

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Tuesday, February 23, 1971
Tassajara

It is more than six months [laughs] since— Is it working?

Student: Yes.

—since I came to Tassajara, and I was very much impressed, you know, of your practice at this time. And I am now thinking about, you know—not thinking about—but actual feeling I have now, you know, and some, you know, prospect for the future—future life of Tassajara. I feel something right, and I want to talk, you know, a little bit about my feeling and my hope.

I don't know if you have actual feeling of true practice. I don't know, because, you know, why I say so is because I didn't know [laughs], you know, when I was practicing zazen. Even though I was practicing zazen when I was young, I didn't know exactly what it was. But although I had some feeling of practice, but, you know, it was pretty difficult to talk about the feeling I had. But now, you know, the feeling I had makes some sense right now for me, right now [laughs]. But at that time, it doesn't make much sense, although I had some feeling, and sometime I was very much impressed by our practice at Eihei-ji or some other monasteries. Or when I see some great teachers, listening to their *teishō*, I was very much impressed.

But it was difficult to organize that kind of experience—to put some order in those experience. Maybe because I wanted to put some order, you know, it was not possible. This way is to have full experience and to have full, you know, feeling in every practice. Then that is, you know, that was our way. But maybe it is true with you.

Why we couldn't satisfy our practice is one reason I didn't. I thought I did my best, but I didn't, you know [laughs], [make] enough effort for our practice. That is why. And another reason was because, you know, I wanted to put order, you know. People say "stepladder [laughs] stepladder Zen," you know. Actually, we are talking about, you know, enlightenment and practice is one, but still, you know, actually, my practice, at least, was stepladder practice, you know: "I understand this much, and next year," I thought, "I understand a little bit more, little bit more" [laughs]. That kind of, you know, practice doesn't make much sense. Maybe after you try, you know, stepladder [laughs] practice, you may realize, you know, that that was mistake.

This morning, you know, when [Sotan Ryosen] Tatsugami-rōshi was,

you know, giving *dokusan* when we are practicing zazen. I cannot explain you literally what he said, but, you know, our zazen is— If we don't, you know, feel some actual feeling of practice, some warm, you know, big satisfaction in your practice, that is not practice. Even though you sit, you know, with right posture, trying to have right posture, following your breathing, you know, and following all the instruction which was given to you, but maybe still, you know, it is, you know, empty [laughs] zazen.

Why it is empty zazen is you are just following instruction, you know, following form of, you know, practice. And you are following what the way you should do, even though you are counting, you know, you are not kind enough with yourself. That was the point of Tatsugami-rōshi's saying this morning. You should be very kind, you know, with yourself. Not just count your breathing to, you know, to avoid your thinking mind, but to take best care of your breathing, you know. There is big difference, you know. Even though you are following breathing, you know, just to follow your breathing doesn't make sense. If you, you know, if you are very kind with your breathing, then, one after another, you will have, you know, refreshed warm feeling in your zazen.

Perhaps, you know, we are not kind enough with ourselves, with our practice. We understand that our practice is, you know— Still we understand, you know, our practice by following some instruction. Or if you only follow the instruction given by some teacher, then you will have good zazen, but [laughs] it is not so. Why you have instruction is how you are able to be kind with yourself. That is, you know, purpose of instruction.

If you don't feel Buddha's mercy in instruction, and if you don't feel, you know, Buddha's mercy on your form and breathing, you know, and take care of your practice, then there is no warm feeling in it, and it is not, you know, well-satisfied zazen. You should be fully satisfied with your, you know, practice. Or you should be very kind with yourself. So, you know, when you are very kind with yourself, naturally you will, you know, feel satisfaction, you know.

A mother may take care of her children, you know, even though she has no idea of how to make her baby happy, you know. But still, what she is doing for his mother is to, you know, to make her laugh or to make [laughs] her baby, you know, happy, you know. In that way you take care of your posture and your breathing, you know. There should be some warm feeling in it. And when you have warm feeling in your practice, that is actual good example of great mercy of Buddha. If you practice, you know, this way, whether you are priest or monk or layman, you know, you have actual practice which will help your

everyday life, which will be extended to your everyday life. When you do something, you take utmost care, you know, of what you do. Then you feel good, you know.

