

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Saturday, August 21, 1971
San Francisco

Excuse me. [Laughs.] I feel rather stiff. Maybe I worked too hard.

Since we have Tassajara and the city zendō, our practice is rather concentrated on city practice or Tassajara practice. But the most important point is to know what is Zen practice, which is not only city practice, but also Tassajara practice, and city zendō practice. Wherever you are, we have Zen way of practice. No matter where you are, you must have proper understanding of our practice.

In *Shōbōgenzō* "Genjo-kōan," Dōgen-zenji says, referring to this point:

"When all things are Buddhism, there are birth and death—there are defilement, practice, birth and death, buddhas, and sentient beings. When all things has no self, there is no delusion, no buddha, no sentient beings, no birth, no death. Buddhism originally is beyond the all positivity or negativity, so there are birth and death, defilement and enlightenment, and sentient beings and buddha."

This is our fundamental practice. It is better now, I think, for us to follow more original way of Zen practice, which is go beyond Tassajara practice, or city zendō practice, or practice in city life. Wherever you are, this is the fundamental way of practice for us or else we will be too much involved in city practice or monastic practice and we will lose the point of practice, I am afraid.

"When all things are Buddhism—all things are Buddhism, there are defilement, practice—defilement, practice, birth and death, buddhas and sentient beings." The point is they are—they are. All things are Buddhism. Whatever you do, that is Buddhism. But there is some danger in your understanding of this kind of statement. "Whatever you do, that is Buddhism." Whatever you do in Tassajara, or in city zendō, or in city life, that is Buddhism. It looks like—it sounds like this: "Whatever we do, it doesn't matter. Anyway [laughs], that is a practice of Buddhism." If it is so, it is not necessary for you to study Buddhism, if whatever you do, that is Buddhism.

But actually, what Dōgen-zenji meant is not like that. So there is, maybe, when you understand this statement, "Whatever you do, that is Buddhism," there may be two ways of understanding it. One is, whatever you do [laughs], if you understand, you take this statement literally, from your non-Buddhist understanding. That is one.

Another is real Buddhist understanding of this statement. Like in *Lotus Sūtra* we say "*shohō-jisso*." *Shohō* means things we see; *jisso* is truth, true way it exist—way they exist—real way things exist. So everything exist in the way they exist.

So usually when we understand, "Whatever you do, that is Buddhism," means even though you do not behave [laughs], even though you do not live the way you should live, it is Buddhism. You know, there is big difference [laughs].

"Way things exist." Here is, maybe, the problem of "to be" and "should be." "To be" and "should be." Recently people do not like the words "should be." [laughs] You like "to be," maybe. "Should be" looks [like] some rules, and "to be" is freedom: Whatever you do, that is good—that is "to be."

But it will be the opposite. "Should be" is "to be" [laughs], and "to be" is "should be." When you behave according to the circumstances, appropriately, then that is "should be" and that is "to be." "To be" and "should be" is same. But when your selfish idea arises and rejects "should be," reject the way you exist, then that is not way "to be." You are involved in delusion—delusion of self.

And in its strict sense, you cannot survive in that way. You think you can, but actually you cannot. Or you want to survive in that way, but actually it is not possible. If you want to go to Los Angeles, you should take Freeway 101 [laughs]. You cannot go that way, even though you want to go opposite way. "Many people are going that way, take 101, so I will go to the opposite way." Eventually you will reach to Los Angeles [laughs, laughter]. But that is a kind of—the way you choose.

So to think about a kind of freedom is good, but actually that is not possible. So knowing that that is not possible, to think about it is another matter. But if you sit seriously—try to do whatever you want to do, that is delusion. It means that you are completely involved in delusion. It is not actual. It is not possible to survive in that way. So "should be" and "to be" is not different.

So real freedom is in "should be" and in its true sense "to be." That "should be" is the way for beginners, and that "to be" which is one with "should be" is the advanced student. So first stage should [laughs]—should be "should be." [Laughs, laughter.] And "should be," should be "should be" [laughs]—an endless, continuous practice of "should be" [laughs]. You have no chance to get out of "should be" [laughs]. That is okay. Pretty soon "should be" will be "to be." "Should be" or "to be"—you don't care. "Should be" is okay. "To be" is okay, for you. That is the goal of practice.

So Dōgen-zenji says, "Buddhism originally is beyond all positivity and negativity." Buddhism originally is beyond the all "to be" and "should be." Real way is not only "to be," but also "should be." Or not only "should be," but also "to be." That is real way. That is the stage you will acquire after following teaching.

