

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
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San Francisco

I don't know where to start, you know, my talk, but anyway what I want to discuss with you tonight is how to, you know, apply our practice in your —to your everyday life. That will be the point of my talk.

Whether you are a layman or priest, you know, we are all bodhisattvas, you know. We are taking bodhisattva vow and we are practicing bodhisattva way. And as you know, bodhisattva way is to help others as you help yourself, or to help others more—before you help yourself. That is, you know, bodhisattva way. We put so much emphasis on helping others. This point is very important when you try to figure out what will be your everyday life, you know, what will be the relationship [between] zazen practice and your everyday life. Because you forget this point, you cannot extend your practice to everyday life.

Because, you know, as a Buddhist we should see things-as-it-is, you know [laughs], to see things-as-it-is, to observe things-as-they-are—that is the most important point. When you practice zazen, you know, actually you don't see anything, you don't think about anything. But even though you do [are] not aware of what you are doing, you are actually one with everything; even though you don't see, but you are actually with everything. So you know everything. You see things, you know, not with our naked eye, but our true eyes, you know. Even though we don't hear, but [laughs] actually we are with everything. We are practicing with everything, you know, actually. When you don't think, when you [are] one with your practice, you know, at that moment, even though you don't see, you are already with everything and you are actually seeing things, you know, and you have perfect understanding of everything. That is our practice. And we feel in that way when we don't think. I said "feel" but [laughs] maybe "to feel" is not correct word. That is, you know, our practice.

In that way, you know—but in your everyday life, you know, you have to see, you have to think, you have to act. But the way you see—you should —but you should know or you should understand the way you—usually way you see things [laughs] is actually whether actually you are seeing things-as-it-is, you know. You may say that "I cannot see things-as-it-is," because of our emotional, you know, because of our pink glasses [laughs]. I see things, you know, "All things are pink," you know. But I say that is because of your glasses. Actually things are not pink. All the things are not pink. But you may say, "That I cannot see, that I have pink glasses is part of [laughs] the way I am," maybe, you know. So in

this way, so far as thinking mind goes, there is no point to solve this problem.

But if you, you know, know the point of our practice, you know, you will not be rely[ing] on your thinking mind too much or your eyes too much—naked eye too much. Whether you are seeing it or not seeing it, or hearing it or not hearing it, or thinking about it or not thinking about it [laughs], anyway you are one with everything. That point is more important than your way of feeling, you know. You may, you know, feel various way, but you can ignore, you know, some particular understanding of things, or you can ignore your feeling, you know, the way you feel about things, about your friend, about your teacher [laughs]. You can ignore it. Anyway, whatever I feel, he is my teacher, he is my friend, he is, you know, my husband or my wife or my children. So actually, you know, what you have, you know, around you is anyway something you should work on, especially when, as a Buddhist, you know, the purpose of life is mostly to help others, you know [laughs]. If so, whatever it is—whatever it is, you have to work on it. That is so-called-it, in Japanese, *ichinyo zammai*¹—to be fully involved in the activity you take, moment after moment.

Usually, you know, we feel we have lot of choice in our life, you know. Even your wife you think you can change it [laughs]. You have lot of choice. But I don't know whether that is possible [laughs] or not. You may think in that way—you mind think in that way—you feel in that way, but actually, you know, what you have, you know, is your husband or your wife. You cannot change it. Tomorrow [laughs] maybe you can change it.

Maybe you say—you know, someone said very interesting thing. "Maybe I—I may wait," you know. "Maybe better to wait until I feel to do so." I don't know what does he mean "to do so"—anyway, to do so is quite natural. "I'll wait," you know, he said. That makes sense, I think, but that is too passive, you know, to me or we Buddhists. It is too—not lazy, but too passive. If you have—it is pretty good, you know, to wait until what I want to do is quite natural for me to do. Pretty good, you know. Much better than to change it, you know, to do it immediately. To be patient is pretty good, but, you know, there must be something, you know, to do without being just—instead of being just patient, you know, just wait. Instead of waiting for the chance to do something, it's better to work on it. So moment after moment, if you work faithfully, you know, on it, your true life will start. But if you are waiting, or if you want to change your way, or if you make too much choice, you know—take too much choice—you have no time to live on this world [laughs]. You know, pretty soon you will die. You will be as old as I am now [laughs] very

¹ *ichinyo zammai*: *ichinyo* = oneness, non-discrimination, absolute unity; *zammai* or *sanmai* (*samādhi*, Sanskrit) = nondualistic state of meditation.

soon. Without changing over your way, when, you know, you are trying to change your circumstances.

