

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
ONE-DAY SESSHIN LECTURE: 5 PM
Saturday, August 28, 1965
Lecture B
San Francisco

Tape operator (Richard Baker): This is the end of the one o'clock lecture. There may be another lecture later, which will follow immediately if there is.

[Recorder stopped and restarted.]

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] I have nothing in my mind. [Laughs.] I don't know about what should I talk. So will you give me some topic—topics to talk about? Or question?

Student A: You say that we shouldn't be critical of our practice. But you say that if all of us [3–4 words] the part of us that desires to express our buddha-nature is the part that we should [1 word] on.

Suzuki-rōshi: Um-hmm.

Student A: Well, I don't know how to say it, but [laughs]. When—when we're learning to be practicing [?], we're not supposed to be critical of our own practice, right?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student A: But, at the same time—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student A: —it's the part of us that is critical—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student A: —that is the—that's what makes us practice.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Student A: So I don't know what to do.

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] To be critical to our practice by our inmost—it means—it—that is, you know, inmost request itself. But usually when we become critical to our practice, we—we have some other purpose in our practice, because our—we think our practice is not good enough to attain enlightenment [laughs], you know.

When you become critical, at the same time usually you have some—because you have some other purpose or aim, you become critical. Not by inmost request, but by some gaining idea. In this case, to be critical to your practice is not good. But if you think or if you accept your practice as a—even though it is not perfect, [to] try to be perfect is our inmost request. If so, not to be perfect itself—to be aware of our imperfect practice is itself expression of our inmost request. If you understand [in] this way, that is right understanding.

Did you understand [laughs] what I said? My—I don't know whether I put it in right way or not.

Student B: Our inmost request, then, is a request for perfection.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Perfection or—"perfection" [laughs] is not so good word—but to improve ourselves, knowing that our effort is not strong enough or we are not sincere enough. That is why we want some example—good example. The good example will encourage our practice, and it will help whether or not our practice is good or bad.

There—there is big difference, you know, just to be critical to ourself because we have some gaining idea. This gaining idea is based on some invisible merit. But to—to be satisfied with ourselves is quite a different effort to be—not to be something else, but to be ourselves or to be thing itself.

So gaining idea is not good, but we say gaining idea [laughs]—it is also gaining idea, maybe, but gaining idea to be good [?] is not wrong. It is —it is way-seeking mind—so-called-it way-seeking mind. "Practice Buddhism for sake of Buddhism." That is true practice. Practice Buddhism for sake of something else, that is gaining idea. Without knowing that—without being satisfied with ourselves, to try to be something else. Sometime we, you know, we try to escape from our life and to be—to go somewhere—somewhere else or to live somewhere else. That is [laughs] not Buddhism. It is quite different.

Did I explain it pretty well [laughs, laughter]?

Our practice is not like some intoxicating liquor, you know. Many people will—will mix—mixed up this point—will mix up way-seeking mind and gaining idea. We do not rely on even teaching, you know. We want to be ourselves. And we want to be satisfied ourselves. How to be satisfied ourselves is how—why we should follow the example—why we should practice.

Someone asked his disciple, "When the cart¹ driven by a horse does not

¹ Sometimes Suzuki-rōshi pronounced it "car," sometimes "cart." The latter is

go [laughs], which do you whip? A cart or a horse?"² This is very tricky question. Of course, he may whip—give a whip to a horse, you know [laughs]. To give a horse to a—to give a whip to the horse is to give a whip to the cart, because cart and horse is not different, you know. The practice and enlightenment is not different. But sometime [laughs] you think the practice and the cart—enlightenment is different thing, [that] the practice is something—some means to attain enlightenment. If you think in this way, you know, the enlightenment is something different from you. So—and you want to be something else [laughs], because we are so stupid [laughs, laughter] and so [1-2 words]. But stupid one should be stupid. If stupid one is stupid, he is, you know, are youthful [useful?]. But stu- [partial word]—even though he is stupid, it is his nature to make his effort to be more—to be better. That is his own nature. And he try—actually he is trying to be satisfied with himself. It looks like he want to be something else. But actually he want to be satisfied with he himself. That is true understanding. But if you think he is—he want to be something else, and if you try to help him, if you try to encourage him to be something else [laughing], you will kill him. This kind of understanding is very important. It is rather hard for you, especially, to accept this truth, especially when you are young [laughing] you are quite stupid. So you should be stupid.

