

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
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**Zen Mountain Center**

I want to discuss with you about how you study Zen. Zen is actually, in short, maybe, communication—communication between your friend, and communication between your teacher and disciple—communication between teacher and disciple, and communication between we human being and our surrounding—communication between man and nature. This is, in short, Zen. To have perfect communication—wherever you are. To have perfect communication between you and the outside world.

Communication—if we say "communication," it looks like there is subject and object, but if you understand real relationship between each existence, it is originally one. Tentatively we understand in two ways—dualistic way, so it is quite natural for us to have perfect communication between each being. Why it is difficult to communicate with each other is because our mind is always in duality.

That is why it is difficult to communicate. So perfect communication—there is actually nothing to say, even, and when there is nothing to say, that is zazen practice [laughs]. You don't have to say anything when you sit. And yet you have perfect communication with everything. So when you understand—if you want to study Zen, first of all you should know how to study Zen. How to study Zen is to be acquainted always to your surroundings, and that is how you have, for an instance, *dokusan* with your teacher. Perhaps when you come to *dokusan* you feel as if you must have some question to ask [laughs], but it is not necessary so. It is not always so. When you are very attentive, then even though you have no question to ask, if you enter the room and see your teacher, you should be very alert—alert enough to see what is the mood of the teacher today [laughs]. Is he happy or unhappy [laughs], is he busy or not so busy, or is he ready to accept you or not? You should be very attentive. And that is how you practice Zen.

Actually, if you are a Zen student, then you should be always alert. How to be alert—alert is, as much as possible to be attentive to your surrounding, without having personal preference, or without being involved in your own feeling. That is very important point.

If you come to Zen Center, maybe, I hope you feel as if you are students. We say "Zen student," and so you must be a kind of student, but you are students who study Zen. You are not students who are studying something like mathematics or geology or science or physics. You are studying who are you, and who is your teacher, and what kind of relationship we have between us. And it is more like community,

because we are always trying to understand with each other and trying to help each other. So how to help each other—first of all you should understand your friend first. Unless you understand your friend, it is difficult to help. Even though you know your friend pretty well, as we are human beings, sometime you will be sun-faced Buddha. Your friend will be sun-faced Buddha. And sometime moon-faced Buddha [laughs]. Sometime he will be sick, and sometime he will be emotional.

So you should know how he is today [laughs]. You should say always, "How are you? How are you?" [Laughs.] It is not just greeting. It means—it is very important to know how is your friend, how is your teacher. And you should understand exactly what your friend means and what your teacher means when he says something. That is pretty difficult. You cannot always take words—your teacher's words literally. When he says something—he does not say only to make you happy, you know. He may say sometime to make you unhappy. [Laughs.] It is true. Teacher may say—knowing what kind of mood you are in, and say something. And if he understand something very well, he may say something to discourage your understanding [laughs]—to discourage your intellectual understanding. Because if your teacher says, "Oh, your understanding is very good," then you may stick to it. That is a flaw.

So, not to stick to some understanding: Teacher may say that is not true—that is not always true. Although your understanding is right, but on the other hand you became arrogant because of your understanding. In this way, back and forth, your teacher will be taking care of you, so that you can develop your practice in its true sense.

So student must be alert enough to understand that. If you take his words literally, it is difficult for you to study with your teacher. There are many kōans, but those kōans is, the story between teacher and disciple—communication between teacher and disciples. So if you, when you read it, just read it, you cannot understand at all, maybe. Even if it is very simple story, it is pretty hard to understand.

When I was young—maybe I was fifteen or sixteen—I came back from memorial service of our member with my teacher and several of his disciple. It was already almost dark. Until we go back to my temple, there were not one mile but pretty long—we had to walk through the woods and through the trees, and it was a kind of slope. And at this time of the year there are poisonous snakes sometimes apt to appear. And waiting for us—not waiting for us, but they come out because it is too hot. They have to cool themselves and come out from the tree, and roadside they are waiting. It is rather dangerous sometime. When we came to the bad trees, my master said: "You guys are wearing *tabi*," [laughs] "so why don't you go first. I will follow you." [Laughter.]

