

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**Sunday, March 30, 1969**

This lecture was the source for the chapter of *Not Always So* called "Ordinary Mind, Buddha Mind" on p. 58. [Ordinary Man, Buddha?]

The point of my talk is just to give you some help in your practice. So it is just help, you know. As I always say, there is no need for you to remember what I said as something definite. I'm just trying to help you, so it is just support of your [laughs] practice. If you stick to it, it means that you stick to the support—not the tree itself. You know, a tree, when it is strong enough, it may want some support. But the most important one is the tree itself, not support.

I am one tree, and each one of you is a tree by itself. And you should stand up by yourself. And when one tree stands up by itself, we call that tree a buddha. In other words, when you practice zazen in its true sense, you are really buddha. So buddha and tree is one, in that sense. It may be that sometimes we call it a tree; sometimes we call it a buddha. "Buddha" or "tree" or "you" is many names of one buddha.

When you sit, you are independent from various being, and you are related to various being. And when you have perfect composure in your practice, it means that you include everything. You are not just you. You are the whole world or whole cosmos, and you are a buddha. So when you sit, you are ordinary man, and you are buddha. So in this sense, you are both ordinary man and buddha. So you are not just ordinary man. Before you sit, you stick to the idea of "you" or idea of self. That is ordinary man. But when you sit, you are both ordinary man and buddha. So you are not the same being. When you sit you are not the same being as before you sit. Do [laughs] you understand? Because, when you sit, you are ordinary man and buddha.

You may say it is not possible to be ordinary and holy [laughs]. You may think so. When you think so, your understanding is, we say, heretic understanding or one-sided understanding. We should understand everything, not just from one standpoint. We call someone who understands things from just one side, "*tamban-kan*." *Tamban-kan* in Chinese or Japanese means "a man who carries a board on his shoulder." Because he carries a big board on his shoulder this way, he cannot [laughs] see the other side [laughs]. He is always carrying a big board on his shoulder. Almost all the people are carrying a big board [laughter, laughs], so they cannot see the other

side. He thinks he is just ordinary man, but if he takes off the board, he will understand, "Oh, I am buddha, too [laughs]. How can I be a buddha and ordinary man? It is amazing," he may say. That is enlightenment.

So when you experience enlightenment, or when you are enlightened, you will understand things more freely. You don't mind whatever people call you. "Ordinary man." "Okay, I am ordinary man [laughs]." "You are buddha?" "Yes, I am Buddha." "How can I be a buddha and ordinary man?" "Oh, I don't know why, but actually I am buddha and ordinary man." [Laughs.] It doesn't matter whatever they say [laughs], that is all right.

Buddha, in its true sense, is not special or different from ordinary man. And ordinary man, in its true sense, is not someone who is not holy or who is not buddha. This is complete understanding of ourselves. With this understanding, if we practice zazen [laughs], that is true zazen. You will not be bothered by anything. Whatever you hear, whatever you see, that is okay. Before you have this kind of actual feeling, of course, it is necessary to be accustomed to our practice. Although intellectually we understand ourselves, if we haven't the actual feeling with it, then it is not so powerful. That is why you must keep on practicing. If you keep practicing our way, naturally you will have this understanding, and this feeling, the actual feeling, too.

Even though we can explain what is Buddhism, if you do not have the actual feeling, we cannot call him a real Buddhist. Only when your personality is characterized by this kind of feeling can we call him a Buddhist. How we characterize ourselves by this kind of understanding or practice is to always concentrate on this point.

It is rather difficult to explain how to be concentrated on this point. There are many kōans and sayings on this point. And those sayings look very different, but [laughs] actually they are all the same. "Ordinary mind is *tao*," you know. Ordinary mind is *tao*. Even though we are doing quite usual things, whenever we do something, that is actually Buddha's activity. Buddha's activity, but our activity [laughs]. Ordinary mind is *tao*. Buddha's mind, Buddha's activity, and our activity are not different.

Someone may say our activity is originated or based on Buddha's mind. And Buddha's mind is "such and such," and the "so and so" is ordinary mind. You may give various explanations [laughs], but there is no need to explain in that way. Whatever we do, if we do something we cannot say, "I am doing something," because there is no one independent from, separated from, the others. When we do [thumps stick on table] something it makes a sound [laughs]. What is the sound? [Taps stick once per word.] When I say something, you

are hearing it. So I cannot do anything by myself, just for myself. That is actually what we are doing, so I cannot say I am doing something. If someone does something, everyone is cooperating. And everyone will do something. So there is no explanation [laughs], actually. So just [thumps stick] moment after moment [thumps stick], we should continue this kind of activity, which is Buddha's activity.

But you cannot say this is just Buddha's activity, because you are [thumps stick] doing something actually [laughs]. You may say then, "I don't know who is doing what." But why do you say, "Who is doing what?" You want to limit your activity, you want to intellectualize your activity, that's all. So before you say something, the actual [thumps stick] activity is here. That is actually who we are. We are Buddha, and we are each one of us [laughs].

Our activity is cosmic activity and personal activity. So there is no need to explain what we are doing. When you want to explain it, that is all right, but you should not feel uneasy if you cannot understand it, because it is impossible to understand. Actually you are here, right here. So before you [thumps stick] understand yourself, you are you. After you understand, you are not you anymore [laughs]!

But usually you stick to something which is not you, and you ignore [laughs], the reality. And you feel uneasy with the reality, and you feel some satisfaction with that which is not real. As Dōgen-zenji said, "we human beings attach to something which is not real and forget all about that which is real [laughs]." That is actually what we are doing. If you realize this point, you will have perfect composure in yourself, and you can trust yourself. Whatever happens to you, it doesn't matter. You can trust yourself.

That belief or that trust is not the usual trust or usual belief in that which is not true, that which is not real. So when you are able to sit without being attached to any image or any sound, with an open mind, that is true practice. And that you can do that means you are already free, you have absolute freedom from everything.

Right now I am putting emphasis on one side of the truth. But it is all right for you to enjoy your life moment after moment because you are not enjoying your life as something which is concrete and eternal. Our life is momentary, and, at the same time, each moment includes its own past and future. The next moment will include its own past and future. In this way, our momentary and eternal life will continue. This is how we lead our everyday life, how we enjoy our everyday life, and how we get freedom from various difficulties. How we do not suffer from difficulties and how we enjoy our life, moment after moment, is our practice, based on true understanding.

I was in bed for a long time, and I was thinking about those things. I am just practicing zazen in bed [laughs, laughter]. I should enjoy my bed [laughs]. Sometimes it was difficult, but [laughs, laughter] if it is difficult, I laughed at myself. "Why is it so difficult?" [Laughs, laughter.] "Why don't you enjoy your difficulty?" [Laughs.] That is, I think, our practice.

Thank you very much.

---

Source: City Center transcript. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Verbatim transcript (checked against tape) by Bill Redican 7/14/00. Lightly edited for readability by Gordon Geist 3/27/03.