

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**ZEN CENTER AND CITY PRACTICE**  
**Sunday, May 10, 1970**  
**City Center, San Francisco**

This morning I want to reflect on our long, long practice, which we started maybe more than ten years ago. The purpose of Zen Center is, as you know, to provide a Zen meditation hall or whatever it is, you know: some place to practice zazen, and practice with some teacher, was the original intention of Zen Center. And with this purpose we organized non-profit organization. And now, here, when we, you know, acquired this building, we named this building Mahābodhisattva Zendō. It is—reflecting on our practice that was, you know, nothing but the bodhisattva way: to help others and to help ourselves.

In the meantime we had Tassajara zendō because we needed some place where we can practice our way, putting everything aside and being completely involved in our practice—not—maybe not completely, but [laughs] more completely [laughs]—almost completely. For a human being this "almost" is always necessary [laughs], or else we cannot survive. "Almost" is, you know, actually the secret of practice.

But anyway, we can practice our way almost completely putting everything aside. That was the purpose of Tassajara zendō, and that we have that—this special zendō means at the same time to—we can understand actually what is Zen—Zen practice in more traditional way, or else, you know, or else we do not know what we are doing here—unless we know some background of our practice. In here, it is difficult to, you know, have—to have full understanding of our practice here and with—what we are doing here.

It is something like to know your family, you know. When we know your friend's family, you will know your friend, you know, much better. Even though your—you know your friend—you think you know your friend, if you do not know the background of your friend, you—sometime it is difficult to understand your friend.

If you want to know who is Buddha, it is, you know, necessary for us to know—to have some understanding of his culture background. This is always true. And for most of us, because of various reasons, it is difficult to study our way in Japan because of language difficulties and some peculiar, you know, development of Zen in Japan. So as much as possible we want to practice Zen in the most original, you know, more original, you know, form of Zen. So it may be quite natural for us to go back to Dōgen and to know his way—and forgetting, you know, everything developed after him—and to go back to Dōgen, or to go back to Bodhidharma or Buddha, will be the most important point

for us.

It is not so easy to, you know, to establish Dōgen-zenji's way or Bodhidharma's way or Buddha's way, but we—at least we should try. It is much better, even though it is not perfect, it is much better than trying to, you know, introduce something else [laughs], you know, we—that is also up to our effort.

But most important thing will be how we practice so-called-it bodhisattva way—to help ourselves and to help others. This point is missing in Japan. Original bodhisattva way is to help ourselves is simultaneously to help others. In Japan, when we help, you know, others, we forget [laughs], you know, to help ourselves. We, you know—it is—sometime it is good—it should be like that, but if, you know, our zazen practice—when zazen practice does not follow, you know, we lose our way. We will be—easily become a—will be—we will be easily enslaved by people [laughs]. That is not bodhisattva way.

Without losing, you know, ourselves in city life, you know, to help others—how to help others is the point. We should be—whatever we do we should be Buddhist. To be Buddhist should not be just to practice zazen in calm nice building like a hermit [laughs]. That is not our way. Mahāyāna bodhisattva way is to—wherever we are, without losing our practice and help others is our way.

To realize—for actual realization of our practice, we should keep our way, you know, as simple as possible, so that many people can follow our way easily. Here I must say "as much as possible" [laughs], because our human life is already complicated and difficult [laughs]. So when I say "simple way," you may think—if you go to Zen Center, they are observing very simple way—much simpler [laughs], you will, you know, say "much simpler way than our mundane practice." But that is not permissible [laughs].

We—I think we must have, you know, almost—almost—almost same difficulties as, you know, city people have here too. Or else, you know, as we are human being which—whose life is always—whose mentality is—as, you know, very complicated, anyway. Wherever we are it doesn't make much difference because our mentality, you know, is—because of our mentality we have very complicated life.

So even though you come here, your life cannot be simpler than city life. The difference is, you know, we have—we are not inst- [partial word]—we are enjoying the complicated, you know, life, when people in the city is involved—being involved in various things and being confused in the activities which is going with them. Anyway, even though you come here, you know, so that you can help others as much as possible—so that we can give our seat [?] more people as much as

possible, you know, we must have some rules—which is—which should be very practical.

To set up practical, you know, practice, you know, so that we can practice our way more quickly without spending much time—and giving to share our facility with more people, we must make best effort to fulfill our bodhisattva spirit. As our, you know, purpose of Zen Center is like this, naturally we open this place, you know, for everyone. And because we open—because we open our facility to neighbors—our neighbors, we will have constantly new students.