So we thought we are pretty brave monks to go first, and moreover we are wearing *tabi*. So do what he say, we thought [laughs, laughter]. And we said "*Hai!*"—and leaving teacher behind, we went first, and we came home. And teacher, as soon as we sit down [said], "Oh, why don't you sit there? I have something to tell you." [Laughs, laughter.]

We realized something is happening [laughs] because he said sit down. When he says "sit down," something happens. We know that. So [laughs] what will it be? Anyway, we sat down. He said, "I know you boys are not so alert, but I didn't know you are so dull boys," he says, first of all. This is what he said. Still we couldn't understand why he is so angry. We did exactly what he told us: wearing *tabi* and came back. We walked first and came back to the temple. That is what we did. He said, "When I am not wearing *tabi*, why did you wear *tabi*?" [Laughter.] That is something which we didn't notice. Our teacher didn't wear *tabi*.

Long long time ago he took off his *tabi* and put them in sleeve and walked, but we didn't notice them [laughs]. We carried a lot of goodies. We happily came back wearing *tabi*. We were very much ashamed [laughs]. What we do? We didn't notice that he didn't wear *tabi*. Moreover, when he said, go ahead, he didn't say, "I am not wearing *tabi*." He was very [laughs]—I don't know how to say, but he didn't tell us, he didn't say, "I am not wearing *tabi*, but you are wearing *tabi* so go ahead." Then we must have noticed, but because he didn't say anything about his own *tabi*, so we couldn't notice. We should have noticed—at that time we should have noticed that he didn't wear *tabi*. This kind of communication is pretty important in practice of Zen. Zen is not just intellectual understanding, you know.

To polish up our mind, to be alert enough to communicate with others always, you should be very—not careful, but you should be attentive always. Even though you are sleeping [laughs], you should be attentive. That is Zen student's way. My teacher would talk about one good *ino*. Because they get up so early every morning, in daytime they became sleepy. So when they start chanting, even when they are chanting, they [laughs] become drowsy. And that *ino*—even though he was *ino*, he was sometimes sleepy. But when you should strike the bell, he wake up: *gong* [laughs]. You know, *chin, chin, gong* [laughs, laughter]. He doesn't miss. He never miss. That kind of alertness is something that is, not only he knows very well, but also a kind of alertness. There are many stories like that, even nowadays. I don't know nowadays, but when I was young, or when I was in monastery, there are many interesting stories something like that.

So we have no time to stick to our own problem. [Laughs.] It is so, because everyone is very alert. So we have not much time to stick to our own personal problem. In this way we will continue our practice. If

you do not know what is Zen practice, it is maybe rather difficult to understand.

Hofuku [Hofuku Juten (Baofu Congzhan): d. 928. Dharma successor of Seppō Gison.]—Hofuku was the name of the—one of the students—a disciple of Seppō [Seppō Gison (Xuefeng Yieun): 822-908. Dharma successor of Tokusan Senkan.]—I think Seppō, yeah, disciple of Seppō—and Chōkei [Chōkei Eryō (Changqing Huileng): 854-932. Dharma successor of Seppō Gison.] also, brother disciple of Seppō, went out. And Hofuku pointing out mountain and said, "This mountain is the famous mountain, Myōhō." [Literally, "wonderful dharma" (*Denkōroku*, Chap. 4).] Myōhō mountain—Myōhō is the famous mountain which appears in Kegon Sūtra.

You know Zenzai-dōji. [Zenzai-dōji: A bodhisattva in the *Avataūsaka (Kegon) Sūtra*.] Zenzai-dōji is the lay Buddhist who visited fifty-three masters in southern India, but even Zenzai-dōji couldn't visit the Mount Myōhō. So because of that, Mount Myōhō is very famous mountain. The first pointed at some mountain and said, "That is the famous Mount Myōhō." And his brother, Chōkei, said, "Well said, but it is pity that you said so." That was the question and answer between them.

Actually, it is not Mount Myōhō, but what pointed at the mountain that is the Mount Myōhō. And Chōkei, his brother, said, "Well said, but it was pity that you said so." That is the question and answer.