You think you are helping, maybe, your wife or your husband only [laughs]. But actually it is not so. You may fail, you know, even though you make best effort to have good family life. You may fail maybe, you know, we don't know. But even though you fail, you know, to help your family, you are helping actually many people around you, you know. "Oh, he is so good," or "She is so very good wife," you know. If you give your friends or your neighbor that kind of warm feeling, actually that is how you help people. Things happens in that way.

Now I have, you know, many students, you know, so if I am helping only one student, it looks like I cannot help the rest of the student [laughs]. But I don't think so, actually. To help one student means to help rest of the students, in its true sense. And if you only let me do so [laughs], I can do it, you know, but most likely you don't allow me to do so, so I have to make an appointment [laughs]. Yvonne [Rand] has very difficult time to arrange my appointment. That is not what I want to do, actually. Whatever you do, you know, if you do it with your warm heart, sincerely, then it means that I can helping—I am helping the rest of the students.

Do you know why we have—we call our—the—we have the *Wind Bell*,² you know? "*Wind Bell*" means, you know, comes from Dōgen-zenji's famous poem, *Wind Bell*.³ Whichever—whatever the wind may be, you know: east wind or west wind, south or north wind—it doesn't care. It's just ring, all day long [laughs]. And he doesn't know what he is doing. All day long he is doing something. He is busy. He is helping others always, without being involved in north or south or east or west, good or

² *Wind Bell* is the biannual publication of the San Francisco Zen Center.

³ *WIND BELL*—by Eihei Dōgen

Hanging in space by his mouth
His whole body is his mouth

East, West, South, and North Wind
He does not care

Always, he talks in many ways
about Prajñāpāramitā for others

Tsu Chin Tsun Ryan
Tsu Chin Ryan

The above is Dōgen's rewriting of a verse by his master Tiantong Rujing (Tendō Nyōjō, 1163-1228). See, e.g., Steven Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dōgen* (Boston: Tuttle, 1997, p. 141). The translation reproduced here was probably by Suzuki-rōshi.

bad, strong or weak, good sound or bad sound. That is actually our practice, isn't it?

Anyway, when you sit without any idea of discrimination—just sit—then you are you, and your practice include everything, and you are helping every—people. With this, you know—not confidence, but—with this feeling or, you know, in this way you practice zazen, and in this way you, you know, work on what you should do. So if your, you know, bodhisattva mind is not strong enough, you know, you may think I am [you are] not doing something well or good, you know. Better to [do] this or to—better instead of doing this, better to do something else. But when your way-seeking mind or bodhisattva mind is very strong, then you do not discriminate.

So to see things with this bodhisattva mind and to see things just [with] discriminating eyes—there is big difference, you know. So to see things-as-it-is—if you want to see things-as-it-is, you must have good practice and good, strong bodhisattva mind, and ready to accept your surrounding as-it-is. In prosperity or adversity, you know, you should act—you should manage your life maybe as a ship always, you know—as a sailing boat crossing the ocean. Whatever the wind is, you know, they have to [laughs]—you have to manage your boat. So that is some Zen master—I think it was Ummon⁴—"to drive wave—follow waves and drive waves." Follow waves and drive waves. That—he means—when he say so, we have, you know, unusual skill in our—in managing things: driving waves, following waves, and driving waves. Not much idea of driving waves, and yet so negative so passive, you know, to follow—just to follow: Following but driving [laughs]. Driving but following. When you are completely with your surrounding, that kind of activity will appear, will be your own. That kind of power or skill comes from real zazen practice with right spirit.

