

**Shunryu Suzuki-rōshi**  
**Saturday, July 24, 1971**  
**Tassajara**

This evening I want to talk about Buddhist practice. In one of the fascicle of *Shōbōgenzō* there—there is fascicle about virtue of mountain and river.<sup>1</sup> Virtue of mountain and river. This is very interesting and give us a great benefit to understand what is our practice. Virtue of mountain and river.

He [Dōgen] says usual people think mountain is solid, mountain does not move and permanent; but river flows. That is usual understanding of mountain and river. Mountain and river. It is exactly the same as—people say Rinzai practice or Sōtō practice [laughs]. And the Sōtō practice is such-and-such; and Rinzai practice is such-and-such. And it looks like Sōtō way is more rigid and Rinzai way is more free. But Sōtō way is not so strict, but Rinzai way is very strict. They may say many things about Sōtō or Rinzai because it looks like so. And there must be various arguments about what is Sōtō and what is Rinzai. But there are—there are not so many arguments [laughs] when we say: "Mountain does not move, but water flows, river flows." And there's not much [laughs] arguing about that.

But Dōgen-zenji or—no—no—but Daokai-zenji Master<sup>2</sup> said: "Mountains flow [laughs]; mountains—mountains goes but river doesn't. Mountains flow. Or East Mountain flows over—over the—over the river. Mountain goes and river stays." And about this statement, because it is difficult for us to understand, so people say—people say: "True Zen is beyond words [laughs]. It is not possible for us to say what is Zen practice actually. Zen practice is beyond words." That is why Daokai-zenji said, "Mountain—East Mountain goes over the water."

But I want to explain really what our practice is. And then, maybe, then you may understand what real—what Daokai-zenji, you know, said.

Another—another statement which Dogen-zenji said in "Genjō-kōan," the first fascicle of *Shōbōgenzō*. Maybe that is the first chapter. He started with "Genjō-kōan" to finish one hundred fascicles of *Shōbōgenzō*. But he couldn't complete one hundred. But anyway, he started with *Genjō-kōan* when he was thirty-two years old. And in—in "Genjō-kōan" he says, "Over—under enlightenment—let enlightenment—let everything in surrender to it [?] or over—under enlightenment—let everything exist under practice, enlightenment." And—very difficult translate. Maybe I

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<sup>1</sup> *Shōbōgenzō* (*Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma*), "Mountains and Rivers Sūtra" (*Sansui-kyō*), 1240.

<sup>2</sup> Daokai of Mt. Furong (Fuyō Dōkai): 1043–1118. Buddhist patriarch in Dōgen's lineage; 45<sup>th</sup> patriarch from Shākyamuni Buddha.

should try to translate it different. What he might mean is when we practice zazen, our practice covers everything. And even though you do not have everything in your mind, in your practice, you do not realize, or you do not feel your practice cover everything. But actually, in your practice, when you just sit, there is actually everything.

But you shouldn't stay in the darkness of the enlightenment. Why we say "darkness" [is] because you cannot see things actually. You know, when you sit like this, you know—even though you hear, even though you see something, actually you are not seeing anything [laughs]. But you are seeing. But you hear it—but the way you hear is not to hear something, you know: "What is it? Oh. It's very good music." You do not hear in that way, you know. You do not see—you are not curious to know what it is, you know. "Is it spider or [laughs] cobweb or [2-3 words unclear] legs. Looks like cobweb. But it looks like legs because it moves. "What is it?" [Laughs.] You do not see in that way, you know. Anyway, something that you are frightened with [?]. You are not seeing; you do not attach to anything. You are not curious about anything. But you are just seeing.

Then it looks like—things exist in dark room. Things actually exist in the room, but it is dark, so you do not see, you know, what—exactly what it is. You do not try to see, or even though you try to see, you cannot see, anyway, in the utter darkness of the room. So you don't see. So what is there is just your practice—your practice; you know, and you are completely free from everything, and yet your—your practice include everything, you know, include everything. In your practice many things exist. And, like a—like a blue sky or blue space, millions of stars, you know, exist and possible to exist. There is big possibility in—in the blue space. You can fly through it. You can sing in it. You can dance in it [laughs]. A lot of possibilities in the sky, but what actually exist is the blue sky.