And in this kind of question and answer, you have no time to think about it. You should understand it immediately. The moment Hofuku said, "That is the Mount Myōhō," then immediately his brother should understand what he means. Actually he understood immediately, "Yes, well said, but it is pity that you said so." [Laughs.] This kind of question and answer.

Usually, as this is kōan, after thinking about this story over and over and over again, and find out the meaning of it, but that is not good enough. You should understand immediately.

When we read some Zen book, it is better to read just question and answer, whether you can understand it or not, whether you are alert enough to understand it or not. Maybe sometime, to stop your confusion—confused mind, it is good to think about Zen stories. That will give you some encouragement. But that is not good enough. Actually, before I give you lecture, I spend some time to read something short: *Shōbōgenzō*, or *Hekigan-roku*, [ *Pi-yen-lu* (W.G.), *The Blue Cliff Record: A collection of 100 kōans compiled by Setchō Jūken (Hsuehtou Ch'ung-hsien [W.G.])*.] or *Shōyō-roku*, [ *Ts'ung-jung-lu* (W.G.), *The Book of Equanimity: A collection of 100 kōans compiled by Wanshi Shōgaku (Hungchih Cheng-chueh [W.G.])*.] to break something, to warm up my Zen mind

[laughs]. So, when you want to listen to lecture, if you just come and listen to the lecture, that is enough.

But when I ask you to give some question, whatever the question may be, sometime you may give me wrong question, sometime you may be scolded [laughs] because of it. But you should be ready [laughs] for that. If it is wrong, that is communication. Even though it is wrong, I don't say it is good question, I don't say so. That is perfect communication. We should be—the question and answer should be very honest.

So it is quite okay to say, if you cannot accept what I say—"I don't understand, I cannot accept it." Then, sometime I shall be angry, like brothers do, but that is okay. And to give wrong question, and to be angry about the students is a part of practice. In that way, real practice should go on and on and on.

There is many simple kōan or Zen story like this. Since I give you a story, since you may not understand what does it mean, Myōhō is supposed to be a mountain where Zenzai-dōji couldn't visit, couldn't climb up. Why was it not possible to climb up? Because that mountain is the mountain which covered all the mountains in the world. Wherever you go, that is the Mount Myōhō.

So before you climb up, before you visit that mountain, you are on the mountain. So if you try to find out where the mountain is [laughs], there is no wonder that you cannot find out where is the mountain. Actually, in reality, each existence covers whole world, whole universe. So actually it is not possible to see, even though you think you saw it, but actually the mountain or river you saw is not the true mountain or true river. That is true mountain or river. So when Hofuku said, "That is Mount Myōhō," when he said so, it is so—actually it is so, but we should—Chōkei should understand the other side of it. Although that is Mount Myōhō, or that mountain—Mount Myōhō can be any mountain, or can be a river. So what he said is right—because he knows that when he say so, Hofuku didn't mean that is some special mountain. That mountain covers everything. Not just mountain. It is something more than that.

Because he understand what kind of truth is ..., you are understanding what is the real—what is Mount Myōhō. People say, Zenzai-dōji couldn't go to Mount Myōhō. Maybe that is true, but on the other hand Mount Myōhō could be any mountain, and that is actually—must be—Mount Myōhō. That is what his brother meant. But when he says that it is pity that you said so—if you do not say so, your understanding is perfect, but it is pity that you said so. Because you said so, someone may misunderstand you or think, "Oh—someone may think that is Mount Myōhō." If someone think that particular mountain is Mount

Myōhō, which you will find out in *Kegon Sūtra*. That kind of understanding—perfect understanding of the mountain is communicated between them.

Sometime when some disciple doesn't have perfect understanding of reality, then maybe he will be scolded by his master. So it is necessary, of course, to have some understanding of reality. Intellectually we must have some understanding of what is reality. But even though you have understanding of it, if you are not alert enough, or you are not ready to experience that kind of perfect reality ... [*Sentence not finished. Tape turned over.*]

You think Zen practice is a kind of training. Yes, it is training, but our training is very different from usual training. Your training, first of all, is based on zazen practice. That is one point. And your training should be—purpose of the training should be how to experience unselfish practice. That is another point. Whether your practice is selfish practice or unselfish practice will be pointed out by your teacher. Your teacher knows whether your practice is selfish one or right practice. Your teacher can easily tell.

