason for everything to happen? Or—

Student A: I guess you could call it that, or something that—no matter what happens, it's the individual that counts. It doesn't matter what's happening in the whole. It's just the individual that will eventually count in the end. That's what I'm referring to—that you can't do anything about the whole but you can do something about yourself.

Suzuki-rōshi: That's pretty big question. It is—I think you are asking me about Buddhist view of life—human life. Is it?

Student A: I guess I'm asking a question about the way I've felt in the past months—the way I look at things. And it seems as though when I look at things in this way, everything seems to have fallen in place. Everything seems to have meaning. It doesn't seem to trouble

you at all.

Suzuki-rōshi: Meaning. Yeah. When we say—you know, you—your question, I think, more than, you know—actually what you mean—that question may be the question of why we practice zazen, you know, or why is it necessary to set up some rules or why is it necessary for human being to have some certain culture. The meaning of life—when we say "meaning," it is already problem of—question of some certain view of life. When you see or when you understand our life from some certain viewpoint, we say, "It is meaningful," not "It does not mean anything." But when you say, "Everything is meaningful," maybe it means we should have a wider viewpoint without sticking to some certain viewpoint. Then everything will have some—will have meaning. Everything which happens in our human life or in nature has some meaning—has meaning.

From Buddhist viewpoint, as you know, everything happens by some karma, you know, good and bad karma or good—no, excuse me, karma. Good and bad—when we say "good and bad" it is—it has already problem of morality. The karma is actually the causality. When something happens [it] has some reason why things happens. So without any reason, nothing happens. That is karma in its wide sense.

But it doesn't mean in this sense, in its wide sense, we do not have any idea of some particular being, you know. Things which we see in some form or color is a tentative form and color. But by itself there is no self-nature. But what exist is just karma. And it—karma appears in various way. That is, maybe, the ka- [partial word]—idea of karma in its wide sense.

But this kind of karmic life for us, each individual, may be good and bad karma: agree or something which we want to accept, easy—easy accept it—which could be easily accepted, or which is not so easy to accept it. In this sense, we have good and bad karma. And this karma, in its more narrow sense, will explain why we have problems in our human life.

So in its narrow sense, if you do something bad you will have bad result. And that is karma. But we should not—no one—or everyone want to be free from karma. That is—naturally we have that kind of desire to be free—how to be free from karma or how to improve our karma. When we think—when we come to this problem, that is the problem of practice, or problem of good understanding of our teaching. Teaching is provided to solve this kind of problem.

So in our—especially in Mahāyāna Buddhism, instead of karma, idea of karma, we have bodhisattva vow. And to be free from karma—it is not

possible for us to be free from the law of cause and effect. But it is possible for us to use—to have good use of it. To help others, you know, we suffer. And to help others we [are] involved in karma. You know, that is—because there is law of karma we can improve our life, and we can—and even though we suffer, we can—by this—by suffering or being involved in karma, we can help others. So idea of the bodhisattva's way to help others even before to help ourselves is closely related to the idea of karma.

It does not mean—everything has—the point is not to understand everything, to say, "Everything is meaningful" because everything has some reason why it appears in that way. Everything has some reason why it appears. It's, you know—it's more, I think—it does not mean so much. You know, it is same thing if I drink a cup of water we will not—I will not be any more thirsty [laughs]. It doesn't mean so much. That is—that may not be the meaning of karma—all [?] the meaning of karma. But it is one of the many—one of the understanding or interpretation of karma in Buddhism.

Another, you know—when we misunderstand- [partial word]—when we—there is some danger, you know, when you say, "Whatever it is, there is some reason for them to appear. So it is meaningful," you know. —it means we must find out some reason. [For] even a stone in roadside we must find out some reason, we must [not?] ignore things, we must find the value of it. In this way, if you—someone may understand in this way, but someone may say, "Whatever we do, that is all right," you know, "because there is some reason," you know, "why I do this kind of thing" [laughs]. If you understand that way, that is not our understanding.