I think most of you have wrong idea, you know, about freedom or things-as-they-are [laughs]. When you say "freedom" or "things-as-they-are," is not what I mean, at least. You are not, you know, seeing things-as-they-are, because you have some special glasses, and through them you are seeing things. And each person has different glasses, so your opinion will not meet, you know [laughs]. So the more you has to, you know, manage our group, the more you will be get in confusion [laughs], because you stick to your own, you know, eyes, your own understanding. And if, you know, you see things without glasses, things—if the picture you have is things-as-they-are, then, you know, naturally everyone will agree with what you see, and you have to agree with some other person's understanding. But even so—even you cannot agree, you know, because you have on your glasses, you know, even though you cannot agree, sometime, you know, you should take off your glasses. "Oh!" [Laughs.] "But I need this glasses," you know. "As a teacher, I must have this

⁴ Yunmen Wenyan (Ummon Bun'en): 864-949. Chan master of Tang China.

one." [Laughs.] So excuse me. I must wear this. Maybe what you said is right. If you, you know, realize what kind of glasses you wear, then you can easily agree, you know. Without knowing that you have special glasses—as a student, as a teacher, as a officers, as a *rokuchiji*⁵ [laughs], so, you know, it is—things become very difficult. So when, you know, with this understanding, many good virtue will result, you know: humbleness, soft mind, or clear understanding, or sometime sharp judgment, you know.

[Laughs.] By the way, we like bamboo very much. We Japanese like bamboo [laughs]. Someone said, you know, when I came to America, "That is Japanese bamboo *bonsai*." I couldn't figure out what did he meant, you know. "That is Japanese bamboo *bonsai*." Anyway, most people knows we Japanese like bamboo. Actually, what he means—Japanese *bonsai* is very expensive [laughs]. That was what he meant. "Oh, that is Japanese bamboo *bonsai*." [Laughs.] But for us, bamboo is not something very expensive, you know. Bamboo, first of all, has very good nature. If you want to cut it in two, it will be—you know, if you—before you cut it [completely], you—it will split in two. *Ffft!* You know. If you want cut it [in] four, it will exactly split in four. And, you know, even though bamboo is ten, maybe thirty feet long, you can split in just—you can split just in two, you know, from the root to the [laughs] top. It will go in that way. No other plant can be spread—split so nicely, you know. That is, you know, nature of bamboo.

But if you have that kind of wisdom, you know, to see things-as-they-are, even though it is not bamboo, you can split right in two, as Nansen⁶ cut the cat right in two—*Whack!* [Laughs.] Students amazed. "Oh!" [Laughs.] They didn't have, you know, they didn't have time to criticize his killing cat or violating the precepts. *Whack!* It happened in that way, and when they realized, you know, the problem is all gone. [Laughs.] That kind of, you know, activity or wisdom will appear only when you can see things-as-it-is without trying to see, or when you solve the problem without trying to solve the problem. How you can do that is just to sit.

In China, you know, there were a famous scholar. After they studied many things or heard many things, they—he rinse his ears [laughs] to get rid of what he had learned. So when you have, you know, this kind of practice, even, you know, wisdom of—wisdom resulted by studying for long long time, going through many thousands of books, it is, you know, you should, you know, rinse your ears. You don't need it. Because of that you can hear.

⁵ *rokuchiji*: by tradition, the six operations officers of a Japanese Zen monastery.

⁶ Nanquan Puyuan (Jap. Nansen Fugan): 748–835. Dharma successor of Mazu Daoyi (Jap. Baso Dōitsu).

That kind of, you know, freedom you will have—how? First of all, you have to have bodhisattva mind. And next, you must be concentrated on what you do. And your life is—must be based on our pure practice, *shikantaza*. Not so difficult thing, actually, but you make your life difficult because of your glasses. Or because of—because you create, you know, many ideas. And because you have too much choice.

