

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**Tuesday, August 3, 1971**  
**Zen Mountain Center**

I want to explain why we become Buddhist [laughs] or why I myself became a Buddhist. Perhaps here in America, because you have some wish, you know, hope in your future life—future life of a—future—personally your own future life. and sociologically you're concerned about your future society. But to tell the truth, we Buddhists do not have any hope [laughs]. We do not have any hope for our human, you know, life because we understand this life is originally full of suffering. That is, you know, how we understand our society. From the beginning we understand that our world is world of suffering. And we understand why we suffer, you know, is because we expect too much. We always expect something more than you will obtain or acquire.

For an instance, everyone knows that we cannot stay young, but we want to be always young [laughs]. Once in a while, you know, when—even though you are young, once in a while you may feel, "Oh gee, I am twenty-five now [laughs]. Oh, I am not anymore young." [Laughs, laughter.] You may feel in that way. That is, you know, good evidence that you want to be always young. But that is not possible, you know. We want to experience what you have, but that is not also possible.

Things are changing always, so nothing can be yours. So whatever you want—you want to be or you want to have, nothing can be possible for you to obtain or to have it. That is actually how our human world is. Actually it is so. But still, we want to be fooled by [laughs] something. That is maybe why we say human beings do not like something real. But human being like something unreal. That is very true. You don't like anything real. So after, you know, give up all the hopes you have in mundane world, we become Buddhist.

Then what will become of you if you become Buddhist? If you resign from this world, what will become of you is maybe next question. Why you become Buddhist is to resign from this, you know, world of suffering, to have perpetual, you know, joy we become Buddhist. If you become Buddhist, even though you have no, you know, hope—mundane wishes. But instead you will have the freedom from various restriction which you had in your mundane world. You will be free from restriction.

Actually, because of our many desires, we do not have freedom. We, you know—we restrict ourselves by ourselves. No one want to be—want to restrict you. But you yourself restrict yourself. And sometime

you feel someone else is, you know, restricting yourself, but actually it is you who is restrict yourself. Because of your wishes you restrict yourself. Because of your wishes you feel as if someone, you know, [is] making you unhappy [laughing]. And that is not so. You have too much desires. So your society will not allow your family or your friends—will not allow you to fulfill your wishes. Everyone want to fulfill, you know, each one's own wishes so we have, naturally, trouble. And we feel because of your friend—because of your society you suffer. But it is not so actually. Because of your too much—too many desires you suffer.

So purpose of our practice as a Buddhist [is] to be free from yourself, your small self, to be free from your small wishes. That is purpose our practice. This is, you know, Buddhist trip [laughs, laughter]. Our trip is very different from yours—maybe opposite. We are not interested in something we can see, you know. We are not interested in sightseeing trip or space trip or anything, you know, you can enjoy in its ordinary sense.

And here I have—speaking of trip or some kōan or Zen story<sup>1</sup>—famous Zen master, Changsha.<sup>2</sup> He was called "Big Lion."<sup>3</sup> People called him Big Lion because he was so powerful teacher. One day he went out of the monastery and [went] strolling about the mountain. And when he came back, *shūsa*<sup>4</sup>—do you know *shūsa*? *Shūsa* means leader of the monast- [partial word]—monastic training—asked him, "Where have you been? What kind of trip did you make? [Laughs.] Where have you been?" he asked.

And he said, "I have been strolling around the mountain." This is already—he is speaking about his own practice. "Strolling over" means, you know, as you know, when you stroll over you have no particular intention of going some special place—anywhere you want. If you see something and you want [to] find out something interesting you will be [?] go that way, and passing many beautiful places. When you want to come back, you may come back. But there is no particular purpose of the walking. That is [what the] story [is] about.

It means, you know, the life free—free from various attachment or worldly interests. Anyway, he enjoys his life. And why he can enjoy his life is he has—he doesn't—he is not restricted. He is not under restriction. He is free—always free. His mind is always free from himself and from others, and from objective world. That is why, you know, he said, "I am strolling around," he said.

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<sup>1</sup> From *The Blue Cliff Record*, Case 36: "Changsha Wandering in the Mountains."

