

Shunryu Suzuki-rōshi
ZAZEN TALK
Tuesday Evening, July 20, 1971
Tassajara

I wanted to see you earlier, but I was too busy so I couldn't come.

Can you hear me? Can you hear me?

Student: Yes.

Oh. Okay.

Anyway, it is very good to see you and Tassajara, which has improved a lot since I left here. Tonight my—I didn't have any idea of giving talk, but I—as, you know, we have many guests and some of you may leave tomorrow, so I decided to talk a little bit—maybe I said ten minutes [laughs]. But it is rather difficult to say something in ten minutes, so I don't know how many minutes my lecture last.

What I want to talk about tonight is something—some idea or some understanding of Buddhist which is not—may not be unfamiliar to you.

We observe things in two ways. We understand things has two—two side. One is phenomenal side; the other is, maybe, more ontological side. Something—some—most of us, you know, understand things from the light of difference, like big or small, black or—black and white, material or spiritual.

Usually, maybe, spiritual— If we say "spiritual," usually it is something which is not material. But, according to Buddhism, even though you say "spiritual" that is, you know, not much different from—different of physical or materialistic side. "Spiritual" or "materialistic" we say, but those are, according to Buddhism, not much different. It belongs to the understanding of phenomenal side of the reality—spiritual too, spiritual understanding too include phenomenal understanding.

The other side is, [as] I said, you know, tentatively ontological side—a noumenal side which we cannot see, you know. Before you [existed], something exist in dharma: big or small, black or white, heavy or light, spiritual or material. Then something, you know—before something looks like—looks like, something looks like spiritual and material. Things looks like spiritual sometime material, looks like, but there is—there is some, you know, something before it can be spiritual or material. Let's think [about] this point more: spiritual and material.

When you think something material is quite different from something

which is spiritual, that is not Buddhist understanding. We understand spiritual and material is also, you know, it belongs to one side, you know. There is partition here [laughs], and spiritual and material also belong to this side. The other side is, you know—it doesn't belong to the other side.

So we say spiritual and spiritual things, spiritual being and materialistic being is one, not different. It belongs to this side. [Sighs.] Let us—let's think [about] this very carefully. If you think spiritual being is something different from material, then your life will be split in two [laughs]. One side of you want to be very spiritual [laughs]. The other side of you want to be material or physical or emotional. The other side of you may want to be more calm and good. So there is some separation. That is why you have—you feel that kind of separation. Is—your understanding is not clear enough.

For an instance, while you are alive, you know, you think you—as long as you have body, you are physical being and after, only after you die, you will be a spiritual being, you know. That kind of understanding is very usual understanding. You may understand in that way. That is why you have problem after this, you know. Or, even though you are still alive, if you lose your friend, then you feel very lonely because you think, you know, as—so long as your friend [is] alive, he is with you, which is material or physical. But after your friend die, he changed into spiritual being, leaving physical body behind. People may call it "soul" or "spirit," but that is not our understanding. That is still the understanding you have in your mind—understanding of your mind or brain [laughs] in term of, you know, spiritual or material, because no right or wrong.

Something, you know, something understandable and you cannot—you don't know the other side of something which you don't understand, which is not possible to understand. We do not—even though we do not understand what it is, but, you know, it is, you know, you cannot deny things which is not understanding by your small mind. And you will know that to understand things in term of big or small, black or white, man or woman, you know, is to put limitation to actual being. Actually. I am not just physical. I am spiritual too. But even though I say I am spiritual and physical that is also I put myself in limitation of spiritual and physical. But actual "me" is something more than spiritual and more than material.

So as long as you are trying to understand what is actual reality, what is actual "me," you don't—it is not possible to understand who you are. That is our way of understanding. If your— If your understanding can reach this point, there is something, you know, more than spiritual and more than material, more than right or wrong, more than man or woman, and that is reality, and that is actually each one of you. Then you will have renunciation from good or bad, life or death. You will be free from the idea of good or bad, life or death.

Even though you try very hard to be very spiritual, still you exist this side,

ignoring the other side of yourself. That is why you suffer. If you really want to be—want to attain enlightenment and realize what is real you, you know, then you have to try to go beyond the idea of good or bad, life or death.