When you have too much choice, even though you think you had—you have good—you made a very good choice [laughs], but it doesn't help so much. It's better to do your best in your adversity, or it's better to spend your time, whether you like it or don't like, in some kind of situation which you may not like. And experience you have through that kind of, you know, situation is pure experience: something you feel you did—something good, you know, may not be so good, you know. But something which you did anyway, whether you like it or not, because you have to do it, I did it—you did it. When you say so, maybe what you did will be very good. And your experience will become—will be with you and helping you, as a part of your blood. Think about this point, you know. If you are sincere—if you are very sincere student—

But most people want to do it because you [they] like it. That is—I don't think that is good way. If you like Zen Center too much, you should go [laughs]. If you don't like it, stay here [laughs, laughter]. But anyway, you have freedom [laughs], so you may not stay. That is trouble [laughs] you have in America. But actually it is very much so. So my way of encouraging people is little bit different, you know. That is why my people say, you know, my students say the more you grow up, the more I become difficult [laughs]. You know, I must be always difficult with you. It is very difficult for me to be difficult with you, but [laughs, laughter] I am trying to be difficult with you [laughs]. I think that is the best way to help you, you know.

I think you have the point, you know, I want to say. Do you have some—do we have some more time? Would you—do you have some question? *Hai*. Please speak slowly. Uh-huh?

Student A: Did I understand you to say that whatever you want to do or whatever you feel that you should do or want to do, you should do it now or work on it now?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student A: Does that mean that—say that there's some situation in your life that you want to change, that you should change it now, or that you should work on changing your wanting to change it? Does that make sense to all you ... [2-3 words spoken to other students unclear]? In other words—

Suzuki-rōshi: Change? Oh.

Student A: Are you saying that you should work on what you want to—
on what your situation is now—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Yes. Uh-huh.

Student A: —not work on what you might like your situation to be?

Suzuki-rōshi: Whatever the situation may be, you know, at that moment you should work on it. That is, after all, you know, in one words, that is the point. But as it is not so easy thing, you know, so I am talking about many situation you may have with your surrounding, you know, so that kind of things makes my talk long—longer—made my talk longer. But in short, you should, you know, be always with people, and you should make best effort on each moment in the situation you are, without being discouraged or without being arrogant, you know, without having much discrimination, you know. Like you sit, you know, anyway. That is the point. And what is your point of the question?

Student A: Well, the question is, let us say you have a feeling that something is wrong for you. Let us say, you know, you are in school and you feel I shouldn't be in school, or I am in a particular job, but no, this is not the right job. Is your feeling that you should try to work with that job or with that school situation and see what you can do with that?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Student A: I see.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. That is, you know, after all that will be better, you know, better than changing your job. But if you have to change, you know, like someone said, you know, "Let's wait." You may say to yourself, "Let's wait until I can," you know, "leave with a good reason." Or situation makes you leave, you know. Maybe even though you try, you know, your best to improve the situation, you know, they may, you know, urge you to leave, maybe. So at that time, the best way for you or only way for you may be to leave. But we must make best effort always. So if you stick too much about your idea, you know, you will lose the point. You may be happy with them to give you some reason to leave [laughs], so are a little bit, you know—you have more freedom than they have.

Student B: The idea of helping others—

Suzuki-rōshi: Idea of?

Student B: —can for me sometimes is a problem because although I think about that, sometimes when I actually look [*Sentence not finished. Tape turned over.*] ... it doesn't actually appear that that is actually what I am doing. I guess it's like realizing that my ego is there all the time. And it—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student B: To say it—to say that I'm trying to help others gets to sound silly to me—

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] Yeah.

Student B: —and it gets to sound like a lie, when I actually look at what I am doing.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Looks like you are lying.

Student B: I don't know exactly what my question is, except that I—to tell you that I meet that problem sometimes.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes.

Student B: So it seems to me sometimes that actually the way to help others is to forget all about helping others, in a way. To forget about them. It seems like vanity or pride—

Suzuki-rōshi: Vanity or—yeah.

Student B: —sometimes to say that.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh. You are not honest with yourself, anyway, you know. You feel—you may feel in that way, you know. But if you go through that kind of, you know, difficulty, or, you know, at that—at this moment you may feel in that way. But if you continue to do—to keep that feeling, then you will have pretty big experience, you know, and you can test your spirit. Before you realize how important it is to have that kind of spirit, it looks like, you know, you are not honest enough or you are not strong enough, you know. That is, in another word, lack of confidence in what you do, and you feel as if it is, you know, hypocrisy or something, you know.