<sup>2</sup> Changsha Jingcen Zhaoxien (Jap. Chōsha Keishin): d. 868. Ch'an master.

<sup>3</sup> Shin Daichu (lit., "Chin, the Big Tiger.")

<sup>4</sup> Suzuki-rōshi said "*shūsa*" throughout, not "*shuso*."

But *shūsa* was a very good fellow, you know, very plain fellow himself. But then "You were strolling about. What—where did you go?" [Laughs.] He asked like that. He, you know, he tried to catch his master, you know. He feel if his master has some special interest, you know, in something he can catch him. If he—if you like good food, you know, he would say, "Oh! I like noodle." [Laughs.] Or "I like *sake*." [Laughs.] There he can catch him. "Oh! You—you like noodle. Then next, you know, next—next [1 word unclear: sounds like Japanese *sukuji*], you know, we will make some noodle for you." "Oh good." If he say so, he was caught [laughs] by—by his disciple. "I know—I know your weak point. That is your," you know, "weak point." So whenever, you know, his—he became mean, he may say, "I make noodle for you [laughs, laughter] tomorrow. How about it?" In that way, you know, his disciple caught him.

But he—but what he said was, "I have been gone. I—I saw many beautiful flowers," he said. So *shūsa*, his disciple [thought], "Oh, he likes flowers. He is really quiet as flower, anyway. So if I make beautiful garden—a flower garden, I think he will be happy." In that way he wanted to catch him.

So he thought he caught him. And what he said was, "It is—you look very happy," you know. "You have spring—you feel as if it is—do you feel as if it is springtime?" [Laughs.] "Do you see the flowers and beautiful garden—beautiful flowers?" he said.

But his teacher said, "No, not always so. I felt as if I was strolling about in the autumn," you know, "period—for their last dead leaves—and cold. I had that kind of feeling." That is what his teacher said. It means that he is not caught by spring flowers. Nor he is not caught by beautiful foliage. It is already, you know, frosty late autumn. So he couldn't go—disciple couldn't catch him. If he said, "You are strolling—you looks like strolling about spring field. But now you said you are strolling—walking through the late autumn field."

That is, you know, our trip. We should not be caught by anything. Until you have that kind of strength or freedom, you should, you know, practice hard. Purpose of practice is not to chase after worldly freedom, but it is to have freedom from our small desires or fame or success in our mundane world, and if possible to help people—to make—to release them from that kind of mundane wishes and restrictions. That is, you know, Buddhist way of life: join you in your path, in your ordinary life, and then you will have freedom from ordinary life. There big difference.

So when you have real freedom from everything, you may be very sympathetic with people who are involved in small, personal desires

and—to be involved in competitive world. So naturally you want to help people to be free from—free from this kind of life. To share the, you know, to share the joy of freedom with people is our purpose of life. Usual—usually, you know, people are deeply involved in city life and so they stay in city. But Buddhist, you know, remain in city and live in city to help people who are involved in that kind of confusion. The way upward is to, you know, to—to make ourselves free from the small self of desires. And the way downward is after we have that kind of freedom to help people and to go back to the city is the way downward.

So—and after you, you know, you have freedom you do not—you do not enjoy the freedom around because you—you feel their suffering in your heart. And you—you cannot help going back to city to help people. That is the way downward—way upward. You should go down one flight again. That is Buddhist life. Whether you are priest or layman, you should—you should start our practice from actual experience of suffering of this life.

Buddha, you know, after experiencing many, you know, luxurious life as a priest, and he found out that there is no real pleasure of life in this kind of life. And he gave back his life and escaped from the castle and started to practice to gain freedom from this kind of worldly life. And after he attained enlightenment, he again came back to his castle, and before he came back to his castle he met five of his men who escaped the castle with him. And he preached for the five of these men. And they were—those five people were the first disciple of the Buddha—disciples of Buddha. And he at last came back to his house. And his mother-in-law became a priest, his son became a—not priest, but [laughs] Buddha's follower, you know. At that time there is no such a people like priest. They—their relatives and family became his followers. That is good example of Buddhist life.

