

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**LOTUS SŪTRA, LECTURE NO. 2: CHAPTER II**  
**[Third Lotus Sūtra Series]**  
**Thursday Evening, October 23, 1969**  
**Zen Mountain Center**

*[The recording starts with Suzuki-rōshi reading from: **Saddharma-Puṣkarāka or The Lotus of the True Law**, translated by H. Kern, New York: Dover, 1963 (an unaltered reprint of the 1884 edition of "The Sacred Books of the East," Vol. XXI), Chapter II, "Skillfulness," p. 30. He is continuing from approximately the point where he left off in SR-69-10-20.]*

*... out things difficult to understand.*

The mystery of Tathāgata is difficult to understand, Shāriputra, because when they explain the law (or phenomena, things) that have their cause in themselves, they—they—they do so by means of skillfulness, by the display of knowledge, by argument, reasons, fundamental ideas, interpretations, and suggestions. By a variety of skillfulness they are able to release creatures that are attached to one point or another. The Tathāgata, Shāriputra, have acquired the highest perfection in skillfulness and the display of knowledge; they are endowed with wonderful properties, such as the display of free and unchecked knowledge; the power; the absence of hesitation; the independent conditions; the strength of the organs; the constituents of Bodhi; the contemplation; emancipations; meditations; the degree of concentration of mind. The Tathāgata, Shāriputra, are able to expound various things and have something wonderful and marvelous. Enough, Shāriputra, let it suffice to say that the Tathāgata have something extremely wonderful, Shāriputra. None but Tathāgata, Shāriputra, can impart to a Tathāgata those laws which the Tathāgatas knows—Tathāgata knows. And all ways [laws], Shāriputra, are taught by the Tathāgata, and by him alone; no one but he knows all laws, what they are, how they are, like what they are, of what characteristic and of what nature they are.

And on that occasion, to set forth the same subject more completely [copiously], the Lord uttered the following stanzas:

-----

This chapter is, for us Sōtō students, a very important chapter. If you understand this chapter so far as I read, you will understand what is

our transmission, what is our practice, what kind of life we have as a Sōtō Zen priest or Sōtō Zen children—disciples [laughs]. It is so important. But usually they don't think this chapter is so important, and the most explanation of this chapter is very superficial. So I want you to, you know, read it over and over again [during] study period. I will take time and Dick [Baker] one line after one line very deeply and very widely.

I—we must be very grateful for Dōgen-zenji to make—to find out the profound meaning of this sūtra, especially this chapter "Skillful Means." You know, usually skillful means or devices is something secondary, not the most important thing, but something secondary. But it is not so.

You know, Buddha has been sitting in silent in spite of various miraculous things happening, but he was sitting just silent. And as soon as he rose [from] his seat, and come out from meditation, he address to Shāriputra. This is opposite, you know. Mostly when someone ask him he gave answer, but this time when he started this sūtra, he addressed to Shāriputra, one of the most important disciples of Buddha. And he says: "This is what I—what I want to say now is something which is very important, something which I haven't say, and which is very very difficult to understand for all of you." But usually, you know, Buddha said to Shāriputra, "You are good disciple. You understand my teaching very well." [Laughs.] But this time he said, "You may not understand what I will say. This is a sūtra which I haven't told you before." This is, you know, rather funny. There is some reason—there is many reasons for that.

I said he is—this chapter is named "Chapter of Good Means," or "Skillful Means," and which looks like secondary. Then, what is the first principle? You may wonder what is the first principle. Actually, the first principle is not something which you can talk about [laughs]. Even Buddha cannot talk about. That is originally what the first principle means. Whatever you say, even what Buddha said, once he said in words, that is not first principle any more. But in this chapter, he is talking about which cannot, you know, talk about.

So there is no wonder why he said, "You, Shāriputra, and all the assembly may not understand what I will say right now." Or difficult to understand. Here [it] says "difficult to understand," but there is no other word, so it—the translation could be "difficult to understand," but maybe "impossible to understand" [laughs] or "impossible to say" is right. But it doesn't, you know—if, you know, you say "impossible to understand," you may say, "If it is impossible to understand, why you—why Buddha are going to talk about it?" So [laughs] maybe better to say "difficult to understand." Whatever you say, you know, that is—that cannot be the first principle. [Laughs.]