To share this building with new students, we should, you know, give them some guidance, or show them some example of our practice, so that they can feel better in this building. So that we can help them, we must have some skill, you know. That is why we, you know, must have Tassajara. So new student, when they come, if they want, they can stay here longer, and they can go to Tassajara, and coming back from Tassajara, acquiring some, you know, way to help people—coming back here and help people here. In this way, I think we can continue our—we can fulfill the purpose of Zen Center.

This is the main, you know, structure or spiritual structure of Zen Center and Tassajara. No one did not try to be so [laughs]—no one had this kind of idea from the beginning [laughs], but for—while we are, you know, practicing zazen, naturally this kind of, you know, framework was resulted or set up by all of us. And I think this is very meaningful thing. Something, you know, so-called-it bodhisattva way appeared in this country, without knowing what it was [laughs].

As we already, you know—as you call this building "Page Street"—maybe "300 Page" or "Page Street Center" [laughs] or—. Pretty soon you will—all of us will decide "Page Street Zen Center" or "300 Page," or I don't know [laughs], and Bodhisattva Zendō, you know. *Mahā*<sup>1</sup> is—*mahā* is—something, you know—when we say—when we write "Mahābodhisattva" it sound, you know, something great [laughs]. Maybe "Bodhisattva Zendō" will be enough [laughs, laughter]. But if we say "Mahābodhisattva Zendō," then more people will come [laughs, laughter]. That is a purpose of inviting, you know, more people here—Mahābodhisattva Zendō [laughs, laughter]. That is also, you know, a part of bodhisattva practice. But if I say so, Zen Center should reserve for the name *mahā*—not small one [laughs]. The Bodhisattva Zendō will be—each one of your home will be the Bodhisattva Zendō. This is Mahābodhisattva Zendō [laughs], where there is—there is many small zendō in, you know, residence—residential part of Page Street Zendō.

To come here, I think, each one of you must have struggled pretty

<sup>1</sup> *mahā* (Sanskrit): great.

hard, I think, you know. But anyway, we are very fortunate to be here and to practice here in its pure, original sense.

As, you know, Buddhism is very, very old, and Buddhist spirit penetrated every corner of our culture in Japan, China, and India, Buddhism is like a great river, extending its branch stream in various kinds of mountains and fields, but the water, you know, which is running is the same: sometime muddy, sometime pure, but water is water. Muddy water can be a pure water, and pure water could be sometime muddy water. We should not reject the branch of the river because the water is not so clear. We should accept whatever the river could be. But we should not forget all the water is the same—originally the same. So only by zazen practice, you will find out pure water in muddy water, without being attached to pureness—clearness of water.

Dōgen-zenji says Zen practice is for everyone, whether they are clever or they are dull, man or woman, or old and young. Zen is for everyone, because he could see the pure—pureness of the water in muddy water. So when we, you know—why we practice zazen here is to find out the pure spiritual practice, even though they do not—they are not aware of it. [*Sentence finished. Tape turned over.*]

[To find the spiritual pure practice in]<sup>2</sup> city life, this is the reason why we practice zazen. But this is, you know, not something—this practice is not something you can compare with some, you know, ordinal [ordinary], you know, activity or practice. Only when you, you know, understand what is practice, you can, you know, start this kind of pure practice. So if you want to—to help people in its true sense, I think you should at least to go to Tassajara—you should go to Tassajara and practice longer.

I am afraid that Tassajara, you know, will be—will become a very important practice—Tassajara practice will become very important for—for Zen or for Buddhism because of various reason. I wish you can practice your zazen in various places, you know, but more and more I feel some burden, you know, on our shoulders. This is not so, you know [laughs], agreeable feeling because it is too much for us.

I want to share this kind of burden with many people, as much as possible. But actually, you know, we need your help. With your help, I think we can share the great burden which was given by, you know, our successive teachers.

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<sup>2</sup> The text in brackets was supplied by the tape operator, who recorded on tape: "The words that are missed here by turning over the cassette are: 'To find the spiritual pure practice in city life.'"

Physically, you know, I feel much better this year [laughs]. So, you know, I may survive [laughs]. I don't know how long [laughs], but, you know, let's try hard, and I want you help us, you know.

Thank you very much.

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Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997.  
Transcript checked against tape by Katharine Shields (May 4, 2000) and Bill Redican (May 15, 2000).