So [laughs] if—if you come to Tassajara with some mundane hope, you know, to make a good home at Tassajara it will be big mistake. Tassajara is not some place, you know, where you can stay forever. If you want to stay here that is fine. It means that you will, you know, spend rest of your life help people here. We will have various—many—various kinds of children, you know, we will have. All of them—not all of them want to be a priest or want to be a Buddhist in its true sense. Tassajara has hot spring, and for students and away from the city life it is good place to stay. So it may be [seem like] a good idea to spend rest of the time here. That is big mistake. That is not the nature of this community. This community is for the students who want to—to have some power to be free from our small wishes—small desires. We have many desires. Even though you do not realize it, you have it.

To be free from all those desires and willing [?] to acquire—acquiring big freedom—great freedom from yourself and from mundane world, and always, you know, free from suffering, and always, you know, being happy with people and friendly with people, and without any expectation to help people in Tassajara is, you know, why we—you stay at Tassajara if you want to stay here.

Wherever you are, there is something to do. Even though you are in such a remoted mountain there is something for you to do to help people. So it is okay for you to stay here, but you cannot stay here just to enjoy yourself, your life. If you, you know, have this kind of idea and stay here, people from outside will not feel so good. I think, you know, way many people like Tassajara—the reason why they like Tassajara, I think—*mmm*.

Actually, excuse me, I was—I became a good friend of hummingbird [laughs], you know. The hummingbird—relationship between me and the hummingbird [laughs]—not much relationship, actually [laughs, laughter], but whenever I come out they come—sometime two. And they won't to be disturbed by me [laughter]. What unusual birds. "Here—he is always here, and he don't makes me—makes me any harm," you know. "There is no need to be afraid of him, but whenever he come out, I feel uneasy—it is [2-3 words] what he will do. Let's go and he will come."

And, you know, I sometime moves on purpose, like this [probably gesturing], so that they can go away. But they won't go away! They are much more interested in what he—what his friend do, you know. If his friend come, you know, immediately he will go. Until his friend come, even though I move [claps hands three times], he doesn't go. It means that he has his own life. It is very different from mine. But there is some connection, you know, because whenever I come out they—they come. There must be come connection, but not much connection. I think this is very good relationship, you know. I do not give, actually, honey to them. Someone else—I don't know who—give the honey to them. Someone else give them honey treat. So actually I have not much relationship with them, but there is, you know, very close relationship. It is difficult to explain what is my relationship to the hummingbirds. And I think our students and our guests—the relationship between them is something like that, you know [laughs]. We are practicing zazen here. You come to enjoy your life here, or you are vacationing here. So completely different, you know, life—not—not at all same.

But I don't know why but our students like our guests very much, like hummingbird, you know, come to—come out whenever I go out. Not much reason, but we will do it anyway—that's all. I think that kind of relationship is good, the perfect relationship. Usually, you know, what

we try to is to have complete relationship—to feel, you know, possessive of something, you know, someone, or to, you know, to make them follow our rule or [1 word] way. That is, you know—that kind of relationship is not based on the real Buddhist way.

You may know, in *Dhammapada*,<sup>5</sup> Buddha said, "You should be like a bee," you know, "collecting honey from flower to flower—flying from flower to flower, without destroying the flower, without disturbing the beauty of the flower." That is, you know, Buddhist way of helping people. We do not disturb hummingbird; the hummingbird does not disturb us. And hummingbird is not, you know, bothered by—does not want you to do anything. It's just he want to—to come and see what is going [laughs]—"What is he doing?" [Laughs.] Very, you know—and I f- [partial word: feel?]-day by day I feel very good relationship between the hummingbird and me. It makes, you know, very soft sound. And he can stop, you know, in the air whenever he want to: *rrrh*, you know [laughs]. He—maybe he could—he could stop in front of me like this: *brrr*. "What are you doing?" [Laughs, laughter.] He doesn't say so—just, you know, *brrr*. And he—*brrr*—he makes, you know, one soft sound.