Whatever you do, you know, it doesn't make—we cannot disturb the stars. Whatever you do, it doesn't make much sense [laughs]. That is, you know, our practice actually. But if you think: "I have a good practice; and I have a great freedom from mundane life. That is—this is enlightenment; this is the standard [laughs]." And if you stick to your practice, you know, it doesn't—it is not utter darkness; it is something already. Your practice is under limitation of good or bad, perfect or imperfect. So it is not already our enlightenment. So—so even if, you know, in zazen—zazen, you know, even, even something happen, you know, if is something wrong with your practice, the practice is not true practice anymore.

If so, should you [laughs]—should you always [be] practicing zazen? Bodhidharma sit nine years. But we shouldn't take it literally, you know. Bodhidharma always—was not always sitting [laughs]. He must have ate

something [laughs, laughter]; he must have go to rest room, especially when he is very old like me [laughs]. He was not always sitting. So true practice is not matter whether you are sitting or whether you are not sitting. Whatever you do, you know, that—the activity you have should be practice. But when I say so again you will stick to my words, or you will take my words literally.

So—so Dōgen-zenji said that you should not stick to our practice *shikantaza*. It is utter darkness of the room of the temple [?]. If you stick to—if you think—if you stick, you know, in zazen is only way to obtain perfect enlightenment, then that is again wrong practice; that is not real practice. So you should also forget all about your practice. Or you should practice zazen until zazen practice become your own practice like your own, your eyes, or your eyes, or your nose.

Even though you have it, you don't realize it. You don't feel you have it. But you have it, you know. How you can have this kind of matured practice instead of lazy practice, you know, always sitting on black cushion or always sitting in—with mosquitoes, or false pride [laughs]. You should be, you know—that is not actually real practice. But why we practice so rigidly is to acquire that kind of practice, little by little. While you are doing rigid practice, sometime is fighting with the dragon, you know, and sometimes bothered by many ideas to come.

Anyway, you have—you try to sit. While you are sitting in that way, little by little, without knowing when you acquired the power, you will have, you know, more and more, you will own zazen, or zazen will become your own. And you do not feel you are practicing zazen. Even though you are sitting, you don't feel you are practicing zazen. Even though you are doing something else, you do not feel: "Oh! It is good to do something after zazen." [Laughs.] You do not feel—feel so much difference between zazen practice and everyday activity. The feeling doesn't—different so much, because you are, you know, you are very much familiar with your practice. And zazen become your own power, or not even power, even—because you do not feel you have power. Many people say—old students say: "I have been sitting eight years with you but nothing happen." [Laughs, laughter.] Nothing happens is very good. [Laughs, laughter.]

In Zen, various poems about it, you know. It is translate—translated in English. But, for an instance, there are beautiful, you know, sight-seeing place in China. [1 word unclear.] And in literature, you know, there is many lakes like—like maybe many beautiful, you know, lakes. And when it is—sometime lakes—water, you know—lake have plenty of water—a lot of water. Sometime it—they are not filled, but anyway, it is beautiful. So people want to see, you know—people in—all over the China wants—want to see the lake and worship the beautiful mountain. And that mountain is very beautiful, and mist comes and goes, and mountain appears and disappears. And it is very beautiful. I—I didn't go there, but people say

it is very beautiful. But the poem says—I think it was Sakoda's [?] poem: "I at last come to the place; but not much interesting sight I have. The [word?] when—when water come [1 word] is beautiful, and when rainy days, [1 word] is beautiful. That's all. Nothing," you know, "special." That was what he said.

Even though you, you know, are tired, you have str- [partial word: "strength"?]—actual you have strength. Your practice mature. But actually, you gained anything [nothing]. That is real practice. If you think I gain something, it's not, you know, it is not real, you know, practice. Too much, you know, [1-2 words], because, it is—it is not—not enough your feeling that way, or it is too much you feeling that way. So only when you—you think you have enough practice every day, and you—[have] enough problems to exist every day [laughs], then that is real practice.

