

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
Sunday, August 8, 1971
Zen Mountain Center

Tonight I have nothing to talk about [laughs]. Empty hand. No book. I just appeared here [laughter]. But as Yakusan-zenji¹ did, I wouldn't go back to my room without saying anything. If you ask some questions, I will answer. In that way, I want to spend just one hour with you. Okay? If you have some questions, please ask me. Ask. Okay. *Hai*.

Student A: Rōshi, I notice that often when I wake up in the morning the first minute or so my mind is sort of unclear. [Remaining 3-6 sentences unclear.]

Suzuki-rōshi: It is because you are [at] Tassajara pretty long time, and you have not much problem to follow our schedule. So you have, maybe—you have time to think [about] something else, you know [laughs]. That is, maybe, the reason. At first, as we—as it is difficult to follow our schedule and to know exactly what we do in zendō. First of all you think about [how?] to go to zendō anyway, you know. That will be the first thing you think about. But more and more, you feel as if you can do pretty well. I think that is main reason. I think that is not so good, but that is—anyway that will be the problem for the student who stay pretty long time here. So if it is so, I must give you a big slap [laughs], but now I—I want to ask you—I have a question, you know. Why do I give you a slap—because your practice is not so good? [Taps stick several times.] What will be the reason for—reason of the slap?

Student A: It seems [1-2 words] to my mind, to—to wake me up right now.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student A: And I [4-8 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. When you just wake up, you know, you have—you don't have, you know, so many things in your mind. Your mind is clear. And when your mind is clear, you have to come to zendō. And our practice should be continuous view [?] of practice, but that is actually not so easy. So—but if—if something appears already, it can't be helped, you know. You shouldn't fight with it. Even so, even [if] you have problem, [and] your mind is not clear, you should

¹ Yaoshan Weiyān (Yakusan Igen): 751-834. Dharma successor of Sekitō Kisen. Master of Ugan, Sensu, and Dōgo.

come. That is what you should do. To encourage that kind of practice, I give you slap or *dōan* or *ino* will, if you are still in bed, you know, for an instance. Someone will go to—to bring you to the zendō.

That is—usually it is, you know, we understand it is not so good, but once it happen in that way it can't be helped, you know. And even though we go and [on?] catching, but it is not because your practice is bad. Don't understand in that way. Something already happened. We should not criticize it. But we should encourage him to have good practice, that's all. Do you have some other question? *Hai*. Be careful. [Laughter.]

Student B: Each one of us has [1-2 sentences unclear.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Colors. Uh-huh. Colors. What do— I don't.

Student B: What does [1 word] mean when we see colors? There's no [1 word]. It's entirely blue, with [4-5 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: Do you see something or—

Student B: Sometimes color.

Suzuki-rōshi: Color?

Student B: Green and blue.

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student B: Blue and green, maybe.

Suzuki-rōshi: When—even though you open your eyes? Ahh. [Laughs, laughter.] Blue and yellow. Something like, you know, something like trip. Maybe—maybe—did you—do you have some experience of drugs?

Student B: Yes.

Suzuki-rōshi: Maybe that is you think of something like that— association with it. I don't know exactly why, because I don't see any color [when I meditate] [laughs, laughter]. My enemy is drowsiness, that's all. Do you see some color?

Student B: Only in the back of the [1-2 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: Drowsiness or color?

Student B: Drowsiness.

Suzuki-rōshi: Drowsiness [laughs]. You have same experience—you see the color?

Student B: Not really [8-10 words.] [Laughter.] I thought green [3-6 words.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Green— [Severe coughing episode.] Blue—do I look like blue? [3-4 words.] *Hai.*

Student B: [3-4 sentences unclear.]

Suzuki-rōshi: But I don't think that that is big problem. If you see the color always, it will be problem sometime. You know, many things happen. We say another name of delusion is *ganka*,² you know, flower of—flower—flower of eye—some, you know, color or some vision. That is another name of delusion, so you don't have to worry so—so much about it. *Hai.*

Student C: Last night in your lecture, you were discussing how it's possible to make a journey on the path of communication. I was thinking afterwards that it seems like the idea of communication involves communication between two things.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: And it seems to me that what you [4-6 words] you reduced these two things to one. And I think that communication, maybe, is a bad word from the point of view of [1 word]. At a certain point, you're no longer communicating. You're—something beyond that—something—I—I couldn't think of a better word for that.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Communication. Communication is usually something which happens between two, but that is one—one-sided understanding of communication. Yeah—why we can communicate is, you know, there is—between two there is some oneness [?] that is there. That is why we—we can communicate. You see? Communication is—is something which happen between two, and at the same time, communication will be unders- [partial word]—a same understanding, you know, through words. To reach same understanding, we communicate. So it is actually based on same understanding, which doesn't happen. Looks like happen; does not happen before you communicate.