Do you have some question? *Hai.*

Student C: Um, along that line, to help others or to practice with people, um, I guess sometimes you might get angry or just to meet the situation

as best you can, you know. I sort of look [?] upon this idea of trying to be a saint [as] sort of ugly, you know, in a way. You know, you've been—I feel this—I don't know, you know. I feel—I get angry. Um. I don't smile sometimes. I do smile sometimes. But I don't know, you know. I just—I just have the same sort of feeling. I can't—to just meet the situation, it seems to me that I can—

Suzuki-rōshi: Sometime if—

Student C: —to try to meet with it, but, you know, not to go out and try to be a saint in that [4-5 words unclear] ... the same thing—a carbon copy.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh. The thing what I am talking [about] is the fundamental spirit we must have, you know. If the center of your spirit is strong enough, whatever you do will be—will work, you know. You may be angry sometime—that is okay. And if you do not lose the center of the, you know, effort, you can be angry—very angry [laughs], maybe more than usual people be, you know. You could be angry. But you should not lose the spirit. You should not try to escape from it or, you know, you should be—you should try to be with them—with him, you know. Or you should not discriminate him. You should be—you should [laughs]—that is the taste of the work. *Ffft.* [Laughs.] You know? He may be very angry if I keep work [laughs], but, you know, it is okay. It is much better to smile, you know [laughs], when we—I feel, you know, angry with him, I must be angry completely. Then anger will work, if you do not lose the spirit to live with—to be with him, to practice with him.

Student C: Sort of not to run from him.

Suzuki-rōshi: Not to escape, or not to make choice. *Hai.*

Student D: When you're confronted with the suffering of other people in the world that's caused by things like war and hunger, what kind of responses can a bodhisattva make which are consistent with right practice?

Suzuki-rōshi: Bodhisattva? If you, you know, if you are [in] India, you know, for an instance, I haven't been in India yet, but if you are [in] India, your practice will be naturally different from the practice we have here. But it is—or, for an instance, you know—this is, maybe, you know, good example. Right now America has a kind of difficulty, you know, your country. And that kind of problem is our problem, you know, so we—instead of criticizing your policy, how to help them will be, you know—how to help them in its true sense will be—if you, you know, want—if you want to help them but when you cannot help directly, you will have some, you know, urge—you will feel some urge. And that kind of urge should be

directed to encourage your practice—stronger, you know—to make yourself stronger, and to be ready to, you know, help your country, you know, or your society. That kind of spirit is—must be always there. Even though you do not join your, you know, peace movement, you should feel some urge, you know, some necessity to work on it. You shouldn't put the problem aside, you know. You should practice our zazen amidst of the problem, feeling the urge of practice. Then through your practice you will grow, you know, and you will have more spirit and more power, and you will be ready to help people.

Student D: Is there a way to combine action with [2-3 words unclear], you know, sitting practice besides personal practice in a way that, for instance, if you join the peace movement, that that would be part of your practice? Or if you worked and lived in a community, you know, doing things in that community, could that be part of your practice, as well as sitting—not excluding sitting but as well as sitting?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, I think so. I think so, but if you—actually, you are right here, you know, so you must have good practice. Your practice should not be weak. Then you will be ashamed of yourself, you know, not to join them.

Student E: Rōshi, you said before, Rōshi, that, you know, we should—well, in order to see things-as-they-are, you know, we must have the bodhisattva eyes, and in order to have that, we must be able to involved fully with whatever we are doing. But it seems that there's like a problem with that as there is with, one might say, the idea of trying to become a saint, is that you have—

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] Yeah, that is very cheap idea, you know, to be trying to be a saint or a sage, you know.

Student E: If, um—

Suzuki-rōshi: It is a kind of escape, you know.