Ahh. This is rather discouraging [laughs]. Maybe if I say so from the beginning, you may say, "Oh, I wish I didn't start practice Buddhism. [Laughs.] It is too difficult." You may say so, but Buddhism is not any special teaching. Actually, Buddhism is our human way.

Here we have many things to think about. First of all, we should know how—we should know that this world is for human being—for human being, not for birds or cat but for human being—this world is world of suffering [laughs]. Originally—not originally, but—for human being, as long as we are human nature, which is very selfish, which care for something which you cannot acquire or you cannot expect. That is human nature. We care for something which we cannot reach. Or because you cannot reach you want it. Because we do not stay young forever, we want to be young always [laughs]. Something which we cannot expect is something we like. That is our human nature. So human life is, at the same time, a life of suffering. That is very true.

We should know many things about our human being. When you know about human nature deep enough, then you will start to practice Buddhism. It is like operation. When the pain is strong enough to accept operation, you will go to the doctor [laughs]. But it is almost impossible to have operation when you have no pain. Because you have a great pain, because you know human nature well enough, you start Buddhism like you go to the doctor to have operation. This is nature of Buddhism. That is why you practice zazen.

At first when you sit, many things will come up, many ideas—many wrong ideas and many things you did before. We don't do so much good things in comparison to bad things [laughs]. Most of the things we do is bad [laughs] or things you feel regretful. Something when you do, you feel very good, but after you did it, how do you feel? [Laughs.] "Oh. I thought it was very good, but it was not so good." [Laughs.] That is something—feeling you have. And that kind of feeling comes up constantly when your mind is very calm, like a bubble comes up from the bottom of the water. When the water is rough—not smooth enough, then no bubbles comes out. Even though it comes out, you don't notice it. As soon as your mind becomes calm, you may realize how much bubbles you have in your bottom of your heart. The real practice starts from that kind of practice.

You may say Zen practice should be calm—to have calmness of your mind is real practice. "I have been practicing zazen for so many years—

two years, three years, or more than that. Still I don't have calmness [laughs] of mind at all. What shall I do?" That will be your question.

In zazen practice, we say if something arises in your mind, let it arise, let it come. Then it—they will not stay so long, so let it go away. In zazen that works pretty well. If you let it come, and if you do not entertain them, they will go away. But in actual life it is not so easy. You may suffer. Then what will you do? When you suffer, what will you do? The suffering is very strong. What will you do? Here is something you should think about.

The one point is, your practice is in the first stage, and you have next stage and the third stage. In the next stage, you will, like when you have good zazen practice, nothing arises in your mind. Your mind will be, even for a while, in complete calmness, where there is no image or no feeling. Your mind is complete calmness. That is the next stage you will have in your zazen practice. And the third stage will be the stage you come back to the stage—something like the first stage where there is many problems, where there is many weeds, and where there is many flowers. But the way you see the flowers, the way you see the weed, is different, but nearly the same stage. Looks like same stage, but big difference.

So you don't have to solve that problem. The point is you should continue that practice of difficulty. That is the point. So you should know that is only the first stage of your practice. So you cannot solve the problem only at the first stage. If you struggle at the first stage, you will lose your practice. That is why we say, "Great patience is the best of virtues. [Laughs.] To continue it is most important practice. Without struggling with it, just continue it. Then you will have chance to have the second stage or the third stage." It means that. I forget where I found out that statement.

Someone who fell on the earth, maybe by stumbling on a stone or something—fell on the earth—will stand up [laughs] by the same earth. Because of the earth you stumble, you fell. Earth is the problem. Because of the problem, you hurt, you hit against the earth. But because [laughing] of the earth, you can support yourself again, and you can stand up.

So you have complained because you think because of the earth you fell [laughs], but without earth you will not fall. And at the same time, you cannot stand up. So because you have problem, you feel as if because of the problem, you fell. A fall or stand up is a help—great help which was given to you by earth.

So problem itself is your mother. Because of the mother of earth, you can continue your practice. You are practicing, so zendō of the earth—

great earth, which is the problems. Problems are actually your zendō. That is very true.

So what is delusion, what is enlightenment? When you are deluded of truth, that is delusion. When you are deluded of earth, that is delusion. When you enlightened of the earth, that is enlightenment. When you stand up by the earth, that is enlightenment. When you fell, because of the earth—you feel in that way—that is delusion. So you have chance to attain a great enlightenment when you have problem.

Usually you talk about your surrounding. You talk about Tassajara practice and city practice. That is, I think, very good. [Laughs.] But that is not the point of practice. The point of practice is—the problem you have here or city or Tassajara is the earth. So if Tassajara is monastery, city zendō is monastery, and city is also monastery in its wide sense.