But there is potentiality or, you know, possibility before you communicate. So it is not actually two. It is just two—two ways of understanding. Do you understand? That I can speak to you is

² *gan* = eye; *ka* = flower. A disease of the eye. Hence, delusion.

because there is possibility, for you and for me, to reach same understanding. So if—if we try to communicate without sticking to one's own view too much, communication is possible. But if you do not give up one-sided view of yours, communication is not possible. Only when one of the two person give up his own viewpoint and take same viewpoint, communication is possible. [When] both of them in turn take the other's viewpoint, the communication is possible. Isn't that so?

So problem of communication is problem of viewpoint or ego. If you stick to your ego, communication is not possible. Or it takes long, long time. Maybe waste of time sometime. So one of the two should give up his own viewpoint and feel sympathy—sympathetic to—to others. That is only way to communicate. *Hai*.

Student D: Rōshi, often when I'm chanting [2-4 words] I'm sitting zazen, when it [6-8 words] particularly the *Heart Sūtra* in English. And it started out different—the meaning of the words. Is this thinking of the meaning of the words [6-8 words]?

Suzuki-rōshi: Meaning of the words—yeah, if you chant in English, naturally, you know, you will think of—think about the meaning too. But it is not actually—it is something which—which we—appears or which come to your mind immediately. You see the characters, or immediately you say something. It is not just sound.

The *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* is—the meaning of the sūtra is about emptiness, you know. So each word suggest [to] you the reality of the emptiness. So, especially when you chant *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, it is just words which suggest [to] you the emptiness. It is like you cross your legs, and to have your *mudrā*, and you take breathing. Same thing.

Maybe before you understand the meaning of the sūtra, you know, then you may be wondering in your mind, "What does it mean?" Then that is not, you know, zazen. That is reading. Do you understand? The chanting sūtra is something which you can do after you know the meaning. It is not reading. It is expressing your understanding through words. Do you understand the difference?

Student E: [2-4 sentences unclear.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Difference? Difference between reading and chanting is—chanting is something, you know, you do after you know the meaning, after you have some confidence, you know, in your understanding of the sūtra, so your mind does not—do not wander. The chanting encourage your chanting [understanding?], and if you chant, it—chanting encourage your spirit or understanding—actualize

your understanding with—with your voice. That is chanting. Reading is to think about it: "What does it mean? I don't understand." That is reading. Do you understand?

Student E: I guess [?].

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh. *Hai.*

Student F: Rōshi, I don't know—the first time I listened to [1-2 words] zazen, and I usually—when I'm in the zendō there is a struggle in my mind. [6-8 words.]

Suzuki-rōshi: You come to struggle [laughs] with your resistance, you know. That is okay with you [?], or else you will not stay here. Why you stay here is to struggle with your resistance. That is okay, isn't it? That is why you are here. The struggle makes sense, you know. You know, zazen is not some—zazen is—Dōgen-zenji says zazen is the most comfortable and easy practice [laughing], he said—but it is not so for us. For us, zazen is something difficult.

But anyway, we think we have to continue, for—while you are con-[partial word]—if you sit you feel better, you know, even though your sit—your zazen is not so calm. But much better than not to sit. It is, you know—you feel some resistance to zazen, you know, but if you do something else you may feel in the same way, I think. That is not problem of not—problem—not problem of zazen, but problem of you, you know. Problem is always with you.

So if you feel in that way, you should think more, and you should try to solve that problem. That is, you know, why you think. So zazen will be the shortcut to solve that problem which you have—which human being have.

Actually, you know, because, you—your—it is not because there is Tassajara or Zen Center, you know, that you sit. It is something we should do, whether there is Zen or not. Wherever you—you are, that is a problem we have, actually. And that is the problem we should confront with. Okay? Not a, you know—it is not problem of—of Zen. Do you understand? [Laughs.]

You may feel, you know, your parents, you know, encourage you to go to Tassajara. And that is why you came to Tassajara. You—you may—I don't know—something—that kind of feeling you have, in—in some corner of your heart [thought?] [laughs]. Don't you think so? But actually the problem you have is not your parents' problem or my problem or Zen Center's problem. The problem—we all human being has similar problem. That problem—big problem is [1-2 words]. Okay? *Hai.*

Student G: I'm looking at a kōan which uses the [1 word] word of "transmigration." Can you say something about how it might be a [3-4 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] Transmigration. It is—did you have kōan *mu*?

Student G: Yes.

Suzuki-rōshi: And do you—did you get through the kōan?

Student G: Yes.

Suzuki-rōshi: And next one is transmigration?

Student G: No.

Suzuki-rōshi: No?

Student G: This is—this is a long [1 word] many people [4-6 words]. And this is one.

Suzuki-rōshi: One of the—one part of—huh?