Relationship between Buddhist and usual people should be like this. How is it possible for you to be like a hummingbird is? First of all, you must have strong practice. You must train yourself so that you can have always big mind—big strong mind. Or else, you know, you cannot be like—you cannot be like a hummingbird. It is easy for the—for the bird to be like that. But it is not so easy for human being to be like that: so innocent, so little bit [?] desires, having great freedom from everything.

First of all, if we want to be like that you should be able to reform your small desires. Even though you have desires, you shouldn't—you shouldn't be caught by them completely. It is okay to have desire, but you should not be enslaved by it. And that is why we practice hard—because we human being is very hard, you know, creature—very difficult—difficult creature. So accordingly we must have difficult practice. So for human being, if you ... [*Sentence not finished. Tape turned over.*]

When you have too much desires, why is it—is it necessary to have more desires? If it is too much, you should release your burden. That is, you know, what we should do to have more freedom. If you continue to extend your small desires, more and more your life will be confused and your suffering increase endlessly, and you will be lost in suffering. As our human world is very individual, personal world that,

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<sup>5</sup> Verse 49, literally: "As a bee without harming the flower, its colour or scent, flies away, collecting only the honey, even so should the sage wander in the village" [*Dhammapada*, Nārada Thera Vajirārāma, 1963, p. 53].

even though you make great effort to help people, it doesn't work. When you have enough money to give, you know, you will be a good person. But if you have no more money, no one will give it to you. No one will say even "Good morning" [laughs]. That is an actual how this world is going. As long as you have money, you have many friends. As long as you are young and beautiful, you have many friends. But if you become 50 or 60 you don't have much—so much friends, and you would be very lonely.

But if you—if your mind is always young, being free from various desires, then, you know, you will have always your friends even though you have not a penny of money. That is actually what will happen to you. How you, you know, have always hope in your old age, how you create, you know, yourself after 50 or 60 is the main purpose of our practice. So that you may not feel sorry when you become old, you practice hard.

When we—we—when—because I want—we want to be always happy, you know, we practice hard. But as Buddha said, "If too much—too many trees [probably meant "birds"], you know, come to small tree, eventually tree—the tree will be dead." If we have too much desire, we will die. So if you want the tree always green and alive and strong, you must protect the tree from too many birds. Birds likes—like the tree, and tree like birds, so it is okay to have some, but if you have too much [laughs] the tree will die. And bird will be—will be unhappy if tree die.

We do not encourage people so much, you know. We do not propagate Buddhism, you know, so intensely. But what we are doing is, as much as possible, to make people happy is our purpose. As much as possible, we should help people. And "as much as possible" is, you know, important point. Not too much: as much as possible. Little by little.

Even though something is very good—maybe health food is good for you—but if you want all the people to have health food, you know [laughs], that is not possible. And if you try to do so, you will be exhausted [laughs]. Not much people—most people are interested in something sweet or meat or fish, which taste good [laughs]. No one interested in brown rice or *miso* soup or bean curds. Not much people are interested in it. So if you want to—even in Tassajara, you know, there is some problem—not much—because we—most of us like strong healthy food, not much problem. But still, you know, there is some problem, and each one must try pretty hard [laughs] sometime, because sometime we have many desires. Knowing that this is not so good, but we want to taste it once in a while. That is the trouble.

So if you convince, you know, people through and through in some way it is very difficult. It is almost impossible. It is very difficult. As someone said, "A man can lead a horse to the water, you know, but it is almost impossible to make them drink." You—you may think if you lead a horse to the water: "Now! He came to the stream." [SR hits table three times.] "He may drink, you know, water from it." But if he is not hungry or thirsty he will not drink immediately [?]. If you make them drink, it is a great job. [Laughter.] You need many helpers. And between helpers there will be trouble [laughs]. "No! Not this way!" [Laughing]. "Do more! Do more! You are lazy! Why don't you —? You are afraid of horse!" [SR makes frightened little mocking sounds.] [Laughs, laughter.] "Do it right now! He is trouble!"

