

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Introduced by Jakusho Kwong-rōshi
Mill Valley Zendō
Wednesday Morning, December 23, 1970
TEISHŌ

Zazen—zazen practice, for us, more and more become important. Nowadays, as you may feel, we are human being. We came to the point where we must start—maybe it is too late but, even so, we must start some new movement. In America it is not so—so bad, but in Japan it is very bad because the land is so narrow. And what people did for [to] their own land is awful. Soon they will not have anything to eat. And I—we think, even though we die will come to—to the earth. And everything, you know, which appeared should come back to the earth or in its wide sense it—it must come back to emptiness. But something we human being did for [to] our earth or land is pretty difficult to go back, to resume its old home of emptiness.

We human being appeared on this earth and did many things to the earth. And as long as we could, you know—everything resume to emptiness, it was okay. But now it is not—what we did is pretty difficult to resume to emptiness. If you raise, you know, vegetables—vegetables contain something harmful to you. If you eat something, if you breathe air—everything, you know, has already some poison for us. And poison we made remains on the earth almost looks like forever. It cannot be forever, but for human being it is—it is almost forever.

People talks about this kind of thing, but they do not feel so deeply or bad about this. I feel—if I could, you know, after death become emptiness, I feel very good. But what we did, as Buddha says, is, you know, create karma—awful karma.

We—how we create karma is because of the ego. So we should try to—try to get rid of ego as much as possible. So, as Buddha says, egolessness is the most important point for our practice, for our life. When you have not much ego, we feel eternal life for us. Even though we create ego, that ego is strong enough to support yourself, not more than—create problem—unnecessary then. In other word, if we go back to emptiness it is okay. Even though we create something bad, that karma should be reduced to emptiness [laughs] as soon as possible, as soon enough for human being to live on this earth.

This kind of life should be based on zazen practice. If we do not practice zazen we accumulate ego-centered activity, one after another. And we have no time to see, to realize what we are doing. But what—only when you start your activity or your life from zazen then you will—you wouldn't

create so much karma—bad karma. And even [though] you create some karma, you know what you are doing and you can control yourself. And you have—you are sensitive enough to feel what you are doing. And when you see something growing naturally and beautifully you will appreciate it. But when you are—your life is involved in awful karma, without seeing anything, without appreciating anything, without feeling anything good, then your—your life is nothing but the karmic life. I don't say I'm not creating any karma, but I can see actually what we are doing here.

I have— I came back from Japan and realized the difference between the life in Japan and in America. There is big difference. In Japan— Japan is Buddhist country, but Japan is already covered by big karma. But here in America, we have some chance to start something new. Maybe Japan is a kind of factory where people create very bad karma, but in America I don't think so. I think the people who is—who live in America has some responsibility to save all human being. And people who live in such country like Japan should be—should have bodhisattva's mind to sacrifice themselves for human life, human activity, or human being. Even though they themselves cannot have real way of Buddhist life, but they should accept it—their own karma—and they should help people in their own activity, for an instance. If Japan is big factory, they should make something good and help people. But here in America, I think you must have more human like—life, and you must have real practice here. And you must set up some new way of life without creating not much karma, without spoiling the beautiful land you have.

How you can do this is to practice zazen—not all day long, but at least one hour or two hours a day. And you should start your life, you should renew your life, you should go back to emptiness and start your life again and again. Then you will have real Buddhism way of life.

My temple in Japan [Rinso-in], when you would drink water from the stream—you know, not stream, but big and small, small spring. But the water we—they drink now in that temple, I don't think it is good enough; it is not pure enough, I know. And people may know what kind of water they're drinking; but they give up to talk about it. If they talk about it, you know, what they feel, you know, what they have will seems [?] like a bad feeling. and [there is] no way to, you know, purify the water. There is no way.

The earth itself is already not good for human beings. It's terrible, you know. The vegetables they raise is not good enough, I don't think. And I thought what will be the way to eat good vegetable, good water? But no way to get pure water. No more place to raise good vegetable or water.

I didn't talk about this, you know, when I was in Japan. It is so cruel to talk about this kind of thing.

People who take—make trip by fast train. When I was young I would, you know, I—we were very happy to see Mount Fuji. But people now, instead of looking, instead of seeing Mount Fuji, they see the other side of the train where there is many factories and pollution, polluted water. And they talk about how bad it is without seeing Mount Fuji [laughs]. It's awful condition. Last time I visited Japan, four years ago, it was not so bad, but in four days—in four years it changed a lot. But we must be, the—I think we forget, we human being, does not—do not realize what we are doing and what is our karma.

So I—we should encourage people to sit and go back to, you know, emptiness. When you sit instead of, you know, having some gaining idea of attaining something, you should go back to emptiness on your black cushion, and start—to start something new. Where your practice is involved in some gaining idea of attaining something, it means that you are encouraging ego. As long as you have too much ego, your life will be karmic life. This point should be remembered. And you should know what is pure zazen, what is true zazen transmitted from Buddha to us, which include Buddha's teaching which is the foundation of various teaching of Buddha, which is a way to observe our precepts. When—only when you practice true zazen it is possible to observe Buddha's precepts.

This morning you repeated *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* three times. That is very encouraging. We should repeat, you know—for ourselves we should, I think, practice zazen with silence, with calmness of our mind, with empty mind. But maybe for others, you know, let them know what is *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*—what does it mean to us, over and over again, until they understand what is *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*—and how important it is to practice zazen for us, for human being. It is our practice now. It cannot be just for Zen Buddhists. It should be for all human being. And this is not religion any more; this is something we should do. Even though it may be too late, but we should try our best. If we really awake—if you—we are really awakened, it cannot be too late. I think we must have more positive, you know, practice too for people. Let us sit with people and let us recite *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* with all human being.

I couldn't, you know, express how I feel, but I think you must have understood what I mean. I'm so glad to see so many people in this zendo. Encouraging, you know. Young, small students. We must, you know, try very hard.

Thank you very much. Okay.

Source: Original tape provided by Sonoma Zen Center, marked "Mill Valley Zendo, Suzuki Roshi, Shingyo, Teisho, 12/23/70." Transcribed by Jeffrey Schneider (July 1999) and checked against tape by Bill Redican (30 August

1999). Mill Valley Zendo was under the direction of Jakusho Kwong-roshi.