So we say, you know, you are, you know, rather something on or in what you do. For instance, you know, as Tōzan Daishi said—Tōzan Ryōkai Daishō, you know. You recite his name every morning. And Tatsugami-rōshi bow, you know. When Tatsugami-rōshi bow, all the patriarchs, you recite their name. And Tōzan Ryōkai Daishō, he, you know, attained— It is difficult to say, you know, when he attained enlightenment [laughs]. So he [laughs] attained enlightenment so many times [laughs, laughter]. So we cannot say, you know, when. But when he was, you know, crossing river, he saw himself in the river and he said, "Don't," you know, "try to figure out what is you. If you try to figure out what is you, what you will understand will be far away from you. You will not have even image of yourself." Don't try to do so.

But you, actual you, are rather in the river. You may say that is just shadow or that is just, you know, reflection of yourself, not me. You may say so. But if you carefully, you know, if you see it with warm-hearted, you know, feeling, that is you, you know. [Laughs.] You know, you think you are very warm-hearted [laughs], but when you, you know, try to understand how warm I am [laughs], even by temperature, you know [laughs], thermometer, you cannot measure your feeling actual. But when you take—see yourself in mirror or water with warm feeling, that is actually you. And whatever you do, you are there rather than here.

If this side of the monks are, you know, doing something, and the other side of the monks doing some other things, what [laughs] what Mañjushrī is doing [laughs, laughter]? When you do something, there is Mañjushrī, actually. Real you is there, you know. [Laughs.] You don't have to [laughs] seek for where is Mañjushrī and what is he doing. If you actually, you know, [have] good practice in your everyday life, there is our practice, and there is Mañjushrī, and there is true you, you know, real you. Don't say Mañjushrī is here or there [points] or in the middle of the zendō. It is actually, you know, there when you do things with warm heart, by your warm-hearted mind. That is actual practice. That is how you take care of things. That is how you talk with people.

So there is many ways, you know, because some of you are priest, some of you are layman, and some of you are married priest and some [of] you are not married priest. But our practice is same, not different. Those who, you know, who are not monk and priest may, you know, may his own way, you know, to go. Those who are not

married or who have already married, you know, they have their own way of extending our practice to everyday life. So although our situation is different, but, you know, practice is just one.

Mañjushrī is actually one, but even though he is one, but [laughs] he is everywhere, you know, and with everyone, and with things what you do. Whatever practice you are involved in, there is Mañjushrī. But secret is, you know, not to forget the true mercy of Buddha who takes care of everything. If we lose this point, you know, whatever you do, it doesn't make any sense.

Tatsugami-rōshi put emphasis on warm heart, warm zazen. If you practice zazen, you will feel very warm. Even though it is cold, but you should feel some warm feeling in your practice. That is, you know— The warm feeling we have in our practice is, in other word, you know, enlightenment or Buddha's mercy, Buddha mind. It is not matter of just counting your breathing or, you know, following your breathing. Counting breathing is too too too, you know, tedious [laughs]. So maybe better just to follow [laughs] breathing. This is easier, you know, and less disturbance in our practice [laughs, laughter]. This is just [laughs, laughter]— Doesn't make any sense.

The point is, you know, one after another, inhaling and exhaling, you have to take care of, you know, the breathing in and out, just as a mother may watch a baby, you know. If a baby smile, mother may smile [laughs]. If a baby cry, mother will worry. "Ohh" [laughs]. That kind of, you know, close relationship—to be one with your practice is the point. I'm not talking about anything, you know, new. Same old things [laughs, laughter], I am sorry. But I was very impressed, you know, this morning when he was, you know, giving you *dokusan*. I wish you could understand Japanese [laughs], but you don't. But I think you must have felt some feeling from his, you know, talk.

