

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
SESSHIN LECTURE NO. 3
February 7, 1971
Sunday Afternoon or Evening
San Francisco

This morning I said you must find yourself in each being. That is actually what Tōzan [Ryōkai]-zenji said: Don't try to seek yourself. Don't try to figure out who is you. "You" found out in that way is far away from real you. He is not anymore you. But if I go my own way, wherever I go, I see myself. You know, if you, you know, take your own step, it means bodhisattva way. Wherever you go, you will see yourself. You will meet with yourself. And, he says, the image you see in the water when you want to figure out who is you is not you, but actually just what you see in the water is you yourself.

In *Sandōkai* we have same statements: You are not him, and he is you, you know [laughs]. It is paradoxical, you know. It is to catch your mind, they use some paradoxical, you know, statement like this. You are not him, but he is you. It means that when you try to figure out who is you, even though you see yourself in the mirror, he is not you. But if you just see your, you know, figure in the mirror, without any idea of, you know, trying to figure out what is you— Why it is not you when you figure out who is you [laughs] is, you know [laughs], because of your self-centered mind, you know, limited mind, you cannot see.

A self-centered, you know, practice doesn't work [laughs]. You know, if you try to attain enlightenment, or if you want to be some great Zen master, you cannot be actually great Zen master. When you don't try to be so, you know, or before you try to do so, or before you practice our way, you are buddha. But because of your limited practice, self-centered practice, even though you practice your way, you cannot have real practice. You will miss, you know, yourself, lose yourself in small, self-centered practice.

And this morning I told you first of all, anyway, you should try to help others. But when I say so, there may be some misunderstanding. You will have misunderstanding. Whatever you do, that is [laughs], you know, our practice. The misunderstanding is, you know, comes from also selfish practice, or practice of gaining idea—limited practice.

But it is, you know [laughs], pretty hard to practice our way without any, you know, expectation, without any gaining idea. It is actually very difficult. So that is why we have various rules, you know, in zendo. Because of those rules, you know, just to follow the rules, just you follow the rule without any idea of self, you know. Or giving up your idea of self, you can practice, you know, real practice which is not based on self-

centered idea. Unless you give up your self-centered practice, idea of self-centered practice, you cannot follow your pract-[partial word: "practice"?] [laughs] [our] rules, you know. So rules will help you to give up your self-centered practice which wouldn't work, but rather encourage you to practice real practice. So rules will help you to have good practice.

In *Lotus Sūtra*, you know, we have one chapter, you know, in which Buddha is talking about our rules. Why we observe our practice is just to help ourselves to keep our practice and make us easy to help ourselves. It is the practice, you know, easy practice, you know. You may think to follow rigid rules is difficult practice. Someone said, you know, "Oh, I wish I hadn't start this, you know, kind of difficult religion [laughs] like Zen [laughs]." Maybe we feel in that way. Our small mind will feel in that way. But if you know what is real practice, you know, then various precepts and rules of Buddhist way will help us, you know. And we find it easy to follow bodhisattva way because of the rules set up by Buddha.

[Nyōgen] Senzaki. Do you know Senzaki-rōshi? Perhaps you may know him. And he said, and in his last word, "Don't put head upon [laughs] your own head [laughs]." "Don't put head upon your own head." Because you, you know, put, you know, another [laughs] head upon your head, you are involved in foolish, self-centered practice. Even though it is Buddha's head, you shouldn't put [laughs] upon your head. It is better to have only one head [laughs, laughter].

So, you know, try to attain enlightenment is, you know, try to put another head on your own head [laughs]. You cannot move so easily [laughs, laughter]. We are not trying to put anything on our head. We just, you know, try to experience who am I, what is our own head—that's all. How you, you know, find out your head is our practice. Again, "to find out" does not mean, you know, to find out some head [laughs] upon your head, to find out your head which is thinking. How is it possible to, you know, think about your thinking mind? You know, how is it possible to see your own eyes? That is not possible. But there is only one way for us, you know, which makes us possible to realize what is my own head. If you knock it [laughs], you may feel it. "This is," you know, "my head." In other word, to put some limitation, you know, to put my head under some limitation is how we realize our own head.

By the way, a famous Zen master in China, Echū-kokushi¹ (Nanyō Echū),² who is one of the disciple of the Sixth Patriarch— He was a very good Zen master. But he had not much, you know, descendant of himself, so

¹ The honorific title -kokushi (Jap.) means "teacher of the nation" or "master of the country," a title bestowed on the teacher of a Japanese emperor; the Japanese equivalent of the Chinese "Kuo-shih." Also "-guoshi" (Jap.).

² Nanyang Huizhong (675-775): early Chinese Ch'an master; student of Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch. He was Court Chan Master for Emperor Suzong and his successor Emperor Daizong. Also known as Chū-kokushi (Jap.).

we don't know him so well. But he himself was a great Zen master. When he was dying, Emperor³ asked his *jisha*, you know, what kind of a tombstone should we make for him after something, you know, happened to him. But Echū-kokushi told the Emperor's messenger that, "Ask my student. Ask my disciple."⁴ And they made a tombstone for him, and about that tombstone they had a kind of discussion. And one of the students said, "It is as big as this country. This tombstone covers all the state south of Lake Hsiang and north of Lake T'an is included in his tombstone." Another student said [laughs], you know, "No. It will include whole world."