We say, you know, there is no natural buddha. Even buddha—if they do not practice, you know—if he didn't, you know, follow bodhisattva's way, he couldn't have—he couldn't be a buddha. So we say there is no natural buddha. Buddhahood is called *kai*.¹ *Kai*? *Ka* is fruit. It is, you know, "result"—no, "point," some point which he attained by some practice. That is *kai*, "result." In morning service² we say: *kakai muryō no kenshō*, instead of saying all the sages in religious world. *Kakai* is the sea of the fruit world. So fruit has some, you know, some cause or some flower, you know, result. Fruit—"sea of fruit," we say. [*Kakai muryō no kenshō* means] "innumerable buddha—innumerable sages in the fruitful world." The—all the sage is supposed to be someone who practiced hard to attain that kind of stage.

¹ *kai*: the stage of fruition or effect; the stage of fulfillment of bodhisattva practices; the stage of buddhahood.

² Line 3 of the Second Morning *Ekō* (dedication of merit): *jippo jōjū no sambō, kakai muryō no kenshō* ("the all-pervading, ever-present Triple Treasure, the innumerable sages in the ocean of enlightenment").

Okay? Some question? *Hai*.

Student B: Rōshi, before—two weeks ago, you said that you weren't altogether satisfied with our practice here.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student B: I didn't know exactly what you meant.

Suzuki-rōshi: Altogether satisfied? [Laughs, laughter.] I forgot why I say so. Maybe at that time, not altogether [?]. At least I think we are, you know, making genuine effort, I think. Maybe that is why I said so. Some—some more questions?

Student C: Rōshi? Could you say something about food practice?

Suzuki-rōshi: Fruit?

Student C: Food.

Suzuki-rōshi: Food practice—food practice, oh [laughs, laughter]. Our practice is more prac- [partial word]—special practice than just physical one. Maybe to provide some strong, good food will be important, but the more important point will be the attitude to eat, to take food.

Maybe Buddhist food practice is one extreme, but very spiritual. We emphasized spiritual side. You know, when I came to America—I think some of you already knows about it—about what I am going to say—talk about—you know, there is—there—there is Toyo market, you know. Before my wife came, that market—that store was opened, and she had not much customers. So naturally, they haven't fresh vegetables or fruits because she hasn't not much customers. And she had to throw [away] a lot of fruits and vegetables. I didn't ask her to give me the vegetables, you know, which she put them in garbage can. But I—I—I would. I couldn't help taking old, you know, apples or old—the most, you know, old green onions because I was, you know, I—it is a kind of habit, you know, to use something old first, leaving something fresh for next meal. This kind of—this is, you know—most—some people told me that is very foolish way. If you, you know, take the best one you will have best one always. So to use worst one is the most foolish way.

I thought I agree with him—I agreed with him. But actually [laughs], you know, I use—I would use something old first. My master³ would

³ Gyokujun So-on, at Zoun-in temple, in 1916. In SR-69-09-16, Suzuki-rōshi gives the same age: "I went to my master's temple when I was thirteen years old." Thirteen reflects the Japanese way of counting age (one at birth,

told me, "Your father," you know—my master was my father's disciple and I went to my master when I was thirteen years old. And he would—told me, "Your master always—your father always picked up some vegetables in the—in the stream." Maybe some farmer up a river throws [away] some old vegetables. And my father—he said, "Your father would pick up old vegetables. That is our way," he said.

I think this is—I don't think this is best way, but we rather emphasize the spiritual practice rather than physical practice—which food has more power, or which food is more rich or stronger. I think this side should not be forgotten. How to make best use of food will be the point, without throwing away—without—with some respect for our food will be the most important point. *Hai*.

Student C: What do you mean by spiritual practice?

Suzuki-rōshi: Spiritual practice? To—what I mean—to—to—to have—everything has buddha-nature, you know, so we must respect them. Everything has—because it is closely related to our practice especially. So, the—to treat food is—should be like to treat our physical body. That kind of attitude is important. This is not just vegetable. It is a part of our body. As Dōgen says,⁴ to—you should treat a piece—a grain of rice as you treat your eyes. That is what I mean by spiritual practice. Or without maybe—without discrimination, we should accept—we should take food, whatever it is. Whatever it is, if something I offered with respect, then we should not refuse it. This kind of practice, I mean.

Student D: Can you speak about how we can help the zazen grow stronger in everyday life, in everyday practice?