And you should not stick to same old question or same old problem. The problem will help your practice when it arise, but if you stick to same old problem [laughs], that will make your practice worse. It is necessary, when you feel you have to stick to same old problem, you should reflect on your practice: whether that practice is selfish practice or unselfish practice. If it is selfish practice, you shouldn't stick to it. You should find out another topic to think about. You should choose right material to think about. And if you are always involved in same old problem, then you should ask someone's help, with humbleness of your mind—that is important—without thinking whether your understanding is right or wrong. That is another matter.

Even though your understanding of the problem or way of solving problem is right, if you have to stick to same old problem, then it is bad enough. Even though you think your way of solving problem is right, but it is not—it is bad enough for Zen practice. As a Zen student, we must be ashamed of thinking same thing over and over. But you may think if you come to your teacher, your teacher will help you. Maybe so [laughs], but way he help you will not be same way, same old way. We don't help you same old way. Something positive, something negative: according to the situation he may take many different ways.

Sometime he may agree with you; sometime he may not agree with you. He may give you some suggestion how to solve the problem, not by words, but give you some medicine. That medicine sometime may be sweet and sometime may be bitter. But when it is bitter, what you may think: "Oh no, this medicine doesn't work [laughs], not for me. I

need some sweet medicine—sweet water, not bitter water like this." And, when you think in that way—when you feel in that way, that is how your teacher help you. If your teacher give you always sweet answer it doesn't help at all. You will be involved in same old problem again and again.

And if you always confront with your actual problem and work on it to improve your practice, then you will have power to help others. Because you treat your problem as your own problem, and to solve the problem as your own to feel better. So even though you have good chance to practice, to improve your practice, you cannot. This is very important point: With what kind of attitude you solve the problem is very important. Actually it is not your problem—it should not be your problem, although it will give you chance to develop your practice.

Maybe—do you have some question? [Laughs, laughter.] If there is some in your brain? [Laughs, laughter.]

**Student A:** [10-15 sentences unclear.]

**Suzuki-rōshi:** To me that is good [laughter], because you wanted to come here, you were eager to come here, and your mind is, maybe, fully devoted to your practice here. So I think that is good. Fear—fear you say, that is not just fear. You see? When you are very—your mind is very alert. You feel that kind of feeling too. That is how you felt, but you may feel some other way. At that time you felt it. Sometime you will feel great joy instead of fear—some unusual feeling in your heart. If you really want to do something, you will feel a kind of excited. When your mind is excited something unusual will happen to you, but that is not bad. You shouldn't feel—you shouldn't have negative understanding about it. Okay. *Hai*. Oh, no? Question? *Hai*.

**Student B:** What part does emotion ... what part does it play in ...

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Emotion—emotion. Emotion—emotional, you know, activity—or emotion—if you refine the emotion it is good, but if you take let-alone policy [laughs] for emotion, it is not so good. It needs some effort to refine or to—I don't know. Emotion itself cannot be always acceptable, or they will train it. But that kind of element is necessary. It will push your practice.

For an instance, putting various problems aside, if you practice zazen, still you will have—emotionally you will be involved in some particular problem even though you are sitting. But in that case, the emotion you have—for an instance you have girlfriend, and came to Tassajara and practicing zazen. The emotion you have about her will help your practice, will encourage your practice. And how you feel, maybe, "Since I came here saying—convincing myself that I have to practice zazen

anyway. So I came here. If I don't practice zazen, here, I am fooling—I am just making excuse for her." And you will feel very bad if you do not have good practice here. In that way your emotion—same emotion will result in some different effect on you. So to have problem is good. Without problem, it is very difficult to practice.