But I would rather say, you know, as his teacher Nanyō Echū said when he was asked, "Any stone will be good," you know, "good enough." Even a small stone can be good enough for me." You know, which do you [laughs] like, whole world or small stone? I rather prefer, you know, a small stone, you know, which we can carry or move, you know. If you know what is the small stone, you know, that is you yourself, which will cover everything. But if you think, you know, big whole universe is yourself, you will be lost [laughs]. You have— It doesn't make any sense.

You need, you know, one small room for yourself. That is very true. And when you find yourself really in the small room, as one of your room, then there is you yourself, and whole universe is there. And whole universe makes sense to you, you know. Without your room, whole universe doesn't make any sense. So what you need now is the small room, and what you will need after your death is a small stone, maybe. That is very true. That is actual reality, which is always true with everyone.

So don't talk about whole universe or some mysterious experience, but to find yourself in the small room or in the rigid practice of Zen. "You shouldn't go that way" [laughs]. You should go [laughs] this way. You should cross your legs this way." Under this kind of limitation, you will find yourself. Real self is there, you know. But because you say, you know, because you discuss whether this room is good or bad, big or small, you know, you lose your real room. Before you discuss, before you are caught by, you know, discrimination or thinking mind, you own your room.

So if you find a true joy under some, you know, limitation, and that is only way to, you know, realize whole universe. There is no other way for us to get approach to the whole universe. When you exist right here, you know, whole universe makes sense to you. Before you think about it, it is important to give up your, you know, foolish discrimination or foolish idea of freedom or, you know—

³ Emperor Suzong (Su-tsung).

⁴ His disciple was Tan Yuan: See *The Blue Cliff Record*, Case 18.

In this way, we must practice our way, you know. Why you practice zazen is to be filled with real spirit of bodhisattva and real feeling of your being, which transcend our thinking mind or emotional activity. So as long as you are, you know, you don't give up your thinking mind, it is not possible to, you know, to make your enlightenment happen to you. That experience may happen in various way. You say, "big enlightenment" or "small enlightenment" [laughs], but, you know, actually there is no small enlightenment or no big enlightenment.

After your death, do you need big stone or small stone [laughs]? It doesn't make much sense. Anyway, you need something, you know, that's all. You need something. And better to have smaller ones, you know, better to have very narrow rigid [laughs] practice, you know. It is easier for you to follow. If it is, you know— If the rules is provided in big scale, you may feel very good to see it [laughs], but you will find a great difficulty, you know, how to follow that kind of complicated big-scaled rules.

The rules must be very simple. Simpler the better, and stricter the better. Actually it is so, but if we make it too strict, you know, what will happen will be, you know, you will rely on or and you will just goof off, you know [laughs]. Strict rules [laughs]. It is easy to follow strict rules, you know. If you do exactly what your teacher says, that's all [laughs]. It works, but, you know, but on the other hand, you don't make much effort. So, you know, should not be too big or should not be too small, as [Ekai] Hyakujō-zenji⁵ said, "Thinking about various rules which previous patriarchs and Zen teachers followed, you know, we—I made this," you know, "rule." Comparing various rules we had, he set up some rules, some appropriate good-sized rules for us. That is how Zen rules was originated. And since then, we are trying to improve his rules according to the circumstances under which we practice our way.

You have no danger in our Zen practice to be involved in small-minded practice. And you can trust our rules, because our rules is after improvement of many great Zen masters we have now here. Of course, I think we should improve or we should have more appropriate rules for us, but point is, you know, the spirit to follow or understanding why we must follow our way and we must have some rules in our practice. *[Finished sentence. Tape turned over.]*

By now, you know, after many centuries since we are completely involved in scientific world, we should, you know, be free from thinking mind, you know. We come to the point where we should find out real self, you know, giving up superficial self of universal self, which you can, you know, which you can replace for someone's self [laughs], you know. We have enjoyed, you know, some universal, you know, some medicine which is

⁵ Baizhang Huaihai (Hyakujō Ekai): 720-814. Chan master. Dharma heir of Mazu Daoyi. Author of *Hyakujō Shingi*, a set of rules for Zen monastics.

for everyone [laughs]. It will not help you so much if some medicine is for everyone, you know. Do you, you know, trust some medicine for everyone? Medicine should be just for yourself, you know [laughs]. It may be better than nothing, but each one must have his own medicine.

Buddha, you know, prescribed the medicine for patient according to the person. That is real medicine. But scientific mind create, you know, some medicine for everyone, you know, to sell [laughs], you know, as much as possible [laughs, laughter]. "This medicine is for everyone." Then everyone will buy it. But that kind of medicine cannot help people so well. Sometime it may be poisonous for someone, you know.

Scientific mind can provide something universal, but not for special person. Scientific mind will deprive [derive?], you know, some specialty, you know, from each one, from each being, and they understand people in summary [some way?], picking up some similarity and prescribe medicine for that universal, you know, similarity of many people.

But right now, we should, you know, we should have our own mind instead of putting another big universal self on our head. It is useless, you know. Not useless, but sometime when it is rain, it will help [laughs] to protect you, but in such a place like California, you know, it is useless [laughs, laughter]. We don't need umbrella so much here [laughs]. The more you universalize something, you know, you lose the point of life. If you see something through telescope [laughs], you know, you may see many things, but it is better to see them by your own naked eye. That is our way, without using something which will help you to universalize things.

It is better to stick to one thing rather than to, you know, to be, to try to understand many things. It is better to appreciate something one by one, rather than, you know, to put everything in your pocket [laughs]. You will not see it, you know [laughs]. It's better to pick one flower after another and see it. This is better. This is our way. We put emphasis on validity rather than, you know, universality, you know. Direct, you know, effect on each one of us—that is our practice.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997.
Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Bill Redican 7/31/00.