Here is already one big problem [laughs]. Here is already one point you should think about more. Usually, many teachers will say this is the Mahāyāna—supreme Mahāyāna teaching, you know, this sūtra. What the teaching which is told in this sūtra is Mahāyāna teaching which will destroy the misunderstanding of Hīnayāna Buddhist. So for Hīnayāna Buddhist it is difficult to understand. Actually, you know, literally if you read it literally it looks like so, but it is not so.

The Hīnayāna Buddhist thought that we disciples cannot be like a Buddha, or in other word it is impossible to be a buddha. Buddha is some super-human being, and we are human being. So for us it is not possible to be a buddha. And there is big, you know, borderline between Buddha and his disciple. And the same time, they had big wall between the disciple who—who knows his teaching, who understand his teaching and the people who do not know anything about Buddhist teaching. They had thick wall between Buddhist and non-Buddhist, or priest and layman. Layman is already, you know, lay—there may be lay Buddhist, especially—Buddhist and non-Buddhist, like Christianity, you know.

That is Hīnayāna Buddhism, but in Hīnayāna teaching there is no such wall. Even a animal can be a buddha, you know. And everything—animate and inanimate beings are Buddha himself. That is Mahāyāna teaching. So that is why it is so difficult. But actually, strictly speaking, it is not possible to say—to talk about it or not possible to understand it, what it means.

Now, put this point in your mind always, and listen to my lecture. In Page 32 [Kern edition]:

None but Tathāgata, Shāriputra, can impart to a Tathāgata those laws which the Tathāgatas knows. And all laws, Shāriputra, are taught by Tathāgata, and by him alone; no one but he knows all laws, what they are, how they are, like what they are, of what characteristic and of what nature they are.

This is co-called-it, in Japanese, *shohō-jissō*. "The things—the way things as they are." *Shohō-jissō*. Real—real way of things exist. This is the essential—this is the oldest sūtra is supposed to be—express this teaching: things as it is. And in this translation, there is no—that word literally appears, but:

None but Tathāgata, Shāriputra, can impart to a Tathāgata those—those laws which the Tathāgatas knows. And laws, Shāriputra, are taught by Tathāgata, and by him alone; no one but he knows all laws, what they are, how they are, like what they are, of what characteristic and of what nature they are.

This is actually the law of everything changes, and teaching of selflessness. Things exist—things has no nature—no special nature. Things exist—things exist in organic way or mechanical way, you know, like machine added one by one like this [probably gestures], you know. Or things exist like vegetables or fruits—more organic way. Organic way—that things exist in organic way means it has life, you know, in it. Things and—things in—underlying life is same for every being. The one, you know, life energy makes various form. If so, we are not just a part of whole being. We are always expressing one big life energy moment after moment. This is actually how things exist, isn't it?

So this truth is the truth—the essential truth for Buddhist. And this teaching—this truth is the truth [laughs]—is the truth only Buddha knows—Shāri- [partial word], you know, according to hi- [partial word] —this sūtra. Shāriputra doesn't know—we are—we don't know. But you know that [laughs] actually we don't know. According to Buddha we don't know. Only buddha knows. And only the—it is possible to transmit this wisdom to someone else when someone else become buddha. So only buddha knows, but no one else knows. This is another, you know, kōan [laughs] for you.

I shouldn't—maybe I shouldn't give you so many kōans [laughs] all at once. We should solve one by one, maybe.

For two–three lectures, we will be concentrated on those points, you know, and you should understand it with a close connection or relationship between [with] your practice.

Hmm. I myself don't know how to start [laughs], and how to stop, and how to confront with this big, big kōan.