And how we can go beyond the idea of life or death, physical or spiritual, is zazen practice [?]. So in our practice we should not—our practice should not be involved in "good practice" or "bad practice." You should be just you, and you shouldn't think anything. If something come, let it come. But don't, you know, think about it in term of good or bad. Let it come and let it go away [laughs]. Don't say "this is good" or "this is bad." Or don't think "it is not good to think"—to have something in your mind while you are practicing zazen.

That is actually, you know, our zazen practice: to go beyond various ideas and to be just yourself. And that is possible. If you think about yourself or if you think about someone, you or he is not spiritual or physical. You cannot say he is good or he is bad. Even though he looks like [he is] doing something wrong, it looks like so to you or to the people it looks like so. But who say so? People say so, you say so [laughs]. But he is not good or bad.

This, you know, standard of society—this society—our people have some kind of moral standard. Tentatively we have some moral code and say "this is good" and "this is bad." But it may change. If the moral code or standard of judging which is good and which is bad, then someone which was bad may be—may be good, and which—someone who is bad can be good tomorrow [laughs] or in one or two years. It is as you must have experienced. So our world is changing rapidly.

When I was young there were many moral codes, many idea, you know, [of how] we are involved in good and bad, idea of good and bad: "You shouldn't do this or do that." But more and more we have less moral code. As Dōgen-zenji said, "There is—actually there is no good or no bad. There is no good and no bad. No good or no bad. No good; or, good is up to the time. Time makes—makes things good or bad; but things itself is—things—things themselves is not good or bad," he said.

It is actually how things go, that's all. And—by some rule, or there is some— It is just matter of cause and effect, you know. Things, you know, goes. Things exist now will result [in] some effect, and that effect will cause another effect. Things going in that way, that's all. Actually there is no good or bad. What is going that way is the point. What is going in that way? Something which is not good or which is not bad is going [laughs]. That is the reality. Things going in that way. Anyway, things is developing itself. By itself it is going. That's all.

So if we notice that who is developing, what is going in that way,

something which is not good or bad is going in that way. And we—we say this is good or bad, that's all. We do not realize this point, and we say this is good or this is bad. I'm not talking about something, you know, invisible. I am talking about something actually we are—we have with us always. [Laughs.] Do you understand? But the difference between your understanding and my understanding is you understand things in term of good or bad. You think there is a good person and bad person, but we don't—I don't understand in that way. Things [are] just going in that way. Anyway, things are going in that way, and you call it "good" and "bad," that's all.

If we realize this point, we have already realization [?]. So when you sit in zazen, you are you. You cannot say, you know, "My practice is good." Or you cannot say, "I am bad person." Nor you can say, "You are—I am good person. My practice is perfect." [Laughs.] You cannot say so.

Anyway you are perfect [laughs] from the beginning. It is not necessary for you to say you are perfect. You are perfect, even though you don't realize you are perfect. That is why we say we are all buddhas and we have buddha-nature. And buddha nature [is] developing itself constantly. We understand things in that way. We say, "I am here, and you are there." It is okay, you know, to say so, but actually, you know, without me you don't exist. Without you I don't exist. [Laughs.] It is very true. Since I am here, you are there. Since you are there, I am here.

[Laughs.] You may say even though I don't come to, I don't come to, you know, Tassajara you exist here and waiting for me. That is [laughs], you know, maybe so. Maybe so, but that is not perfect. I am at—at—I have been at 300 Page, and you—with everything. I couldn't say goodbye to—to the building which is related to other things: freeway [laughs], and trees, and air, and everything, stars and the moon, the sun. If I was related to the sun and moon as you are related to the sun and moon, how is it possible to say I am there and you are here when we are always related? But just your mind says you are here and I am there, that's all.

So originally we are one with everything. That is very true. And if someone die, you may say he is no more. But is it possible for something to vanish completely? That is not possible. Is it possible for something to appear [laughing] all of a sudden from nothing? Because there were something, you know, it appears in that way. Something which is here cannot vanish completely. It can change its form. That's all.