Our way is not to get rid of all the stones from the earth which could be a stumbling [laughs] stone for you. It is good to have many stones on the earth which could be stumbling stone. It is good. And when you stand up, if you have a high, big stone, it may be easier to stand up. But more people will [laughs]—will hit against it. But it is very good for your practice to have big stones everywhere. This is, for instance, a big stone. If you understand it, that is enlightenment. If you don't understand it, it is big slap—painful slap. This is a big stone. So if there is not much stone for you to help your practice, we have to bring many stones from Tassajara to city zendō [laughs, laughter]. You are not so interested in this kind of stuff. So if you understand our life, our problem in this way, then you will get through the first stage.

I don't think I have time to explain the next stage. But you may feel if you understood our problems of our life in this way, then that is end of the whole picture. But it is just a first series of the movie. Why it is so is something we should think about.

In the first stage, you are—very interesting stage, so you may want to stay the first stage [laughs] a little bit longer. But again, that is too selfish [laughs]. Buddhism is very strict, very strict. You may enjoy the first stage very much, actually. In the city, in zendō, when you come to zendō, you have a good Zen practice. When you go to city, you will enjoy city life with a kind of leisurely mind. You have some space or some room to accept the difficulties of the city life. Because of the wisdom of understanding of our human nature, we have time, or we have room for accepting the problems. We are ready to accept problems. Like you sit zazen, in zazen, many, many things come: "Okay. [Laughs.] I have enough room here or here or here for you to come. Please come." [Laughs, laughter.] But, it is interesting to see how they go away. "Oh, nothing to see, nothing to eat," so they may

go out [laughs]. It is very interesting.

But, Zen is not something to play with—to play game with. We shouldn't play game with it. If you practice zazen because you enjoy your practice, that is not Buddha's practice. He is very strict. Buddha's mercy is so deep, so clear, and so wide. When we selfish human being always want something good to eat, something good to hear, something good to see. So if someone gives you something to hear, or something to eat, most human being will stay. Knowing this fact, Buddha became more and more strict with us [laughs]. Yeah, it's something which you must think about. And when you study or when you want to learn religion, you must learn something more than this. Just to solve our everyday problem is not purpose of studying Buddhism. [*Sentence finished. Tape turned over.*]

Yesterday I saw Sōen Nakagawa-rōshi.¹ And he was going to—I thought he is going back to Japan, but he was going to—what was the place—Elsahem?—how you pronounce, where Christ was born? Hmm? [Answers from students: "Bethlehem."] Yeah. He was going to that place. Why is he going to there [laughs]? I think that is buddha-mind, something more than this, something more than to enjoy his enlightenment. He is going somewhere else again. He looks like he is very much interested in helping people. Maybe so. But that is not helping people. Without helping people he may not feel so good, so that is why he is going. But his going is not just to satisfy his personal feeling.

At the end of the *sesshin* [laughs] we bow maybe more than thirty times, calling many buddhas' name. Among the buddhas, they call some special names: *Namu*-Sunshine—Sunshine Buddha, or Moonlight Buddha, or Dead Sea Buddha [laughs]. I don't know—because he has his disciple who started zendō at Dead Sea. That is why he bowed—he called the name of Dead Sea Buddha. And Good Practice Buddha. Many buddhas appeared. And he bowed and bowed and bowed [laughs]. That is something which is beyond our understanding. When he bowed to all those buddhas, the buddha he bowed to is something beyond his own understanding. Again and again he did it.

And he gave us *macha*² he made himself. What he was doing, I don't know, and he doesn't know, maybe [laughs]. Anyway, he did it, and he offered. And he looks very happy, but that happiness is very different from the happiness we usual people have.

¹ Sōen Nakagawa-rōshi (1908-1983): Rinzai master. Dharma successor of Yamamoto Gempō and abbot of Ryūtaku-ji Monastery near Mishima. The words "Yesterday I saw Sōen Nakagawa" are from a note written on the back of the original tape's case. The passage was not recorded on tape.

² Powdered green tea.

Our practice should go to that level, where there is no human problem, or no buddha problem, where there is nothing. And to have tea, and to have cake, and to make a trip from one place to another—that was his practice. And he has no idea of helping people. What he is doing—he is helping, but he himself has no idea of helping people. So to solve our human problem doesn't cover all our practice—Buddhist practice.

Hmm.

We don't know how long it takes for us to make buddha trip. [Laughs.] We have many trips: work trips, various trips—space trips [laughs]—various trip we must have. Buddha trip is very, very long trip. That is Buddhism.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript by Barry Eisenberg and B. Fikes. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Bill Redican (11/15/00). Lightly edited for readability by Gordon Geist (10/26/06).