You know, my—when I was young disciple, my master³ would called me "Crooked Cucumber." Crooked Cucumber was my nickname. And when I go to enter the K- [partial word]—our university, I couldn't—we said—the president of the university⁴ told us something like this: You have to be satisfied with yourself [laughs]. Even though you study hard, foolish one is foolish [laughs]. Intelligent one is intelligent, he always, you know, said—he would say that in this way. But it—it was pretty hard to accept, because all of us wanted to be some great [laughing] teacher. But he said it is impossible.

So to—the practice is—the purpose of practice is to accept myself. Knowing that, all our effort is to accept ourselves. Whether we become a great man or not is not the point. When we realize—when we can accept myself—ourselves, we are already one with all the existence. When spring come, we can enjoy spring flowers. When the summer come, we can enjoy the cool moonlight. When autumn come, we will appreciate—we can appreciate the beauty of the foliage. In winter we will appreciate snow. Because when we can accept ourselves, we can accept anything else. There is no—no self in our mind. What we have

used throughout this lecture for consistency.

² Teacher Nangaku Ejō asking his student Baso Dōitsu in *Ching Te Ch'uan Teng Lu (Record of the Transmission of the Lamp)*, translated by Thomas and C. C. Cleary in *The Blue Cliff Record* (Appendix, p. 566).

³ Gyokujun So-on.

⁴ Probably Kaiten Nukariya, president of Komazawa University, Tōkyō, where Suzuki-rōshi matriculated.

is big mind, big self. We can treat my body as we treat others'. We—we will treat my own things as we treat others' property—others. This is how—this is the way of Buddhist life.

Student C: Could it just as well to mean accepting our small mind too?

Suzuki-rōshi: Small mind?

Student C: Mm-hmm.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah—to accept small mind too, knowing that that is small mind: small—big mind watching small mind [laughs]. Yeah. Then small mind will work, you know. Don't you think so?

Student C: I don't know what you mean "small mind will work."

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, work—

Student C: You mean, it will keep on operating?

Suzuki-rōshi: If you know that is small mind, if you know the nature of the—your tool, you can use the tool [laughs]. If it is small [laughs], you can use it when you cut small things. When you help small-mind person, you should use small mind [laughs, laughter], knowing that that is small—very small.

Some other question?

Student D: A few months ago, you said that we're always having problems to live with. Well, since that time, they have become a great problem to me. And—is this part of the nature or the functioning of our small mind, that it has to always feel in terms of a problem to be solved? It seems—it seems for me personally to be almost the crux or the—the point where I—in my practice, at least, I will think I am—hold [?] this dualistic way of thinking or gain—gainful way of thinking. I know sometimes when I'm sitting, I—I fall into problems, thinking if I could solve this problem of my breathing, then I will be—have attained such-and-such. And unfortunately, it's—it's always there. I'd feel a little bit naked if it wasn't, but it's always a problem to be solved. It seems to be an inescapable part of my life.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. "Seems to be" is right, you know [laughs, laughter]. "Seems to be." Not exactly so, but seems to be. That's very good [laughs, laughter]. It seems to be small mind, you know. It seems to be big mind. But actually it is both big mind and small mind. But when you think, "This is big mind, and this is small mind," there is, you know, duality—gap. When you want to decide, "This is good and this is bad," "This is small mind, this is big mind," you have g- [partial

word]—you have duality already. But actually there is no big mind without small mind. Small—big mind is the mind which is working on small mind. If there is no small mind, there is no big mind.

Student D: Then problem-solving does not necessarily have to be a dualistic activity. Is that right?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Not just—when you accept the dualistic activity, you know—to accept is to find the oneness, you know. So when you do not accept it, that is duality. No way to solve it, or there is—it will—it is just deluded idea which will cause many—which will be the cause of trouble. But when you accept it, there is oneness. And the problem is actually solved when you accept it. When you accept the problem, you accept your true nature, which is working on it. When you accept your true nature, you know, fundamentally there is no problem. But as long as we live, moment after moment we have to work on something. So problem—dualistic problem will give you the meaning of life—your life. It is ornament of your life.