So we are always one. It is just your superficial feeling to feel you are lonely. So if you are very sincere, and if you really, you know, give your—give up your small mind, then there is no fear and no emotional problem. Your mind is always calm, and your eyes is always open, and you can hear the birds as they sing. You can see the flower as it opens. And then nothing to worry, actually. And if there is, some—something to worry [about], it is a kind of, you know, treatment [laughs]—special

treatment for you, as if you see, as if you read some interesting novel; as if some writer, you know, write [2-3 words unclear] about human life. It is interesting maybe, and to read it is very interesting. But it is not something to be afraid of or to be—to feel lonely. So we can enjoy our life fully when we understand things in that way. That is Buddha's—Buddhist way. *[Sentence finished. Tape turned.]*

[Note.—Side B of the original tape was blank. The early transcript continued with the rest of the lecture. The following was superficially edited but could not be checked against the tape.]

When I was flying back from the east the other day, I saw beautiful sunset. Sunset lasts pretty long time if you fly from the east. If you leave, for instance, New York or Boston six o'clock, you will arrive at here nine o'clock, up in the air more than three—you know—13 or 15,000 or more—sometime 30,000 feet high. You know, when people think it is dark and there is no more sun. But still, if you are flying high up in the air, you have still sunset and you can see beautiful clouds. It is wonderful to see. But someone may feel very lonely, you know. But if you think you are—wherever you are, you are one with cloud and one with the sun and one with the stars you see, even though you jump out from the airplane, you don't go anywhere else. You are still with everything. That is very true. More than I say—more true than I say, or more true than you hear.

I am [not] talking about something which is very strange or very mystical. You are mystic and I am not mystic. Your understanding is strange, but my understanding is not strange. Don't you think so? But it is you who feel in that way, just your superficial feeling feel in that way. It means that you are not truthful enough to the truth. Your feeling was not deep enough to feel something true. As Dōgen said, people like which is not true—people feel which is not true, but they do not feel something true. *[Laughs.]* They like something which is not right. And they do not like which is true. That is very—what he said is very true. Don't you think so?

We must be ashamed of—to feel something very superficial. If you [are] ashamed of yourself you should practice hard. You should be sincere enough to be yourself. That is our practice and that is our effort—our direction of effort. We are—our practice heading to that way. But usually your practice is heading to wrong way. Again, Dōgen said you shouldn't try to go south heading to the North Pole, heading to the dipper. You see—after lecture when you are going to your cabin you will see dipper. Heading to dipper it is impossible to go south. But people are heading to—trying to go south heading to north. And he says also, if you want to attain renunciation from birth and death, you shouldn't try to be out of birth and death—problem of birth and death. And the birth and death is our equipment for our life. Without birth and death we cannot survive. It

is our pleasure to have birth and death. That is how I—we understand truth.

So don't be—in short—don't be involved in making too much home-made cookies [laughs] in term of big and small, good or bad. You should make as much, just as much as you need. Without cookies, without food you cannot survive, so it is good to make home-made cookies, but don't make too much. It is good to have problem, and without problem we cannot survive. So it is good. We must have problem. But not too much. You don't need to create problems for yourself when you have enough problems. You have just enough problems to survive. Any more than you need, you have just enough problem; the problem you have us just enough for you. That is so-called-it "soft-minded practice—soft-minded practice." Because your mind is too ... *[Sentence not finished.]*

Transcript says tape turned over here, but that is not correct. Maybe just a gap in the tape.]

After all, you can create you and big problem and for your children and for your wife. If some husband enjoy making home-made cookie, your wife will be upset [laughing]. Don't make so much. But that is not usually what we are doing. So if you really understand your life, it is not necessary to practice zazen even. It is not necessary for me to come or stay in America. If you just make home-made cookie just enough for you. It is okay for me to come back—back to Japan and to eat Japanese cookies. As you make too much cookies I have to eat [laughing]. I have to help you. It is not always so good job to eat home-made cookies. Actually that is what we are doing. If we realize this point and enjoy just enough home-made cookies, that is Buddhist way. And just—that is how to enjoy life and that is why we practice zazen.

We do not practice zazen to attain special enlightenment. Just to be ourselves and just to be free from useless effort or tendency of human nature we practice zazen.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997.
Verbatim transcript checked against tape by Jeffrey Schneider (4/99) and Bill Redican (11/29/01).