Suzuki-rōshi: I think if you continue your zazen even for one month, if you don't practice, you know, you will see the difference, you know. The day you practice and the day you didn't. So—

Student D: Sometimes—

Suzuki-rōshi: Some [laughs]—sometime, you know, you—yeah, that is maybe everyone's problem. Sometime you may not, you know—you may—you don't want to, you know, get up so early, or you will be tired of it. That is quite natural, you know. But to be natural [laughing] is not always right. "I should be natural, so when I am s-[partial word]—we are sleepy, we should sleepy—we should sleep." That—I don't think that is best way.

two on the next New Year's Day). By Western counting, he was 11 or almost 12 years of age (1916 - 1904 = 12) [see also *Crooked Cucumber*, p. 14, which gives 11, almost 12 years].

⁴ In "Tenzo-kyōkun," a section of *Eihei-genzenji-shingi*.

Student D: Sometimes our sitting—in our practice of sitting, is very regular. It seems to be getting stronger. And our everyday life is going in another direction. So I'm confused.

Suzuki-rōshi: Reaction. [Laughs.] Confused. We have some tendency, you know. And that tendency is—all the tendency—if we follow our tendency always, we will be lost. The tendency may be based on some various desires. So I think it is necessary for us to—to have some harmony or someone said reason, you know, in our life. To keep some tone or reason or harmony, it is necessary to—to give some control over various desires, I think. So, you know, we are liable to—we are some tendency—we have various tendency. But I think if you try to—try not to—not follow your tendency, you know, you will—I think, if you try always not to follow your tendency, then you will have some—mostly you will—you can control—or not "control"—you will have some harmony in your life. Control or—that is a kind of negative expression, but that is very adequate expression although it is not complete suggestion.

You may not agree with me [laughs], but it is true. Our tendency is to have something good—to eat something good always. But if you eat always something good, your tummy will be sick [laughs]. But our tendency is to try to eat something good always. *Hai*.

Student E: Rōshi, while you were gone, back here there was an earthquake here.

Suzuki-rōshi: Earthquake, yeah. Mm-hmm. That morning I came back.

Student E: [Sentence unclear. Sounds like: Is it bad for us?]

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student E: Oh. What would then is the meaning about our everyday practice if this whole community had been destroyed that night?

Suzuki-rōshi: Everything swepted [laughs] up?

Student E: Yeah.

Suzuki-rōshi: What will be the—our practice [laughter]—

Student E: No—

Suzuki-rōshi: —in that situation?

Student E: No. I guess I was reflecting. What is the meaning of our practice if at any moment we can die, as a community or as a person. It occurred to me that there was nothing protecting us from death—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student E: —ever. For the [1-3 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: Ah. [Laughs, laughter.] I think that is why, you know, I don't firmly believe in our next life or, you know—I'm sorry I have to say so, you know. I have to confess [laughs], you know. I have—I haven't very strong belief in next life. But some people, you know, believe in it very firmly. And those people, you know, has—mostly, those people has good practice. I envy their practice. But at the same time, to believe in that kind of belief extremely strong, that may—that will be—that will not be so good belief.

You know, we live in the actual world. And at the same time we believe in the world which should be, you know—which we want to be like that, you know—the world which should be like that or which we want to be like that. And our next life will be the life, you know—our next world or life is the life which we want to be like that. Actually we live in this world. Without this kind of world we cannot survive. I think everyone has this kind of strong desire—not conviction, but more—more original and more fundamental desire which is more than usual desire: desire to eat or desire to survive.

[Sentence finished. Tape turned over.]

... which we are aiming at. Do you understand [laughs]? To go beyond, you know, whether, you know—to go beyond the idea of our future life. To go beyond everything, that is so-called "nothingness."
Hai.

Student F: Anyway I think that [?]-about this gentleman—that respect for your actions now and present actions—what you're doing now determines your existence at this very moment. That is a moment away. If that happened right now, whatever cause that made you what you are, what you are made up of, will determine your next existence. So the most important thing to remember is to carry out this philosophy of [1-2 words]. Cultivate this and you don't care when you go [laughs]. You know that your next existence will be at a higher consciousness.