Same thing will happen, you know, if you—even though something is good, you cannot, you know, convince them completely. That is human nature. If you do it little by little, you know, as much as you can, that is the best policy. And we will have always good feeling between us. How we bring out—begin about this kind of life in our human life is, you know, too hard. Strong practice is in ourselves—for ourselves, not for others. Without forcing our way on others, but to practice to force the truth on us—each one of us, then naturally people follow your example. And they will share—you can share the joy with people. Because—again, because you expect too much, you cannot share your complete freedom. And you don't have freedom. Even though you have it you cannot share [it] with people.

The other day I talked about Ummon's<sup>6</sup> the Sun-Faced Buddha and the Moon-Faced Buddha.<sup>7</sup> Sometime we are sick and sometime we are healthy. But to be sick and to be healthy is our practice. Sometime we are healthy and sometime we are sick. Sometime it is hot, and sometime it is cold. When it is cold you should be cold buddha. When it is hot you should be hot buddha. There's no secret. That's all. That is Buddhism. When it is cold, you should be cold buddha. When you are sick, you should be sick buddha. That's all. No secret.

But you may find—find out how difficult practice it is to be just sick. To be just healthy, to be just hot, or to be just cold. If it is cold, you may want to go to somewhere it is not so cold. When you are sick, you want to be recovered. Even though, you know, you want to be recovered if—before time come, you cannot be recovered. So it is better just to stay in bed—just to enjoy the life in the hospital. That is much better. When time come, if your doctor is taking care of yourself, you will be recovered.

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<sup>6</sup> SR may have meant to say Baso Dōitsu (Master Ma, Mazu Daoyi: 709-788), the Ch'an master who answered "Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha."

<sup>7</sup> Third case of *The Blue Cliff Record*, "Master Ma Is Unwell."

Sometime we may feel so sorry for someone who is in agitation, you know: "Oh, I have stayed [in] hospital already one month, but my doctor says 'You should stay ten more days.' Terrible!" And sometime I feel very sorry to—to leave hospital before someone leave, you know. If possible I want to stay more, but they don't allow you to stay. And I don't [1-3 words] with them—with my friend always, whenever I go to hospital.

So the secret is when you are sick, you should be sick. That's all. No secret. Then Buddha will take care of your health. Wherever you go, you will enjoy your life. And you will be needed [?] wherever you go.

If your tendency is, you know, to—I don't know how to say but—if your tendency is to be too much helpful to someone—others, then even though you want to help them, they may not like it if it is too much. You should help them as much as they need you. Unless you are not completely from your ego, that is not possible, maybe. That is the way we help people. That is how we—you can do it is because of the true enlightenment. When you know you yourself, you have enlightenment.

When you have not much, you know, desires or wishes, you have chance to see things as it is. You have chance to have enlightened eyes. That is our practice, actually. So you should know the point of practice, you know, what is practice actually. Our practice is something different from usual practice—from usual training.

I wish I have some more time to—to have your questions about these points. Some more question? Some question?

Anyway, if you find out the difference—if you have some misunderstanding about our practice, you know, or if you find out some misunderstanding about the practice, I shall be very happy. You know, if you find out—if you find out that your understanding was wrong about our practice, I shall be very happy. I want to collect your misunderstanding. *Hai.*

**Student A:** Could you clarify if you're just being and allow yourself to be where you are—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Uh-huh.

**Student A:** —if you're sick you're sick. If you're—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Uh-huh.

**Student A:** —whatever. And if you're lazy then you're lazy—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Uh-huh.

**Student A:** —how can you get into practice? [SR laughs, laughter.]  
Can you, without negating that? [SR continues to laugh].

**Suzuki-rōshi:** You know, when you ask that question already you want to be—escape from it, you know. Before you try to escape from it, you know, you should accept your laziness, and your foolishness, and your agitation, you know. "Okay, I am very lazy now." [Laughs.] You know, that is first. Try not to escape from it before you accept it. Okay? If you really think you are lazy [laughs]—sleeping in bed, you know: "Oh! Oh, I am so lazy!" [Laughs, laughter.] Then for ten times you should repeat, "Oh, I am lazy, lazy, lazy." [Laughs, laughter.] And get up! [Laughter.] That is way, you know. Usually, you know, when you feel yourself lazy, you may say, "Get up! Get up!" [Laughs.] You may call up your children—wake up your children and your husband. You see? That is—that—it doesn't work. You should accept yourself to be lazy. If you are lazy, your husband may be lazy, you know. Children will be lazy. You are all lazy! [Laughs.] "Oh, what has she done!" [Laughs, laughter.] It may work, if you really think in that way. *Hai.*

