

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Saturday, January 31, 1970
San Francisco

Our—our effort in our practice is quite different effort you make in our usual life. This point should be very clear for you, or else, you know, you—your practice doesn't work.

And spiritual effort is, at the same time, is very poisonous for us. Spiritual attainment is very, you know—sometime like a—like—will result ecstasy or sometime will result arrogance. And in this kind of, you know, spiritual arrogance or ecstasy is worse than materialistic arrogance, you know. You can easily [be] fooled by people by talking about something spiritual—so-called-it "spiritual," you know. If you—"This is very spiritual thing." If you say so, that is already very powerful, you know. And there is no need for you to give any evidence to it, you know. "This is spiritual thing." If you practice zazen you will understand it, or else you cannot understand it. I practiced zazen for many years, so I understand it. But you may not understand it. "But this is true!" [Laughs, laughter.]

You know, this kind of, you know, danger is always with us. So in Buddhism—Buddhist is very strict with this point. That is why—maybe why we practice something difficult.

The usual materialistic world in our usual life—materialistic world, we have enough difficulties [laughs]. So sp- [partial word]—in spiritual world, there should be, you know, more difficulties because we have to—not only we have to make effort to make progress in our practice, but also we have to keep ourself from various pitfall [laughs]—various desire—danger. So we have maybe much more difficulties in our spiritual effort.

But if you, you know, do it step by step, step little by little, then there is not much danger, you know. The effort is—effort we make in spiritual life, if you do it step by step, little by little as if you save, you know, money: 5 cent, 10 cent [laughs]—as if you walk from here to downtown step by step, then there is not much danger. When you want to achieve something all at once, you have various danger. We—we say "spiritual effort" or "materialistic effort," but it is not different thing. Especially in Buddhism, we deny, you know, materialistic world. We deny it. Why we deny it is to find out new meaning in materialistic world.

So Buddhism started by Buddha. He started his practice when he saw our human world which is very restless, which is very evanescent, where you cannot rely on anything. So he, you know, he deny it. It

looks like very good, but actually it is not so good. This world is not so good. I think most of us, most of our students here realize this point and came to Zen Center and started our practice. The main interest comes—for you is because you cannot—because—the main reason for you to come is because you, you know, gave up or you resigned, you know, to make effort in this world. It doesn't make much sense, you felt. So you wanted to, you know, find out some meaningful—some meaning in our life. That is why you came here. And this is, you know—you—you came here denying this world—usual world.

But to deny this world does not mean, you know, to escape from this world. That is not, you know, possible for you, you know. As—as long as you are human being, as long as you are physical body, that is not possible. Even though you do to, you know, make a space trip, that [laughs] is not possible. You cannot escape from this world.

But still you deny it, you know. You don't satisfied with it. This kind of dissatisfaction bring you to find out new—new meaning of life. So materialistic understanding of life—when you, you know, took—we say you "resigned," but actually it is not possible to resign from materialistic world. And to—to find out some world means to find out another new meaning to materialistic world. So actually what you will do is the same, but meaning of it different. To find new meaning in our life, we practice zazen. And that is the Buddhist thought.

Every—teaching of "everything changes," you know, means because everything changes, and you cannot rely on it. And realizing that, we still make same effort and still live in the same world. But difference is before you attach to materialistic world and why you strive for in materialistic world was, you know, just to acquire or just to attain materialistic success in life. Before, that was your effort.

But after you realize—after realizing, you know, everything—the teaching everything changes, and you cannot rely on materialistic result, what you will do will be the same because you have to eat [laughs], you have to sleep. So, nearly the same. But difference is you don't any more attach to the success in materialistic world. And reali- [partial word]—enjoying materialistic world, you know, moment after moment when it was given to you, you know, to enjoy your life will be your purpose, your effort. Effort—point of effort will change. Before you sacrificed this, you know, moment of life for the next, for the future result—materialistic result, because you, you know, rely on it. But after you—after you deny that kind of result—after you don't attach to it, you will never sacrifice your present life for a future result. That is more Buddhistic way of life.