Student G: It is one [2-3 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: Who is—who is your teacher?

Student G: Many different ones. You know, [2-3 sentences. Names 3-4 "rōshis."]

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs, laughter.] Yeah. But all the teachers are different, but same thing.

Student G: I thought maybe there was one [6-8 words] it.

Suzuki-rōshi: Why, you know? You know, trans- [partial word]—why we say transmigration, when we say transmigration, underlying thought is each individual being, you know, each being. Isn't that so?

Student G: I [3-6 words]. I'm sorry. I wouldn't think that.

Suzuki-rōshi: Transmigration happens, you know, because there is many things. And is there—does—do they exist? Transmigration. Because many things exist, you know, so usually one change to the other. That is transmigration, isn't it?

Student G: That is one way. There's another way [1-2 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Many ways, yes [laughs]. So, what is that? So, we don't exist—transmigration doesn't exist [laughs, laughter]. And still it exists. So it is something, you know, beyond words. So you should, you know, point out actual fact, you know. That is how you pass kōan. If you drink a cup of tea [takes sip], this is transmigration [laughs], without, you know, saying—explaining it by logic. You shouldn't get, you know, caught by words anyway, but you should catch the actual fact which include various kōans. That is kōan study.

Student G: Well, I'm starting to get the feeling, you know—it sounds good. But then sometimes one teacher will say, like, "Don't be stuck by the words," and another one will say, "What's the word [6-8 words]."

Suzuki-rōshi: Because you—your answer is not actual, you know, you—you stick to words. As you ask me the explanation of it, you know, you may—you may be thinking in the same way. So that is why they say—they do not say yes.

Even so, intellectual understanding is necessary, and it will help. But that is not—that is just help, you know. The actual kōan cannot be like that. It is direct experience. But this kind of philosophy will help [you] to have direct experience. And this kind of logic will lead you—lead your practice and will show you the right path, instead of wandering about. *Hai.*

Student H: Rōshi, we do our best to assume all of our responsibilities all the time. And [1 word] would be encouraged. [1-2 sentences.]

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] I think that is pretty good, you know. You will—you should be, I think, exhaust your energy. You should—you should, you know, be always in complete combustion [laughs]. You see? That is practice. That is, I think, pretty good, you know. That is why we do not take so very strong food, you know, and we do not take too much sleep. You will—you will be always little bit—little bit [1 word], but still you must sit [laughs]. That will, you know—this kind of practice will help your actual practice. You will not—this is how we put a snake into bamboo [laughs]. If a snake is too strong it wouldn't go into the bamboo. So limiting your sleep and [laughs] food when snake is eating [laughs]—it growed [laughs, laughter].

Student I: [4-6 words.]

Suzuki-rōshi: No—suppose [laughs]—suppose not. *Hai.*

Student J: Rōshi, you said something about factors [6-8 words.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Out—outside of Center.

Student J: Yeah. Out.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. As—even though you are outside of the Center, you know, I—I want you to sit one period a day. May be pretty difficult. Morning time is best. Wake up earlier than usual, and beside your clothes [?]-where you sit and everyday if you sit with this kind of cushion, that is [1 word].

And in everyday activity, you should be concentrated on what you do, or, in other word, you should greet people or [1 word] as if you recite sūtra, or it become usual [?] careful feeling [?] of respect—thinking those are all buddhas. And sometime your boss or your friend may not understand what you are doing, but even though they don't understand, you should practice in your own way, with big mind. In city life—in this—in this world—it is big world, you know—wherever you go, people need you. If you have right spirit, people need you. Without you, their life doesn't make sense. We say to shine one corner of the world—one corner, just one corner. So if you, you know, shine one corner, then people around you will be—will feel better.

You should be always, you know—you should feel as if you are carrying umbrella, you know, for the people [laughs] to—to stay away from the heat or rain. It is rather difficult, you know, to take hold of an umbrella, but still that is Buddhist giving. And without umbrella, they don't feel good, actually. It is not arrogant—arrogancy, but it is—actually it is so, because we are too much involved in self-centered practice, self-centered life.

For an instance, you know, Buddhists sometime go—go out for *takuhatsu*. At war-time, sometime I went to *takuhatsu*. And if they are making ditch—you know, ditch?—for shelter from the bomb, I helped them [laughs]. I am not so strong, but I could help them. And I transplanted cucumber or eggplants [laughs] around the ditch, because we get, you know, good dirt from the, you know, from the trench, and planted cucumber around the trench. So sometime I helped in that way. If you do not need ditch—even though you do not—you may not use the trench, you may—you can eat cucumber [laughs]. So I—I prepared, you know, cucumber—vegetable garden and trench. I dug this [probably gesturing] and here was [laughs] vegetables above.

