

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
LECTURE
Sunday, February 8, 1970

Each time we—we start lecture, we recite "an unsurpassed, penetrating Buddha," and so on. This is the essential—pointing at essential teaching of Buddha. And it is not just opening of the [laughs] lecture. It is—this *gyāṭā*¹ itself is perfect dharma.

When we start—before we start lecture, or when you—when someone start lecture, and when you listen to it, and when we speak and listener start to study Buddhism, we—we must have this understanding—perfect understanding. Only when we, you know, we give up the idea of "we," you know, and when we have converted in—"we" in its true sense, this dharma, whatever it is, something which take place in this classroom will be the perfect dharma—will be understood as a perfect dharma.

Usually most people, you know, although you may understand the teaching of selflessness [laughs], but actually, you know, all what we do is deeply or firmly based on the idea of self. You may think, "I am listening to—I have to study. I have to understand what he says" [laughs]. That is already—the idea—strong idea of self and strong activity based on idea of self.

When we give up this kind of self and go beyond the idea of "you" or "speaker," and understand you and speaker in only tentative being related with each other. That is, you know, real classroom for us. We are—relationship between I and you is not permanent one. That is just tentative one. Tomorrow, I don't know [laughs]. Maybe if one of you speak, you know, I—I must be a listener, you know, or student. So it is just tentative relationship. And we are also tentative being. So we cannot meet with—we cannot meet in this classroom in—with this relationship even one hundred thousand *kalpas* of time. Never we can meet, you know, in this relationship together. So we should not miss this moment. That is actually what this *sūtra* means. And this is very important point.

When you discuss something, you know, usually, your discussion is always involved in strong idea of self. Discussion—your discussion to me is, you know, a kind of conflict of idea of self [laughs]. Why that kind of things happens is your understanding of discussion or group is not perfect. That is why we have—discussion does not, you know, is not so successful.

On the blackboard I see many, you know, circles. When we, you

¹ Possibly Japanese for *gāthā* (Sanskrit): four-line verse.

know, realize—realize each one of us or observer of the circles is, you know, empty—we are actually empty. I don't exist act- [partial word] —in its—actually, we don't—I don't exist. You may say, "When you see," you know, "I am here," that is something, you know—some idea of you. But actual—is not actual you. Actual you is, you know, you which, you know, says, you know, "I [laughs]—this is me." That is real you [laughs, laughter]. And "me" is object, you know, object of "I." So "I" is not something like that—something you understand "I." Something you understand "I" as "I" is already someone else [laughs, laughter]! So you don't exist, you know [laughs, laughter]. This is not, you know, tricky words. True words, you know. No one can deny this fact.

So there are many circles, you know. And when I don't exist, you know, I understand the circles. I or, you know, "true I," you know, will understand the relationship between those many circles, you know. If we understand—if we discuss something in that way, there is no problem, you know.

That relationship between those circles are same for everyone, you know. You see, you know, the circ- [partial word]—relationship between the circles, and relationship for you, and relationship between circles for us is always—is safe, you know. Why it is so is big self is observing it, you know. When you involved in, you know—but mostly when we start something about this organization or future plan of Tassajara, immediately you have big idea of self, you know. And you insist [on] your own idea without, you know, seeing the actual, you know, problem we have right now as we see those circles. This is so-called-it, in Buddhism, selflessness.

So when we practice something here, first of all what we should forget is idea of self. To forget idea of self is, as Dōgen-zenji says, to be proved by everything. Here "everything" means Buddha. Everything. Buddha, which include everything, which unify everything as one. That is Buddha. And that is the one, you know, which see the relationship between those circles, you know, correctly. That is someone who is unify—unifies everyone's understanding of everyone. And everyone's understanding of circle.

So the individual reason doesn't work, you know, before you understand "you" in its true sense: who is—what is individual. And how we understand individual is putting ourselves, you know, understanding ourselves one of those circles, you know [laughs]. It is true, you know. When we say "I," you know, it is already object of—of observation. Observation of some unified one. So we should be one of those circles. And in this way if we observe ourselves and relationship between our—each one of us to this zendō, then we will have [laughs], you know, perfect discussion. When we discuss

something, you discuss something—you are some special person [laughs], without knowing that you are one of the circle, you know. That is the teaching of interdependency.