[In] the first—first two—three pages of "Genjō-kōan," Dōgen-zenji talked about this point, especially—and very famous. They are very famous statement. It is very difficult to understand. Why it is difficult to understand is because you try to understand what he said. But if you have actual experience of zazen practice, he is not saying anything special. But the way he says is too, maybe [1 word] or too—the, you know, extraordinary high [1 word] in expression. So we think because the expression is so beautiful, so we think what he is talking about must be something special. But he is talking about very usual things, meaning very subtle word. At the same time logical thing [?].

So he says people say Zen word is not possible to understand by—by mind—by our minds, but—by our thinking mind—but it is possible, he says. But why you—it is difficult to understand is because of your, you know, one-sided view, like: "Mountain does not flow; but river flow." That is already not true.

Why it is not true is because it looks like so. And you say mountain does not move. But mountain actually moving. The river goes; but actually, if river goes, mountain is also going. And if river stays, actually mountain will stay. It is our thinking mind who thinks mountain is moving and river is—mountain does not move and river is moving. That is our thinking mind. And when we talk about things, we forget our subject and talk about things—objective world only. But objective world is projected objects or projected ideas which we have in our mind.

So when we say mountain moves, moving—we know that, you know, ourselves also moving, you know, [1-2 words]. When we say, "river does not move," it means that our practice, in our practice, we do not move. Move or not move is the virtue of our practice. We have—our practice have various [word?]. Our practice can move everything. And our

practice can stop everything from moving, because our practice include everything.

We can, you know— The way I exist here is the way everything exist with me. So actually how you feel, if you feel quite naturally, free from idea of self—for an instance, if you feel your breathing, if you feel your beating of your heart, then it means that you will feel whole world. It is a part of, you know, not even part of— Your breathing is the breathing of the whole universe, which include you yourself. When you do not feel you are counting breathing, you—or following breathing—just follow breathing. That is the breathing of whole universe. So your, you know, breathing include everything. There is nothing but whole activity of your —of the world is—of the universe is nothing but—nothing but your inhaling and exhaling. This is again explained [laughs] what, but actually when you practice zazen, you have it in that way. When you have this kind of zazen there is n- [partial word]—anymore, you are outside world. Or there's no buddha or you. No teacher or disciple. That is complete freedom. That is the proper sort for zazen practice. So our zazen practice should include those points.

Your zazen—when you practice zazen, you are actually utter darkness of the room. You don't see anything; you looks like see anything but, you know, you are thinking include everything. That is another side of the reality. So, there is no need to say "zazen practice" or "everyday activity." Zazen practice could be everyday activity, and everyday activity could be zazen practice. And you will feel same way, but only [laughs]—only when you—your practice matures. Knowing this [1 word] point, you will—when you practice, when you continuously practice zazen, then you will have more and more perfect, well-matured practice. This is our task —whole-life task as a Buddhist. After [at the?] [1 word] it is one source [of] your true nature.

There are many translations— maybe, I don't know how many translations, translation of "Genjō-kōan," various translation of "Genjō-kōan" you have. But if you read it with this idea, I think you will understand what it means.

This is, you know, just outline of important backbone of our practice, but —but what [?] I gived you—give you not much marrow or meat or blood. So you may—you may—you don't understand why I am talking about this kind of thing. I can give you some questions—some questions and answer probably. That will be more interesting for you and help your understanding. Do you have some question?

By the way, did you—could you hear me? [Laughter.] I am basically, looks like, basically same thing over and over again. Anyway, you will understand [laughs] what I'm saying.

**Student A:** Rōshi, when you see something when it's in a dark room, how come you smile and are unhappy with that?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Unhappy—?

**Student A:** —and sad and laughing and different feelings. What—what—what's that? What part [?] is that?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** No. I am talking about, you know, darkness, or enlightenment or the first principle, or emptiness, you know, emptiness. Same thing, you know. First principle or utter darkness of the room or, you know, the [1 word unclear]—there are various expressions for dark. But utter darkness means—why I say so is in utter darkness, when we say "emptiness," we may feel nothingness; or when I say "nothingness" we may feel that is, you know, void: nothing in it—that is nothing. Usually it is so; but what we really mean is there is and there is not. That is nothingness. In—in dark room, there is many things actually; but at the same time, because it is dark, we cannot see. That is darkness. "Nothingness," we say, but actually there is something. There is something but it's—actually, there is nothing. This is very true, isn't it?