**Student B:** What about sleepiness? That's [1-3 words].

**Suzuki-rōshi:** That's worst enemy! You cannot do anything about it. But [laughs] the—the only thing it may help is to have good sleep. And to have good sleep, it is necessary to have some—to organize your life. That is very important. So that—that you can practice good—you have good zazen means you have—it is well-organized in your life [?]. It's [1-2 words]—it's—maybe it's one of your, you know, conditions. When—when something is wrong with your, you know, health you will be very sleepy. But it is difficult to know what is wrong with yourself. But when—as Buddha said, if dragon or snake or sleepiness come, don't fight with it. If real snake or dragon or snake appears, we should sleep, you know. Don't fight with it. It is too late to fight with it. Before it appears, you must do something with it. *Hai.*

**Student C [David Chadwick]:** As work leader, the biggest problem I have almost is trying to balance and juggle everybody's desires.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm.

**David:** And I don't feel—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** "Juggle?" What do you mean? Oh. Oh. [David is probably imitating juggling.]

**David:** I'm—I feel sort of incompetent, you know. I—it's—I don't feel like being too much of an authority. But all the time, all day long, people tell me what they want and what they don't want. And I don't really get so angry. I try to do what they want as much as possible. But what—I don't feel like a teacher, you know?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** No. [Laughs.]

**David:** And I—I—I don't know what to do. It's such a problem. What should I do when, you know—when I could just put people where I wanted them instead of where they want, it would be very easy. What do I do when I hear all day what people want?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah. When they ask you something, mostly they are, you know, they are escaping from their [2-3 words]. So if possible, let—let them think about it. Let them decide, if possible. But that is not always possible. It is, you know—so that is a good practice, anyway. And if you have strong practice, you yourself, you know, strong practice—you cannot [2-3 words]. It is—again, it is matter of your practice. And how student—it is their own problem, not yours. Cannot be yours originally. But something like that happens doesn't—[it] means, you know, Tassajara practice is not so good. They are escaping, trying to escape from their, you know, own duty—putting the responsibility on work leader. It is no good.

Not so easy thing, but we should work on this point. This happens to all of us. So that is why we must be—each one of us should be—should have good practice, or else it doesn't work.

**Student D:** How can I best practice borrowing from Rinzai?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Maybe pretty difficult [laughs], yeah. I think so. The other day someone talked about group practice, you know. But actually we need someone, you know, someone's help. If you do not have anyone to help, you should read. What kind of book is helpful is some Zen story, you know, with commentary is best. Actual story is best, not your—some philosophy or, you know, something like Japanese culture or something—not something like that.

Some actual story is best. And best, you know, story will be the story you have in your everyday life. That is best kōan [laughs]. Why you cannot work on your everyday life as a Zen story is because you understand your own life, you—your own convenience. You don't, maybe—for an instance, you know, if you like diary, you know. It is difficult to describe what you have done on that day, you know. If you—if you write down, you may write down as if you are doing something very good everyday [laughs]. And you will be ashamed of it, you know: "Oh, I am not so good," you know. "I am bad." But actually I

cannot write as if—I cannot write as I am, you know. If you are—if able to describe your life exactly as it is, you may be a great teacher. You are solving kōan, but that is not so easy. If you write something about you, and if your husband read it, you know, he won't accept it. [Laughs.] But still you think, "I am right! He is wrong! He doesn't understand me!" That is not so. If you, you know, write about you so that everyone of your family understand, then you will be a great, great Zen master. That is good practice [laughs]. To describe yourself as you are, to say something as you are—that is good practice. And if you find it difficult, you should [2-3 words: practice right around?]. Okay? That is good practice.

Thank you very much.

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Source: City Center partial transcript (approximately 1 page) entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997, plus original transcription of remainder by Sara Hunsaker. Checked against tape by Bill Redican, March 13, 2000.