So Buddhists say "eternal present," you know, "eternal present." Moment after moment, our life is, you know, continuity of present—

eternal present—present, present, present—withsacrificing anything. And that is more Buddhistic effort: how to enjoy our present life without, you know, sacrificing present is why we practice zazen. Ahh. It is rather—[laughs]. Do you understand? Does it make sense?

Here we are practicing, you know, zazen. But why we practice zazen is, of course, you may say, to attain enlightenment [laughs]. What is enlightenment? Usually you may say enlightenment—you practice zazen to attain enlightenment. So even though it is painful, you know, "I must sit because someday [laughs, laughter] I will attain enlightenment. So I must, you know, sit with painful legs." If that is, you know, your practice, I don't think that is Buddhist practice. I think you are fooled by [laughs] future success of your practice. It is like if I become a millionaire, you know: "I will buy you," you know, "whatever you want [laughs] when you—after, you know—after I become a millionaire." [Laughs.] "When you—you become a millionaire?" If someone ask, "I don't know when." That kind of practice is not our practice.

Here, I must continue something not so interesting story [laughs] to make clear our practice. Why we, you know, do not real practice, you know—why we cannot practice real practice is because we are so deeply, you know, deluded by our materialistic way of effort. Whatever we do, you know, even though you make spiritual effort, the effort you make actually is materialistic way. This is our very unfortunate destiny, maybe. Even when we practice Zen, you know, we are practicing our way with—by wrong ide- [partial word]—wrong idea.

Before I explain this point clearly I want you, you know—I want to make—I want you to make your confidence sure, you know. That is maybe the more appropriate. I tell you, you know, most of you will not have enlightenment experience. You may have, you know, but I don't know—one out of ten or out of hundred will attain enlightenment—enlight- [partial word]—will have so-called-it enlightenment experience. But if you continue our practice, even though you don't know, you make a big progress in your practice, and your character will change. That is, you know, one thing I can assure you.

So anyway, I want you to continue zazen practice. Don't give up zazen practice. You know, zazen practice is not—cannot be materialistic practice, you know. So when you, you know, want to give up, you know, your practice, it means that your practice became already very materialistic [laughs], you know. You are involved in materialistic idea of practice. So because you cannot see any progress by your five senses, because you ca- [partial word]—are not conscious of your progress, you know, you think it's better to give up. It means

that your p- [partial word]—danger is there.

So when you—that is a big warning for you. So when you think: "Oh, maybe better to give up," then, you know, you should know that "I—my practice is—is involved in very materialistic practice," which you denied and started a spiritual practice.

And another thing is try to, you know, do everything in this zendō without waiting for someone's instruction. You should find out, you know, what you should do here. That is our way of practice. We do not give you instruction so much. And by yourself you should find out what you should do. This is very, you know, maybe difficult for you to understand, but there is reason why you should not depend on some one's—other's instruction. You should know, or you should find out your way by yourself, or else you will be involved in wrong practice. Maybe, without knowing what to do, to come to Zen Center [laughs] five months, six months looks like waste of time, you may say. But actually it is not so. And try hard what—how you should practice zazen.

My master,¹ you know, for an instance, had—didn't have so many students. But he did not give me any suggestion [laughs], and he didn't give us any, you know, lecture. What he did was—when he became impatient he scolded us, that's all [laughs, laughter]—only when he became impatient. So we, you know, we liked his scolding voice very much because we—we, you know, we know immediately what I should—we should do.