I exist here like this, but actually I don't exist like that—like this. Buddhist scripture—scripture says, in one day we will change into various beings—sixty billion, forty—forty hundred million, and ninety-nine thousand, and eight hundred, and nine hundred and eighty-four times [laughs, laughter]. How much is that? Maybe the population of America and China, you know, the amount may be something, six million or—in China there is—they—there is supposed to be, you know, four billion. Hmm? No. Four billion?

**Student B:** Seven hundred million.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Seven hundred million? Is that all? [Laughs, laughter.] It is still pretty big [laughs] number so I cannot figure out. But—so many times do we changed in one day. So—if so, and if it is actually so, so I don't exist in this way, even for a moment. We say "moment after moment," but more than that it changes like the strips [?] on the—characters on the train [?]. Looks like, you know, always in the same way, but it is not. Always changing. It is turning. It is result of countless combustion.

So, you know, we—I exist and I don't exist. That is so true [?]. So from —because we are changing moment after moment, I don't exist. But, at the same time, it looks like, and people understand that I am existing here and you are listening. This is a game and explanation so that you—so that I won't convince you [laughs]. This is just explanation, but it is so. So we say we do not exist. When we say so, we are in utter darkness, all over, in utter darkness. When I say, "I exist here and you

exist there," it is light of being. And when we say, "Nothing exists," that is light of non-being. Again, this is just thinking mind. The actual feeling—feeling of reality is beyond our thinking mind. Only ... [*Sentence not finished. Tape turned over.*]

... or, there is no idea of existence or no existence. It is not necessary to say or not necessary to be bothered by this kind of talking. But only to encourage your practice—my practice—I am explaining it so that you—you give up your superficial understanding of, "My [1 word] doesn't exist, but [1 word] exist." That is very superficial understanding.

Okay. Some more questions? Do you have some question over there? I may feel good if me—if you ask me question; it means you are [laughs] listening to me [laughs]. My voice reach to you. Do you feel strange to be at this kind of lecture? I want to—I want to disturb you [laughs, laughter], disturb your busy thinking mind—destroy your, you know, rigid—rigid—rigidness of your thinking—way of thinking. Do you have some question? *Hai.*

**Student C:** I don't know what did you mean by "all activity is zazen."

**Suzuki-rōshi:** "All activity is zazen"?

**Student C:** Yeah. Could you explain this to us?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm. All— It is not something to be explained, but, you know, because—it is the real meaning of, you know, why—it is reason why we practice zazen and reason why we do many things. When we put more emphasis on zazen practice, we say everyday activity is zazen. You see? Every—whatever you do, it is zazen. When we say, so we put more emphasis on zazen. You see? You understand? Everyday activity is zazen. That is why, you know, we—you have some reason in—when you practice zazen.

But actually, everyday practice and zazen practice is not two separate practice. If—if everyday activity is quite different from zazen practice, zazen practice will be dead and everyday practice will just become someone's, you know, blind activity without any reason why you have everyday activity. It is just, you know, agony or struggling, not activity even. When you have some reason—even though you have no reason why you do something, but if you enjoy your activity, or if you have composure in your everyday activity, then you can enjoy your everyday activity. That composure cannot be—cannot be gained by some, for an instance, drugs or wine or [laughs]—or some intoxicant, including various teaching [laughter]. "Buddha said so, so I must do this." That is a kind of intoxicant. But, you know, even though Buddha didn't say anything about it—about what you are doing, when you feel very good and when you have no regret in what you have done, and when you become you

yourself, then that is your everyday, you know, life. And it makes sense. And you will grow in that kind of activity or practice.