Here is another translation—more familiar to Chinese and Buddhist—Chinese and Japanese Buddhist. I think this is—I don't know—this must be from Chinese *Lotus Sūtra*.<sup>1</sup>

The first point, you know, something which you can understand and which you cannot understand. First of all, what does it mean? You know, your eyes cannot see your eyes, you know. So you cannot see your eyes. Eyes cannot see eyes, but I think eyes knows eyes much better than your nose know—knows—much better than you know. Eyes can explain eyes much better than your mouth explain. Do you understand [laughs]? So eyes knows much better than—eyes knows eyes much better than your brain think about, you know. That is the truth. Something which you can understand—there is something

---

<sup>1</sup> Suzuki-rōshi does not read from a Kumārajīva translation (almost certainly the edition of Hurvitz) in this lecture, but he does in the following lectures.

which you can understand, which you can talk about. There is something which you cannot talk about.

We practice zazen, you know. You—you say—most people say, "I have been practicing zazen for ten years" [laughs], but I haven't attained anything [laughs]. Many people say so. Or if you, you know—"If I attain enlightenment, what will happen to us?" You say so, you know—many people say so.

Or many people ask me, you know, "If I attain enlightenment, or if you attain enlightenment, what will happen to you?" Or "What has—what has happened to you?" Many people ask. This kind of question is, you know, about this point. Difficult to understand. It is, you know, difficult to say, difficult to understand—difficult to foresee, or difficult to explain. If you cannot explain it, then, you know, you don't have it. No: You have it, but you cannot explain it.

In—in Japanese, proverb says, "If you have—if"—proverb just goes like this: "Fish mind with water mind." "Fish mind with water mind." It means that if you have mind of fish, you know, you will have mind of water. If you are kind to someone, you know, someone will be kind to you. It is usually understood in that way. You know, "Fish mind with water mind." Or "Water mind with fish mind." It goes together.

But that is not—that is just superficial understanding of it. You may say, you know, "Cats knows—" or "Bird knows bird, and fish knows fish." So: "No one but fish understand fish. No one but bird understand bird," in its complete sense. So: "No one but Buddha understand what he says," you know. "Only Buddha knows about this sūtra. Even Shāriputra, the best disciple of Buddha, doesn't know about this sūtra." You know, usually people understand in that way. But—but it is not so.

Oh, there is some kōan like this, you know. Let—no, let me—before I refer to this kōan, let me explain more.

In our practice, you know, in our practice we should [be] one with everything, you know. If we become one with—one with something, or like breathing, or one with pain, or one with some sound, completely, you become one with everything. So that you practice zazen means that everything else practice zazen. Everything else in the cosmic—in cosmos practicing zazen. With this idea, we practice zazen. So to—the point is to one—to become one with something—to completely—to be completely one with something is our practice. When you eat, you should, you know, [be] completely involved in eating. If you work, you should work, you know. You should be fully devoted to your every moment. That is our practice. We understand in that way.

Then what will happen, you know—the kōan is, "What will happen if," you know, "many things happen around you all at once?" [Laughs.] You know: fire broke out, earthquake, you know, came, and flood came, and cats are fighting [laughs], dogs are running. You know, what will you do? If so many things happens all at once, can you become one with it? That is a kōan. How you solve this kōan? Those, you know, problems are closely related each—with each other, and if you solve one you will solve everything.

I am not so kind as Dōgen-zenji was. He explained, you know, very carefully about those points. But my English is not so good, you know, to translate it in—in English. But, you know, if you—if I suggest—if I say all those—if I show you all those—if I present you all those problems, which is actually one, I think you will—you can—you may be easier to work on it.

The truth which Buddha is talking about in this sūtra is the truth which is possible to explain through—only through actual experience—actual experience. Not some truth reduced from various fact. Not—it is not some truth like theory of gravitation, you know—not something like that, but something which you—only through experience you can realize. You know, we Sōtō priest—in *shikantaza* you just sit without any, you know, idea of enlightenment—enlightenment. Moreover, you know, if you have some idea of enlightenment, and if you try to attain enlightenment as you have in your mind, you know, that is not true enlightenment. Actually, in Rinzai way, you know, even though teacher—even though you practice zazen, to try to attain enlightenment which was explain by your teacher, you know, the enlightenment you will have is quite different [laughs] experience. That is true, you know, and that is real enlightenment.