For an instance, here we have not much mosquito. In Japan, while we are sitting, mosquito will bite us. But still we cannot move as long as we are sitting. Mosquito will help our practice a lot [laughs]. It is, of course, disturbance, but because of that disturbance we will have good strong practice [laughs]. That is pain, or a kind of an emotion. You may not like [laughs] that kind of practice, but actually it helps.

So it is not emotion which is bad, but because you make it bad, emotion is bad. Because you are spoiled by it, emotion is bad. If you are not spoiled by it, emotion is good. Instead of helping yourself emotionally, you help others with same old emotion. Emotion is same, but if it is directed in right direction, it will help our practice.

So when our emotion follows buddha-nature it is good, and when our emotion spoil our practice or is against our practice it is bad. But emotion is not different. Emotion itself is same. That is how I feel about emotion, but emotion could be treated many various ways. As you are an American, you must have some other way of treating your emotion, I think. I don't force—I don't ask you to follow our way of treating emotion, but there is many ways of treating it. But usually people do not know how to treat our emotion. We always treat our emotion by same old way [laughs]. That is why we should say something about emotion practice. Does it make sense? Some other questions? *Hai*.

**Student C:** Rōshi, I ... want to make the most of it.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** It is okay.

**Student C:** What's wrong with me? I don't understand.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah, we don't understand—is okay. Don't try to understand things. It is a kind of small-minded practice. You need something to sit on. Actually that is not necessary. When you are you, that is okay. Before you understand who, you understand things much better. But if you feel you understand things, then you feel better, that's all. And if you don't feel good, you are not so happy, maybe. That is not so good.

Whether you feel good or bad, you are you, and you should accept yourself. The feeling is just superficial problem, not real problem. Our understanding is just excuse. Most of the time, that is, you say,

"help." But it is not actual help. If I have a book when I give lecture, I feel good [laughs]—something like that. You see?

So it is good to have books. It is good—just to have some understanding is good, but if you stick to it then you cannot do anything. You will be burned by it. You cannot open your mouth. You cannot do anything. When you do something, you should forget your small understanding, and you should listen to others, again and again forgetting your own viewpoint and your own understanding, and try to understand again and again the situation you are in. That is right practice. So you don't have to have any question when you come to Zen Center. You should expose yourself. *Hai!* [Laughs.] I am here. Maybe—is there something wrong [laughs]? That is ... *Hai*.

**Student D:** [10-12 words unclear.]

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Literally—sometime literally. But why you have to observe—that is more important than understanding of rules. Or else the rule will be dead. Even though you observe it, sometime you are violating it. Rules is not for master—for the monastery, but for yourself. To help your practice we have rules.

**Student E:** [4-8 sentences.]

**Suzuki-rōshi:** If you are in individual practice, of course.

**Student E:** How?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** How? [Laughs.] Because you don't know why. [Laughter, laughs.] Do you understand? [Laughter, laughs.] First you burn.

**Student E:** My problem is, Rōshi, sometimes I follow the rules and sometimes I don't, because I wanted to see what would happen [laughter].

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Oh. I see. You can find out what will happen without observing our rules. There are many chances to test yourself. But what you mean is whether I become angry or you will be criticized or something like that or? Maybe—it may not be so—some other things, perhaps. Perhaps I know, but that is too much curiosity. You are very curious about your practice. It is not main road. Your practice is not following main street or main freeway. You are kind of making trip by bicycle or something. [Laughter, laughs.]

**Student E:** Maybe more and more if I ride the bicycle ...

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Then maybe you better try some other place, not main

freeway like this [laughing].

**Student E:** [3 words unclear.]

**Suzuki-rōshi:** That will be better. *Hai.*

**Student F:** Why do we bother at all?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Huh?

**Student F:** Why do we bother to do it?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Bother to do it? [Sighs.] There is many reasons. The reason why—I cannot give you all the reasons, you know. But it may be better for you—for your practice, if I am just usual person and usual teacher of zazen in some usual way. Like a river or mountain, I exist in that way. That will be better. If I give some reason why mountain is a mountain is like so. Why river runs slow in that way? That is too much. If you come to the river, you can bathe or drink from it. That is maybe better. I don't want to talk about reason why I am here or something like that. *Hai.*

**Student G:** Why is it so difficult to get up in the morning?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Hmm?

**Student G:** Why is it so difficult to get up in the morning?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** If you get up very easily it means that you have pretty good practice. By practice I mean you are very much one with the practice. Without trying to be something good you can do something good. Without trying to be free from various desires you are free from desires. We say if you can eat anything offered, then already your practice is very good. It's the same thing—to eat which was given to you, without discrimination.