So zazen practice is, you know— To acquire that kind of composure in everyday activity, we practice zazen. If you—if I say in that way, everyday life is first and zazen is next, to enjoy your life you practice zazen. But if you think, you know, if you think for an instance to enjoy our life we practice zazen, so zazen is a little bit, you know, awkward and hard. So maybe I rather take wine or LSD [laughs] so that you may be better. Then that is not our practice, because you only—without understanding the other side of your life, you stick to the pleasure of life, to enjoy your life. And your main purpose of life is to enjoy your life. So it is very one-sided understanding. So that is wrong.

But to—if Zen—if, for an instance, I think:

I am practicing zazen every day [laughs], so there is no need for me to experience or to be sympathetic with so much difficulty in everyday life. I am practicing zazen. I am priest. I am Buddhist. So if I practice zazen, that is okay. I have good reason why I do not work.

This is, you know, another mistake.

So, this is zazen only—zazen only. I don't know what we should [?]. We are addicted by the idea of zazen. That is also wrong. So our practice must have both sides, and your everyday life should have both sides. Then our practice perfect [?] and very realistic. And our practice will help people. Our practice which has both—both sides. Okay? It is—it is important to have both sides or else you will—you cannot survive in its true sense. You will be easily be lo- [partial word: "lost"?]—you will be easily lost. *Hai*.

**Student D:** Rōshi, you [4-6 words unclear] ... difficulties. And what are difficulties? Do they exist outside of what we think are difficulties?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Oh, difficulty is one [?]-must be many difficulties. You know, I—I am confronting with various difficulties every day, and I am confronting with my students' difficulties too [laughs]—actual difficulty, and I'm not saying something special. You understand what—what I mean? Difficulty. Actual difficulty. But actual difficulties—how—why we have actual difficulties, is, you know, lack of understanding of the problem. And that is why we feel confused. But when we—when we are not in confusion, difficulty is not difficulty because we have—we have some hope. But when we do not have any hope, when we are very confused, that is real difficulty.

But when we know why we have difficulty, then it is comparatively good—not so bad. The difficulty—why we have difficulty is because we are involved in just one-sided view. We do not understand things thoroughly or [1 word], you know. One-sided understanding of things makes us difficulty. Or because—because of one-sided view, I do things, we do things. So, naturally [laughs], will—our effort will, end in [?] zazen. We have no freedom. *Hai*.

**Student E:** If you're sitting in a dark—dark room, how do you keep from [2 words unclear].

**Suzuki-rōshi:** [Laughs, laughter.] I don't—I don't say, you know, utter, you know, without wanting you should sit. I mean, without trying to figure out what it is, you know. Whatever you have in your mind, you shouldn't be curious about it. "What does it mean? I had a wonderful experience in my zazen." Or: "I—I had many images of Buddha in my zazen. What does it mean? Oh! [Laughs, laughter.] Where—where do they come from?" That is not zazen, you know, even though various snakes or, you know, spider—black spider come: "Oh, that is black spider—spider. And that is snake." In that way, if you sit, it means you are sitting in dark room. You see but you don't see. You are not bothered by it. That is to sit in dark room. Even though you see, you don't see. Okay? That is true. Actually such a dragon or snake doesn't exist, you know, doesn't come; but you think it come. It is okay to think, to see various image in your zazen. It's okay. It means that something wrong with your breathing or something. That is why you see some fantasy in your practice. But you shouldn't be curious about it. That is to sit in darkness. It is emptiness, emptiness of your mind.

We—we talked about this kind of thing from various way, for an instance *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*: "Form is emptiness; emptiness is form." Emptiness is dark room. And dark room there is form—various form. But at the same time it should be empty. It is tentative color or form of big being.

It looks like I am always talking about some philosophy. But philosophy—it is not philosophy; it is actual practice of each one of us. I am talking about your practice not—not just the philosophy. It may be philosophy, but—it should be—but why we think—observe things in that way is because we have experience of—actual experience of this kind of philosophy. It is not just, you know, talk but actual experience of our practice. So it means that you must practice zazen [laughs], in short, with right understanding. Or else you be lost!

Thank you very much.

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Source: City Center transcript. Transcribed by Jeffrey Schneider (12 August 1999) and checked against tape by Bill Redican (4 March 2002).