Suzuki-rōshi: *Hai.*

Student G: Rōshi, can you speak to us about the practice of silence—the value of silence in—

Suzuki-rōshi: Value of silence? Value of silence, that—it will be—if your mind is not calm enough, you know, you cannot think properly. And you cannot get over the thinking mind when—especially when you should go beyond thinking mind. You should have complete calmness in your mind. That is calmness of your mind. It, you know, sh- [partial word]—not just calmness, but it express the direction of your practice—not stage but, you know, bottomless calmness. That is actually what we mean by calmness. You know, when you sit—calmness with some effort, with some power. That is calmness, actual calmness. Unperturbability is not something like this [probably gestures], you know, but continuous, you know, actual state of being which is calm and stable. So it follows some effort. Not just like stone [laughs], but, you know, there must be some strength in it. That is calmness. *Hai.*

Student H: Is it possible to love without attachment?

Suzuki-rōshi: Without—

Student H: —attachment.

Suzuki-rōshi: —attachment. I don't think so. With—but still, we know that, you know, even though we love someone, you know, we cannot love someone forever. That is what we know, you know. Actually, we know that. If you say, "I will love you forever," you are telling lie [laughs]. Still you have to love someone. Then how you—what do you say? Or, what kind of attitude do you take? If I say, you know, when you love someone, you know—if I say, or—excuse me, it may not be something which I should answer [laughs], you see? You know that, you know, without attachment you cannot love anyone. But still you have to love someone. Then what will be your love? And you should figure out that point. It is not something which I should tell you, but—which—you have to accept the teaching of detachment is [as] something Buddha told you—not something Buddha told you, but it is actual fact.

So what you should strive for is how you love someone in its true sense without fooling someone. Then the way you love someone will be nearly the same as buddha love someone. That is actual detachment, not teaching of detachment. *Hai.*

Student I: Is it possible to get a good understanding of Zen and develop it well without emphasizing or practicing Buddhism?

Suzuki-rōshi: Is it possible?

Student I: How important is it—I'm kind of distinguishing between

Zen and Buddhism.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student I: To some degree Buddhism aims to study Zen. But is it possible to study Zen quite apart from Buddhism?

Suzuki-rōshi: Apart from Buddhism? Buddhist—you know, our—maybe there's no Buddhism without zazen practice, you know. All the Buddhism has zazen practice, but Zen Buddhism put emphasis on zazen practice especially because that is fundamental practice and it is because it is for every one of us. Actually, there is no difference between—not much difference between various schools of Buddhism. You know, outlook is—approach is different. But without zazen practice, Buddhism cannot be Buddhism. *Hai.*

Student J: Rōshi, you were once, I think, talking about war, and you said about war that in our feelings about it that we should first accept that there will always be war.

Suzuki-rōshi: Some war, a kind of war, some kind of war, you mean?

Student J: Yeah.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, maybe.

Student J: And then after we accept that there, I guess, will always be some kind of war, then we can go on and try to make our best effort to stop war.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh. To stop war means to, you know—for someone it may be a war, you know, or—most of people making effort to fight [laughs], to me it looks like so. They may not actually [be] using a gun, but by words and by everyday activity, everyone creating a kind of, you know, war. And result of, you know, our everyday life, I think, is war in its big scale. That is a kind of karma, human karma. So, you know, how to get out of karma, or how to get out of war may be the most important point. And to accept things as it is means not to accept, you know—to have right understanding of our everyday life. Those who has—those who do not have right understanding of our life, you know, [are] creating war.

So we must have right understanding of our life, and we must strive for right—maybe we must, as a Buddhist, we must follow the Eight Holy Path or Four Noble Truths. That is, you know, our life. Where a Buddhist life, where there is no war in its true sense. So to—when you accept things as it is, we will naturally follow Eight Noble—Eight Holy

Path and Four Noble Truths. Because we have—our understanding of life is not right, we create war. There must be various, you know—this is, anyway, big problem for us, the most, you know—so our traditional understanding of, you know, war is like this. But we should make this point more clear, and we should help stopping war with a great effort, I think. Maybe this kind of teaching is right but not strong enough or adequate enough in our world situation. *Hai*.

Student J: Do you mean that the teaching of following the Eightfold Path or the Four Noble Truths is perhaps not strong enough?