So if you cannot get up the moment you hear the *shinrei* bell, [*shinrei*: *shin* ("swing"); *rei* ("bell"). The wake-up bell.] it means that it is difficult for you to die. If you can get up quite easily, it means that when you have time to die you can die quite easily. Big problem and small problem does not make much difference. To die is big problem [laughs], people think. To get up at the moment you wake up is small problem. But it is not so.

So to get up is very important practice. So even though you are sleepy, you should get up anyway at once. And if it is necessary to go back to your bed, then you can go back. But anyway you should get up. Same thing is true to observe our way. Anything you should say YES!—or if

you are Japanese, *HAI!*—say to yourself, with very strong, sharp, you know, clear practice. That is correct. If you are able to say so, it means that you have not much attachment to things, you are pretty free from your clinging. Very important practice and very important point. Okay?

One more question. *Hai*.

**Student H:** In the [?] it says that how *nyohō* is everywhere. I was wondering ...?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Ōyō? [?]

**Student H:** [3-4 words] *nyohō*.

**Student H:** Yeah.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** *Nyohō*. [*nyohō ni*: *nyo*: "splendid"; *hō*: dharma. A dharma term with wide application: "in accord with suchness"; "just as it is"; "Buddha's great teaching," or "truth itself is dharma."] *Nyohō* is "things-as-it-is." Is it—in Japanese—*nyohō*—do you mean *nyōhō*?

**Student H:** *Nyohō*, yeah.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah. Everywhere, everywhere, everywhere—yeah—everywhere, everywhere—when we say everywhere it means here and here, here, here—everywhere. But that one thing shall include everything. It means that. It includes various possibilities of the great being. *Nyohō*. So it is very personal. It is about everything, and it is about a great being which include us. That is everywhere, they say.

So *nyōhō* means when you get up you should get up. When you go to bed you should go to bed. That you can get up when you should get up means that you can die when you die. Same thing. So one practice—if you understand one practice, one activity, if you can do one activity with good spirit, then you can do everything in the same way. If you are good friend of Tassajara student, you will be, wherever you go, in the same way, you will be a good friend of people. That is *nyohō*. Okay?

Anyway, tomorrow morning we will have just one zazen [laughs, laughter]. Five past ten, so one more question please. [Laughter, laughs.] *Hai*.

**Student I:** Rōshi, you were speaking about death. What should the awareness of death be in our karma?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Awareness—it is not possible to experience death, to

think about death even. But some time I think you may think about it. Most people have some experience of thinking about their death. Most people has. But that is not actually death. But I don't think it is necessary to have actual picture of death in your mind. But it is pretty big problem—must be pretty big problem, and we should be ready for death.

Why I say so is, if you think about it always it will be a great encouragement for your everyday practice because it is the most big problem for everyone. There is no bigger problem for us, so it is very good practice to be ready for death.

**Student I:** [Question (6-8 words) unclear.]

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Not thinking. You know, you can think about it, but why you think about it is to have some good feeling about it. That is why you think about it, maybe. The point is emotional problem. It is problem of desire or defining. Thinking mind may accept our death quite easily. What is death? You may explain what is death quite easily, but emotionally [laughs] it is not so easy to think about. After our death is not so easy to accept. To have actual feeling about it is very difficult.

So some people say it is like to go another way from this way—open the door and go on the ... If you go to the next one, that is death. But even if someone explain about death in that way, still it is big problem for you.

So if you accept your food properly, if you get up when you should get up, then it is not so difficult for you to accept your death. It is really so, and that is only way of helping your practice in its true sense.

Thank you very much.

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