It is very embarrassing, you know, to—to be with him without [laughs] knowing what to do, especially when we visit someone's home, you know. For an instance, when we have—when we visit to observe memorial service for someone, you know, and when many visitors are there following him without knowing what to do [laughing]: where to sit, how to recite sūtra, or how to hit bell, you know. Anyway in front of us there—there is—there were bell or *mokugyo*, you know, although we don't know what to do with it [laughs, laughter]. And, you know, if we don't know, you know, how to start, how to say, "*Maka-hannya-haramita-shin-gyō*,"² he himself will start it [laughs]: "*Maka-hannya-haramita-shin-gyō*," he says, you know, he started, and look at us [laughs, laughter]. "What are you doing?!" We don't know how to, you know, manage bell or *mokugyo*. And if I don't he [probably gestures] [laughs, laughter]—very impulsive, you know. If no one watching us, it—it is—if it is only, you know, my teacher—our teacher and us, it is all right. Between us, that is usual routine, so it was all right. But if many people are watching us, you know, it is very embarrassing. But he didn't mind at all [laughs, laughter]. If I can—if

¹ Gyokujun So-on.

² "Great Wisdom beyond Wisdom Heart Sūtra."

we cannot do it: "Give me bell and *mokugyo!*" He hit by [probably gesturing [laughing]]—just sitting behind him.

And we n- [partial word]—we didn't know what kind of sūtra, you know, he may recite. So immediately after—before—when we start, you know, he—he said: "Take this sūtra." So at that time we know, "Oh. This is the sūtra we will recite today," you know. But we don't. [Laughs, laughter.] So he, you know, recalls, you know, almost by himself. We, you know, first one or two page we followed—we could follow and—and three, four page, we don't know what to say. So, you know, as much as possible we followed, you know, without voice. [Laughs, laughter.] But that is not possible at all, you know, so we [laughs]—eventually we will give up. We would give up [laughs, laughter].

But when we, you know, go home they may give us, you know, envelope. It is very, you know, bashful to receive envelope without [laughing] reciting sūtra, you know, without doing anything. They may say *dōzo* [laughs] very formal, you know, but [laughs] it was very difficult to receive it. But we have to receive it, so we did. That's all. That kind of thing was—were what I did when I was, you know, small—not so small, but when I was a novice.

I think this kind of experience, you know, was very valuable and helped me a lot. So it may not be so good habit, but I don't prepare so much, you know, for something I will do, you know, for—to—in—tomorrow or next year, you know. And I—I can find out what to do. I have some confidence, you know, to find out what I should do there when the day come.

For an instance, when I come to America, you know, I didn't collect any information about Soko-ji or America or San Francisco. I just came to San Francisco without any—knowing anything. And I was—I didn't afraid of anything [laughs]. I was—I felt very good making airplane trip, you know, and seeing San Francisco [laughs].

And when I arrived at San Fran- [partial word]—airport, many people were there, you know, to see me. And I went to Soko-ji Temple. Because I didn't expect anything, you know, because I did not have any picture of Soko-ji in my mind, so what—I felt very good anyway. "Oh, this is Soko-ji. Oh, this is Japanese restaurant" [laughs], you know. The first floor is parking place, and, you know, stepping up the high stair, we went to restaurant. "Oh, this is American restaurant." [Laughs.] Usually, in Japan, first floor is, you know, dining room. But here, you know, the first floor is parking [laughs, laughter] place. And an old, old lady appeared, you know, and said—half English and half Japanese—said something to me: "Oh, this is Japanese people in America." Everything was interesting [laughs]. And I could easily find

out, you know, how to become friendly with—with those people. So because I have not much, you know, preconceived idea of America, so I didn't care Japanese people or, you know, Caucasian, you know—I didn't mind at all because I didn't have any idea of what we will do here.

This kind of, you know, attitude is very important. That is how you, you know, live in each moment, you know, to accept things as it is. So naturally, in your practice some day—sometime your practice will be very good [laughs]. Sometimes very drowsy, and sometimes very, you know, stiff, you know. But that is zazen, you know. There is no other zazen for you [laughs, laughter].