To be you yourself on that moment completely is how you have enlightenment. So whether you realize it in term of consciousness or not, that is real enlightenment. So just to be satisfied with yourself on that moment is the real practice. At that moment, you know yourself, you know, not in term of consciousness, or good or bad, or enlightenment, or delusion. You know you yourself best. And if, you know, you attain enlightenment, you are boss of whole universe. And if I attain enlightenment of if I am here, even without enlightenment, you know, I am boss, actually. You are—all of you are nobody; I am boss. For you, you are boss, you know; I am nobody. This—this is very true.

At that time, you know—actually you are there, I am here, but in its true sense there is no relationship between you and me because, you know, you include same area as I include [laughs], you know. Same thing. If it is completely same, you know, there is no relationship. If

there is two things there is relationship. [Laughs.] If it is just one, there is no relationship. This is how you understand Buddha's teaching, you know. There is no relationship between Buddha and you. Buddha—if you say "Buddha," that is Buddha. If you say "student—a student," he is Buddha and include everything. That is, you know ... [*Sentence not finished. Tape turned over.*]

This is so true that, you know, no one don't realize. Birds knows birds. Fish knows fish. And in zazen—in instruction of zazen by Dōgen [he] says,<sup>2</sup> "Fish is like fish; birds is like birds. That is zazen." And when we say "birds," there is no fish. When we say "fish," there is no bird. In that way, you know, we should practice our way.

Let's check up our everyday life, you know. In this way, you know, we have to have our everyday life. But actually, there is some way, you know. You—you may say there is no special way for bird to go to their nest, you know. You may say so. It looks like so. Or there is no way—special way for a fish to swim. Or you may think there is no special way in Pacific Ocean to go to Japan [laughs]. That is, you know, most people thinks—most people think. But there is actually very, you know—the narrow to—the way to Japan is pretty narrow, not so wide.

I always refer to my friend when I talk about this kind of thing. You know, my friend who is barber, you know, always teach his, you know, his boy how to sharpen the razor like this, you know [probably gesturing]. "Do it naturally!" he says always [laughs]. "Do it more natural—like this." [Laughs, laughter.] But slightest, you know, mistake will cut the razor. The natural way is not so natural in its usual sense. Before we become completely natural, we must try hard to be natural or to follow some way. When you are able to follow some way, you are good enough to be natural. Then you may say, "That is not naturalness." But actual naturalness exist in that way. We are, you know, organic being. We are natural—originally natural. But if I am careless for one hour, I may catch cold if I don't wear—if I don't wear one more underwear I will catch cold. Not so, you know, easy to be natural.

So "natural or not natural" just exist in your mind, and you are always fooled by words. So it is much better not to think about those rules or

---

<sup>2</sup> Suzuki-rōshi may be referring to *Shōbōgenzō* "Zazenshin" ("A Needle for Zazen"):

*The water is clean, right down to the ground,  
Fishes are swimming like fishes.  
The sky is wide, clear through to the heavens,  
And birds are flying like birds.*

(From Nishijima and Cross, trans., *Shōbōgenzō* "Zazenshin," Book 2, p. 106.)

Dōgen also discusses the metaphor in *Shōbōgenzō* "Yuibutsu-yobutsu."

those words "natural or not natural," or "this way or that way," "zazen practice or some other practice," or "Japanese way or American way," you know. We are always bothered by those words, and creating many ideas. We don't know what to do. And we lose our way. How to forget, you know—how to go beyond our world of thinking—world of idea is how we practice zazen. Just to be ourselves is the purpose of zazen.

I was not supposed to explain [laughs] those two kōans, but it looks like I explained it already [laughs] by mistake [laughter]. But not so easy [laughs]. Very easy, but actually it doesn't go as you think [laughs].

---

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Bill Redican (7/3/01).