

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
AFTERNOON *SESSHIN* TEA LECTURE
Sunday, February 1, 1970

Sesshin is almost—*sesshin* has almost completed. In this *sesshin*, we have learned many things. I want to—can you hear me?—I want to, you know, say something about what I noticed.

Here we are—each one of us is a cook. In turn we work in the kitchen, and here, you know, in *zendō* we take care of this *zendō* by ourselves mostly. Right now, we carrying our stick in turn, and I want—I explained, you know, how to eat brown rice, you know. The more you chew it, you will have the taste of the brown rice. And in *zendō*, you are food [laughs]. You are rice and vegetables from various states, and we must cook ourselves [laughs], you know, some way. That is what actually we are doing.

I haven't realized how important the—to carry the stick is. I think that is actually not only carrying the stick, but carrying the stick is, you know, how to, you know, cook ourselves. It is actually to chew ourselves. But effect is more strong—stronger than just to chew. And as a, you know, at the moment you get slap, you know, you, you know, you—you die, you know, in past life and appears in new world.

We say, you know, "form is emptiness and emptiness is form." And Yoshimura-sensei,¹ the other day, explaining about *soku ze*—form—*soku ze ku*.² *Soku ze* means, he explain, that is "conversion"—the conversion, you know, without changing anything to convert one to the other.

Another thing is *soku ze*: when you get slap, at that moment big, you know, conversion take place in your practice. You will be—your experience of practice—your practice will change at that moment. You have—anyway, you that kind of feeling, you know, when—before—when you get stick, when you sleepy [laughs] you will wake up. That is, you know, conversion.

By repeating this kind of, you know, conversion many and many times, we can practice our way. That is to realize, you know, our teaching of "form of emptiness and emptiness is form." Form is emptiness is, you know, when you get slap and awaken in nothing—nothingness, where

¹ Ryōgen Yoshimura-sensei was a Sōtō priest who came from Japan to San Francisco in 1969 (see *Wind Bell*, 1970, Vol. IX, No. 1, p. 30). He died at a young age after returning to Japan.

² *Shiki suku ze ku. Ku soku ze shiki.* "Form is emptiness. Emptiness is form"—from the *Heart Sūtra*. *shiki* (form, matter); *soku* (immediately); *ze* (is); *ku* (emptiness).

there is no you or no zendō or no black cushion. *Rhha!* [Laughs.]
That is emptiness.

And from that emptiness, you know, you will have—you will start new practice. Your practice will be renewed by that. Our life should be like this. Whatever happen to us, on that occasion you must turn a new leaf for the quite refreshed life.

Even though, you know, cook is good, firewood cannot be a good dish, you know [laughs]. If you stick to too much idea of yourself, that is firewood—a log or pencil or stone in *miso* soup [laughs, laughter]. So when you, you know, forget about yourself or when you are ready to be, you know, cooked, then our practice will—real practice will take place.

So the moment you enter zendō, you should forget everything, you know, everything you have, and ready start or ready to start new life. That is, you know, how—this is how various teachers in China or in Japan explain what is "emptiness is form and form is emptiness." You are you, you know, even though you, you know [laughs], wake up. Without changing yourself, to have new meaning of life and to—to be involved in a new life is—new life completely is, you know, how form become emptiness.

And when we become very grateful for the emptiness, you know, we don't know what—what it is, you know. Emptiness is something which happen to us [laughs], not because of someone who carry stick, not because of you sincerity. I don't—we don't know why. But any—anyway, something that kind of great experience, great thing happen to us.

If you say this is because of this or that, that understanding is already dead understanding of vivid real understanding of emptiness. That kind of, you know—in this way, you know, the old teachers explained emptiness. Emptiness is something like—and that—from that emptiness, you know, like a flash everything quite new will appear. The flash of, you know, emptiness is, you know, you or I, or grain, or vegetables from [laughs] various state. That is just a flash of emptiness.

This kind of clear vivid understanding will happen, and as a slap. *Shht!* [Laughs.] It is, you know, something which, you know, happens to you. Even though you don't expect it, it happens. When you put your hand together, you know, you [laughs] you are like this! [Gestures; laughs, laughter.] And when you get it right, all of a sudden you become refreshed and you become new person [laughs]. Maybe in that way, I think, in turn it—it will be a very good idea if we carry stick in turn and, you know, give ourselves chance to, you know,

to make conversion. Conversion—I—by conversion I don't mean from Christian to Buddhism [laughs, laughter]—from Buddhism or Christian—to Christianity, you know.

And that is, you know—especially this period when, you know, I listen to the slap, and I saw you, you know, quite refreshed. "Oh, this is," you know, "form is emptiness," and at the same time, "emptiness is form." And new, you know, form appears and as a slap. So we are doing very good job, you know, job. Kitchen is extended, you know, to zendō [laughs], and we eat brown rice by our own kitchen. And zendō practice is extended to kitchen, and I think our practice, you know, is almost complete. I am so happy to find out this point in our practice. I hope you will continue our practice without—without being caught by some elusive idea of practice.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center tape transcribed by Dana Velden (3/10/00) and checked by Bill Redican (9/28/00). Miyagawa Keishi-san kindly provided assistance with the translation of Japanese terms.