If you say enlight- [partial word]—"Someone had enlightenment experience. That is his zazen, not mine [laughs]. My zazen is," you know, "painful zazen," you know. "That is my own zazen. It is," you know, "rather foolish to compare my own zazen to someone's zazen."

When you, you know, detached—when you free from the ordinal [ordinary?] materialistic way of life, you will find out your own way of life, which will be materialistic pretty—maybe so. But that is—when that is your own practice, you know, that is not any more materialistic or spiritual practice. It is both spiritual and materialistic. Only when you say, you know—when—only when you analyze your practice it maybe materialistic or spiritualistic, or when you analyze—criticize someone's practice, you may say, "His practice is materialistic or very spiritual." That is only when you talk about someone's practice, you know, doesn't—which doesn't make much sense to you. We do not emphasize nothingness or emptiness. To—we do not deny, you know, or—yeah, deny someone's practice, you know, because we have some—some good practice instead. We deny someone's practice or our own practice. We are not—we cannot be satisfied with our practice, you know, or someone's practice, and we will be critical with our practice. But that is not because we want to—we have some good practice instead.

It is easy to criticize someone—someone—someone's practice, and most people do it. But, you know, if he ask you, "Then what is your practice?" you have nothing. What you have is painful practice, or drowsy practice [laughs], or stiff, you know, practice.

So we—sometime we—we should deny our practice to make some progress. That is all right to make some progress. But just to, you know, be critical with our practice and to give up, you know, our practice—to become very critical with our practice is very foolish [laughs]. Don't you think so? To criticize someone's practice when you have no power of advi- [partial word]—giving advice, or when you are ready to help him, when you are n- ... *[Sentence not finished.]*

Tape turned over]

... in everything, you know, new meaning in everything.

So anyway, the most important point is to live on each moment in the area—in some given area—in the area you live in. You should live with things you have right now and to find new meaning in it. That is our actual practice. The good example is our two-day sesshin [laughs]. In that way, you know, we continue our everyday life. Buddhist, you know, when we started—when Buddha started our practice, to not concerned things which we cannot see, you know. We are doing everything within the—with our reach, you know. That is world for us. There is no other world for us. You may say, you know, "this world or the other world—future world or this world," but there is no such world. Because you say, you know, "this world or that world," Mahāyāna Buddhist started to talk about that is the result of, you know, delusive substantial idea.

You—you think as if there are something else—where something else which you cannot see, you know. But we do not talk about—we do not put any consideration [in] something like that. When we say "whole world," whole world may be, you know, this room or zendō. That is whole world—sometime, maybe, this country or this earth or this universe. So according to the situation, "whole world" will be different, but when we say "whole world," the world we live is the whole world.

We are not philosopher, you know; Buddhist is not a philosopher. We are, you know, just, our practice, our life, is concentrated on this world which we see or which we hear. And within our reach we do everything.

So when you practice zazen, black cushion is your world, and no more world or nowhere to go [laughs]. With that, you know, understanding we should practice zazen. Then your practice will work. That is, you know, to say "to live in each moment or eternal present." This kind of world will continue eternally. Big world, small world, painful world, you know, happy world—one after another our world continues. And there is no connection between this world and the other world. Because there is no connection, we should [shouldn't?], you know, sacrifice our life for future life, and we should make our best effort in each world. That is our, you know, way of life.

So there is no me or no you, you know. Right now, black cushion is very colorful [laughs]. But when you go back to zendō, you know, your cushion is black [laughs]. And that is—this is one whole cushion in which you are sitting. For you, you know, this is cushion. For me, this is cushion. But you may say this is, you know—this cushion is, you know, common property [laughs]. But it is not so, you know.

This is—this, you know, cushion—big cushion is for each—only for you, each one of you—not, you know, common property. That is each one of you, if you really understand what we are doing here. That is how you extend zazen in everyday life.

What time do you start next zazen?

Student: 3:40.

3:40.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997.
Checked against tape by Dana Velden (3/8/00) and Bill Redican (3/22/00).