Interdependency does not mean to observe things with our naked eye, you know, and see the relationship between things. Because you see your own naked eye, you are, you know, excluded. And you are completely—you are already mistaken as a big self—big unified self. You are committing big, you know, mistake. Or you are violating the teaching—fundamental teaching of Buddha, which is selflessness. If we can—but we can understand ourselves. There is no need to ignore ourselves. We can acknowledge ourselves on the blackboard. And we should be, you know—each one of us should be discuss, you know, at the same time, what kind of, you know, difficulty each one of causing, you know, for this group or this community. If we underst- [partial word]—if we discuss this kind of humble attitude, then there is no problem. And then actual, you know, "I" is discussing the problem. Do you understand?

So first of all, we should recite, you know [laughs]—before lecture we should recite. And we should be unified by the absolute unified one. And put our hand together, and we should, you know, really—we should be really unified with—by the absolute one. Then we have no self, and we can discuss something without any idea of self. And we will realize—we will understand the true meaning of the teaching of Buddha.

So as a Buddhist, the most important thing is to realize the evanescence of life. And things changes, always, incessantly. And we must realize that nothing is permanent. Nothing exist in the form we see or color we see. To understand things like this is called "emptiness." So with emptiness of mind, we should start, you know, realize the tentative form and color of things, and how things are going. Then we will have actual reality.

So first of all, we should understand, maybe, you know, we should destroy our idea of substantiality of us or you, subject or object. And then we should, you know, put our hand together for the one—unified one which is Buddha. And then we should open our eyes, you know, and see things as you see circles in the black- [partial word]—on the blackboard. And if it is necessary we have to discuss about it.

So with this understanding, if we discuss things, you know, you—you may not attach to anyone's particular idea. And all of you easily, you know, agree with some conclusion. But one discussion, one conclusion is not enough. So, if possible, day after day [laughs] we must have discussion, actually. But if that is—if you feel that is not necessary, once a week or once a month we should discuss things. If we discuss

things in this way, I think that is real individualism because we will find out ourselves in its, you know, own position. So there is order in understanding or Buddhist life.

First of all, we should give up small idea of self, and we should be humble enough to put our hand together and, you know, bow to the absolute one. And then we should depend on the true teaching of interdependency, and we should observe—or we should understand ourselves related with each other. That is interdependency.

Sometime, you know, you mixed up this order, and if you, you know, talk about—just talk about the teaching of interdependence without knowing the teaching of interdependency is based on the teaching which everything changes and the teaching of emptiness [laughs], you know, and discuss things, then it means that you are already started to—started to repeat same, you know [laughs], same trouble over and over again. So even though you make a great effort, it doesn't result anything. The more you discuss things, the more you get into confusion, and you will—you have to fight, you know, with each other—with, you know, a self-centered idea.

Naturally, you know, you have to reject many people from Zen Center [laughs]. All of you [?], you know—that is terrible thing—terrible thing will happen. Interdependency means we should not ignore anything. And we should understand the relationship between each one of us, including, you know, you yourself.

So with the most humble attitude we should discuss things. You should not [thumps mike three times] do so. Terrible thing. Big, big self, you know. [Laughs.] You should listen to, you know, everyone's opinion—way of observing things. "Okay." [Laughs, laughter.] Maybe if you don't do this, you know, maybe some time you cannot express yourself, you know, if you are like this. [Laughs.] "That is okay." If you want to say something like this, that is okay. And if you want to say like this "I think this is right" [mockingly using tense, constricted voice], but—but, you know, it should be—this should be also another form of practice of putting hand together [laughs]. If it is so, it is okay whatever you do.

You know, that is—to talk in this way is very easy, you know [laughs, laughter]. Actually it is not so easy. I think we are, you know, doing pretty well, I think. Because—I think that is because you practice zazen. When you practice zazen, even though you don't know what you are doing [laughs, laughter], but actually, you know, you are practicing this practice.

Even a, you know, flash of idea, you know, should be excluded, you know, in your practice. But if it comes, you know, already [laughs] it

is too late, you know, to exclude it. So let it stay and, you know, wait until it goes [laughs], and resume your, you know, true practice. In this way, because you practice zazen, you are, you know—even though you seems, you know, are fighting, you know, actually you are not. And we should trust people first of all. Emptiness does not mean to ignore everything, you know. It doesn't mean vacuity.

So in this way, if you understand our life in this way you will find out how important it is to practice zazen—how important it is to be humble in its real sense.

Source: City Center tape transcribed by Dana Velden (03/13/00). Transcript checked against tape by Bill Redican (3/22/00).