Various rules we have here, you know, maybe like some, you know, I think maybe like some, you know, machine gun looking glass [sighting scope] [laughs]. Do you know the machine gun looking glass, you know? There is many line on it, you know. It is easier to see something, you know, where the target is, you know [laughs]. And it is for the teacher, of course, you know [laughs, laughter], to— Of course it is so, but, you know, it is for the student too: to work on it, you know, to work on something more carefully, you know. When you want to work on something more carefully, naturally you will count, you know, and naturally you want to figure out how to work on it, you know. That is just, you know, relying on your machine-gun looking glass. I don't know how you call it, but they have it, you know. If you see the movie, you know [laughter], *BOOM!* [Laughs, laughter.] It goes in that way. And there you see, you know, the glass in that way.

It is just to help your practice, you know, for teacher, some [?], or students. It is not something actual, you know. Actual relationship between teacher and the student is this, you know: "Hi, how are you?" But this is, you know, too direct and too much, so we have to have looking glass and you [laughs]. Through it, we need something, you know, between us. If we are too close with each other we cannot see, but we can feel. But, you know, if we feel too much too close [claps hands together twice], it doesn't make any sense. We cannot help each other. So we need some distance, you know.

So the rules will give us some distance between teacher and disciple. So because of the distance, student may have some freedom in his activity, and teacher will find out how to help, you know, him. When you play something, you know, if you are too close, you cannot play game. Only when you have some distance between you, you can you play something, you know [laughs]. You have some freedom. If student do not have any freedom, you know, teacher cannot tell actually what he wants to do and what kind of, you know, instruction he need. Only when he see from distance, you know, teacher can help him. [*Sentence finished. Tape turned over.*]

... something to restrict your freedom, rather to give you freedom to behave and to act in your own way. And teacher, without criticizing him, you know, and knowing him—knowing student what really they want to do or what kind of mistake they have, and teacher may help him more meaningful and helpful. It is, for instance, it is something, you know, to—when you want to know whether this, you know, water is too much sugar or your coffee is too much sugar [laughs] or too little, you will stir it up, you know, or too strong or too weak. It is necessary to do something on, you know, coffee or on what you do. We should act on it, you know. That is rules. By rules we know what kind of experience you need or what kind of help you need.

The background or—our rules is based on, you know, also a warm, kind mind. So you are, you— It is not so important to follow the rules, you know, literal, but within the rules you should, you know, try hard. And sometime, if you don't feel so good, you should [laughs] try to break it [laughs, laughter]. You should do something like that. Oh no [laughs, laughter]. Then we will know, you know, what is wrong with him, you know [laughs, laughter]. Maybe his tongue is not so good, or today he lost his belt. That is also gives us some help, you know. So you are pretty free, you know, within our rules. But if you— So when you practice our way, you know, our rules are very very, you know, organized and very, you know— It doesn't, you know, words doesn't come up. Anyway, it is very good for students and for us.

That is actually Tassajara life. And that is why we make our rules [laughs] stricter and stricter, you know. Don't misunderstand us, you know. If your, you know, practice improves, you know, we have to have, you know, more—we have to know about your practice more, you know, carefully. So we must have very, you know, small, very fine, more lines on it anyway [laughs], so that we can measure exactly [laughs, laughter]. If your practice improve, more exact [laughs], you know, glass [crosshairs] is necessary.

You may think, you know, Tassajara became more and more rigid and, you know, strict. And what be—what will happen to us after all [laughs, laughter]? Nothing happens [laughs]. You are you—still you. You have big freedom, you know, but your practice will be improved a lot. And when your practice improve, you have good control over your everyday life. When you have good control of your desires and everyday life, then you will have, you know, big freedom from everything. That is, you know, goal of our practice for priest and for layman.

Ahhh. I don't think I have any more time.

Thank you very much.

And, yeah, you know. I have to go. I have to leave you this afternoon. Take care of your practice. Take good care [laughs] of practice and to be very kind with yourself.

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