So wherever you go, you will—if you have this kind of attitude or this kind of feeling, you know, you can help people quite easily. And sometime people are, you know, sleeping, exposing their belly in the

sun—many people [laughs]. So sometime I help them to cover their belly. And they are very happy, you know, to see you, and they will help you too. If you have that kind of feeling, you have no trouble. And you can help people quite easily, without anything. With—with empty hand you can help people, and there is no need to give lecture like this [laughs]. That will be how you can help. Some question?
Hai.

Student K: What is laziness? Could you [2-3 words.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student K: What is laziness?

Suzuki-rōshi: Laziness.

Student K: [3-4 words.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Laziness is big enemy—as big as large [1 word], yeah. So when you feel lazy ... [*Sentence not finished. Tape turned over.*]

... someplace like this. People in the city are working hard, very hard. And our practice looks like very difficult, but actually I don't know which is more difficult: our life at Tassajara or city life. I don't know which.

In many ways we are supported by city people. And if we are lazy students—uh-oh. And on the other hand, you may say we are Zen students. People may think we are doing something good here, but if you are lazy, and if you are not doing actually something, in some way, people may expect this is a kind of deceptive practice. So we should not be lazy, especially when you are at Tassajara. When you are [in the] city, maybe, you know, you'll be okay—allowable. But if you are monk or if you are [at] Zen Center, you cannot be lazy. *Hai.*

Student L: How do you overcome our laziness?

Suzuki-rōshi: Huh?

Student L: How do you overcome our laziness?

Suzuki-rōshi: Overcome? If you—if you know exactly what you are doing and what people are doing, then you will make your best effort. That's all, you know—there is no other way. But maybe because you think—you feel—you think you are doing something good here, that is why you become lazy. Don't you think so? Anyway, you must make best effort. *Hai.*

Student M: [3-4 sentences.] Is there ever [2-3 words] that we should know?

Suzuki-rōshi: Should. "Should" means, you know, maybe it is so, because we will know how things are going—we know dharma, you know. Dharma is, maybe, the idea of "should." Or actually "things are going" is dharma. And we human being thinks—one—thinks [of] dharma in two ways. So we must say "should." "Be" and "should" is always [laughs]—make one pair. When you—dharma is way things are, so it—it is the word of "to be." But for human being who is selfish, you know, who have choice, you know—because we have choice, "to be" equals "should."

So hummingbird, you know, will be always "to be" [laughs]. Or cats—"to be" is enough; they don't need "should," you know. But [laughing] unfortunately, we have choice, you know. So if we want to follow dharma, you know, we have to say "should." So if the teaching doesn't sound like "should," it is not true teaching. That will be the word you remember, isn't it? It looks like so. Because of our ego-centered practice, because of our idleness, you know, to use fire, to use airplane is actually idleness—idle practice. And we—we human being create many things to be idle, and we have many choice. So "should"—you—you have word "should." But "should" equal "to be." "To be" is more strict word for us. "Should" is, you know, not so strict as "to be" for human being. There is, you know, some way to escape from it. "To be" [laughs] is very strict, very cold—coldness from which you cannot escape.

But you think "should" is awful; "to be" is much better than "should." That is opposite, isn't it? So "to be"—before you attain the stage of "to be," you have—you must practice very hard, so that you can just follow the dharma. You know, to follow our schedule is a kind of practice to follow, so that we can follow the truth. One more question, please. *Hai.*

Student N: I was [2-4 words], and I was wondering if you could say something about practice [1 word].

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. Where—where?

Student N: [1-2 words.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. Wilderness. Wilderness. Uh-huh. And—

Student N: I was wondering if you could say anything about practice in the wilderness.

Suzuki-rōshi: Wilderness. How many people are there?

Student N: [1 sentence.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh, I see. Have you ever practiced in wilderness before?

Student N: Yes.

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. Many times?

Student N: Not so many.

Suzuki-rōshi: May I ask you the—why you are going to the wilderness? Why or—

Student N: Why I'm going to that [2-4 words] going to the wilderness is [6-8 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: Easy to—to be yourself, or something like that?

Student N: Yeah, I think so. Probably to [2-4 words.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Yeah. [Laughs.] I think if you are going, there must be some purpose, you know, because you—to solve a kōan or to think about some particular teaching, you know, that you [are] bothered by people or something, or to change your old, you know, same way or habit, or to stop smoking [laughs, laughter], to, you know, to experience hunger or something, you know—you must have some purpose, I think, you know. So if you are going, it's better to be concentrated on some—some point, you know. Having some purpose of practice, you should be concentrated—your practice should be concentrated on it. So—if so, you have not much disturbance, so you can confront with the problem, I think. So each time you go, you will achieve something, you know.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript by Barry Eisenberg. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Checked against tape and made verbatim by Bill Redican, 12/7/00. Miyagawa Keishi-san kindly provided assistance with the translation of Japanese terms.