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] It is, you know—it should be strong enough, but, you know, our understanding may not be strong enough or something like that. We just literally understand it, but we haven't, you know, enough strength to take it in our actual life. *Hai*.

Student K: Could you say something about Zen and marriage?

Suzuki-rōshi: Zen and what?

Student K: Marriage.

Suzuki-rōshi: Marriage? Oh. [Laughs, laughter.] That was a problem I had suffered [laughter], but—for me, you know, at that time when I got married, you know, I was thirty—thirty-one.⁵ At that time, you know, that was not the problem of marriage. That was a problem whether I should be a priest or a layman [laughs]. I thought if I get married I will not be a priest anymore, or monk anymore. So I have to think a lot. But—so I don't have actual—that was not, you know—my problem was not the problem you may have, perhaps.

Student K: I think that when a man falls in, he just goes toward it all the time and it takes ahold of him and just goes wherever it leads him —

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student K: [Sentence unclear. Sounds like: —right into the wall.] [Laughs.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. I think if you get married your life, anyway, will be more difficult. If you don't marry, your life will not be so difficult anyway. So that is also true with priest or monk. To have family is a great—we will have, anyway, great difficulty. So I don't think that is just problem of monk or you, but problem of everyone. If you don't—if you get married, your life will be more difficult in one sense. But on the other hand [laughs, laughter], you will have some advantage.

⁵ In February of 1935 Shunryū Suzuki married Chie Muramatsu.

That is how our human life goes. Always not sweet [laughs, laughter].

I think Buddha—what—when Buddha said, "Our life is life of suffering," that is very true, I think. Anyway, we have suffering. As long as we seek for something good, you know, we have suffering.

Do you have some more question? *Hai*.

Student L: I'm getting attached to the idea of transmission of mind.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh. Transmission.

Student L: Yeah. I'm getting attached to transmission of mind from you, because you came and sat down beside me, like, and I knew it before you were going to do it, and I'm attaching to it. And I find that I am one of the [1-2 words]. What should I do?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Just try hard [laughs]. That is very true. Sometime the more you make effort, you know, the more you will be far away from the goal. So—but even so, we must make our effort. It is almost a kind of fight [laughs] between teacher and disciple. [Taps stick on table three times, laughs.] Not, you know—we don't fight physically or—but we shouldn't give up. And experience I have—I had—the experience various—my teacher had and maybe Buddha had. You will reach this kind of conclusion. Buddha suffered in this way, and my teacher had same experience as me. Then you have transmission already. Actually, there is nothing to transmit [to] you [laughs]—what you have—something you have will be found out by your effort.

You may almost run away from Zen Center, you know, but then I may say, you know, "Wait! Wait! [Laughs.] Stay here! But I have nothing to give you." [Laughs.] That is why we have to suffer, you know, as a teacher. Nothing to give you. But I have to say, "Don't go away! Stay here!" But I have nothing to give you. Some people may say, "If you don't have anything, I will go away. Then that's all. No transmission." [Laughs, laughter.] Some question?

Student M: Could you speak about when you sit zazen away from Zen Center, and you sit alone? Could you speak about that?

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh, sit alone. By yourself? True zazen, you know, cannot be sit by yourself, you know. That you sit there means that every one of us [is] sitting with you. That kind of zazen is true zazen. Even though you are sitting in Japan or Tibet, you know, you are sitting with all the people in the world. That kind of feeling you must have in your zazen. You include—your practice include everything. That is our practice, you know. When you are you on your cushion,

everyone sitting on their own cushion. That is our zazen.

When you think of someone, you know, in zazen, "Oh, there she is sitting. There he is sitting. Anyway, I am sitting with all of us," you know. That is our feeling of sitting. One more question? *Hai*.

Student N: Do you think it would help our practice if there were more opportunities to have private interviews?

Suzuki-rōshi: More opportunity to what?

Student N: Private inter- [partial word]—*dokusan*?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, I think so. But, you know, we are try- [partial word]—I am—at least I am trying my best to have more time. But as we have too—maybe too many students, so that is pretty difficult. So maybe in this way, in this kind of occasion, you know, to—when I give lecture, sometime this way to ask question will be helpful, I think.

Thank you very much.

Source: Original City Center tape transcribed by Diana Bartle (10/10/00) and checked by Bill Redican (3/26/01).