Student E: I mean, if—

Suzuki-rōshi: Without being sage you can, you know, you can do many things before you become sage. You know, if you are trying to be a sage [laughs], what will you do if you couldn't? You know, in my—when I was young, people worked hard to get some money to help others [laughs]. You know, if he cannot earn money to give somebody, what he will do, you know? Before, even though he has no money, there is—there are many ways of helping people, you know. It is not just after you have money you can help others. Before you, you know, have a lot of money,

you can help others. And with this spirit, if you practice continuously, maybe you will be sage, you know, some day, I don't know [laughs].

Student E: Rōshi, what I meant was, um—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Oh, excuse me. [Laughter.]

Student E: I mean, well, like, when Cody [?] was talking about, you know, in terms of, you know, like we'd have some idea of being good, or that idea or the idea of being involved fully with what you are doing, you know, that—when you have that idea in your head that can be like a problem too, I mean—especially if you have a lot of trouble being involved in that way, because it seems to me that, you know, when you go about—when you start out to do something, you say, "Here I am, and here is the activity I will do." It was, uh—and then pretty soon you find yourself, you know, your mind has wandered completely from what you are doing, you know. So you bring it back, but if you get attached—at least, you know, it's been my experience—I like kind of get attached to that, you know, it's just, you know, then the mind just becomes like a turmoil, like a stream of muddy water. So, um—you know, on the other hand if I—sometimes I don't try, you know, sometimes I feel like if, you know, I don't make an effort to do something [?], it seems to confuse me, you know, which actually creates confusion. I don't ... [3-4 words unclear], you know. I think maybe I'm not doing enough [2-3 words unclear]. But—I was hoping you could say something about this.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Uh. You know, anyway, I understand your feeling, but you have to check your feeling more, you know. First of all, you should check, you know, whether that kind of feeling arise from some selfish, you know, idea or arrogance, or, you know, because of not enough, you know, effort. Maybe sometime it may be because of laziness, you know, lazy idea. So if you don't, you know—if you are not involved—if you cannot do with people [who are] right now with you, then it is a kind of arrogance, you know. "You people do not know what is most important thing. What you are doing is not so important." You should do things, but you don't have enough courage, you know, to convince them to follow you, you know, or you have not enough courage to be responsible for that, you know—what you will do. And you are thinking, you know, your mind is wandering. That is not so healthy practice. Do you understand?

Student E: I'm not sure I could follow you.

Suzuki-rōshi: You know, if you see someone actually acting in that way, you have some feeling, you know. "Oh, that may be how we should help people." So it—you need some good examples, and you need some good friend if you want to do something better, you know. That if—if you act or

—without good friend, without someone's real support, you know, and without, you know—that you haven't good support means, you know, your practice is not there. Still somewhere else. That is why people doesn't support you—do not support you. So if you really, you know, feel in that way, immediately people will support you. Some actual fact should follow with your idea, you know. So just to depend on someone who may lead you to some, you know, good way—that is not good way, you know. Don't you think so?

Start [hits cup or stick on floor or other hard surface] right now [laughs], before you think about it [laughs]. Even though you join the group, you should have your friend to go with you immediately. That kind of, you know, element is—when that kind of element is lacking in your activity or movement, you know, you will be led in wrong direction. If someone—if there are many people, you know, who want to do something good by—under some suggestion, you know, it is very easy to lead them wrong way, you know. Anyone can lead them, because you are like a sheep. That is not healthy, you know, structure of our society.

I, you know, I am sorry, but I feel that kind of tendency in our young generation. We are not strong enough, and our feet is not on the ground. You see? So you must be much stronger and thinking about, you know, result of your, you know, result of your movement, or result of your—each one's acting in each one's feeling, you know. Something is missing is very true, you know. What is missing? You should know exactly what is missing. Even though you don't know what to do with this society, but you should exactly know what point is missing. You cannot depend on anything, anyone. You should know. That is why I am talking about, you know, how to apply our practice in our everyday life. I said, "everyday life," but this spirit could be applied in your movement in future. And you will know what kind of practice you must have. It is not just, you know, sitting—sitting in Zen Center is not whole picture of our practice, you know. It is the picture of your movement—your young generation's movement.

Okay? Yeah. Some more effort is necessary. [Strikes cup or stick again. Laughs.]

Thank you very much.

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