Student D: Ornamental?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Ornamental. Your life will be more colorful [laughs]. It may be beautiful. That is the difference, you know.

Some other question?

[Discussion off-mike, probably about the time.]

We have twenty minutes more! [Laughs, laughter.] Please relax.

[Recorder stopped and re-started.]

Tape operator: This lecture is continued on Track 2 from this point.

[Recorder stopped and re-started.]

The question of—question which do you hit, the cart or the horse—was a question given to Baso⁵ by Nangaku,⁶ the grand—direct disciple of the Sixth Patriarch of China.⁷ His famous word is, "Although you said to the point, it will not be right." That is his famous statement. "Although you say quite well or to the point, it will not be right." It has —it is also double-edged sword. Double-edged sword. It means if you —even though you say so, you will not understand it. That is one

⁵ Chiang-hsi Mazu Daoyi (Baso Dōitsu): 709-788. Chan master of many other Chan masters; student of Nangaku Ejō.

⁶ Nanyue Huairang (Nangaku Ejō): 677-744. Chan master; student of the Sixth Patriarch Daikan Enō (Ch. Dajian Huineng); master of Baso Dōitsu.

⁷ Dajian Huineng (Daikan Enō): 638-713. Sixth Chinese Zen Patriarch.

meaning. Another meaning is whatever you say, that is right. It's double-edged sword.

The Sixth—the Sixth Patriarch emphasized a pair of opposite. Thirty-six—he pointed out thirty-six—thirty-six pairs of opposites: heaven and earth, good and bad, something like these.⁸ I think Nangaku also—his practice is—his understanding of the teaching is based on also the dualist—pair of duality. According to him, something good is at the same time something which is bad. Good and bad is one—two side of the one coin.

When Nangaku was practicing zazen—Baso was practicing zazen:

Nangaku said, "Why do you practice? What is the purpose of your practice?"

He said, "I want to be a buddha," he said.

Is it—and Nangaku, the teacher, picked up a tile and started to polish [laughs]. Disciple Nangaku—Baso asked the teacher, "Why do you polish a tile? Is it possi- [partial word]—is it possible to make a tile—to make a tile a mirror?" he said.

The teacher said, "No, it is impossible." [Laughs.]

This is very famous story. To polish a tile. That is our practice. Even though you polish a tile, tile is tile [laughs]. But to polish is our practice, whether—it doesn't matter whether it will be—it will make a mirror or not. To polish it—to polish it, it is our practice, and that is the goal—that is the enlightenment. The effort to polish is based on our true nature. Our true nature makes us polish it. So whether it—it will be—it will make a mirror or not is not the point.

But Nangaku could not—Baso could not understand it, so the teacher said—continued:

⁸ From *The Sūtra of Huineng*, Chapter 10, "His Final Instructions": Heaven and earth, sun and moon, light and darkness, positive element and negative element, fire and water, speech and dharma, affirmation and negation, matter and non-matter, form and formless, taints (San. *asruvas*) and absence of taints, matter and void, motion and quiescence, purity and impurity, ordinary people and sages, the *sangha* and the laity, the aged and the young, the big and the small, long and short, good and evil, infatuated and enlightened, ignorant and wise, perturbed and calm, merciful and wicked, abstinent (San. *shīla*) and indulgent, straight and crooked, full and empty, steep and level, *klesha* and *bodhi*, permanent and transient, compassionate and cruel, happy and angry, generous and mean, forward and backward, existent and non-existent, Dharmakāya and physical body, and Sambhogakāya and Nirmānakāya.

"If the cart does not go—if the cart driven by a horse does not go, which do you—to which do you give your whip?"

That was the question. Because Baso thought cart is—horse is something—horse is for [?]
—and its cart driven by a horse is something different, you know. Those are two. Because they think—because he thought horse and cart is quite different—in other words, [that] practice and buddha or to attain enlightenment is different. So he—he said:

"Which do you—to which do you give your whip?"

Do you understand? If you think you—if you practice hard you will attain enlightenment sooner [laughs], if you are lazy in your practice, you will attain enlightenment later, this kind of, you know, understanding is usual understanding of practice. But actual practice is when you practice zazen, the practice itself or enlightenment not separated from enlightenment—practice is not separated from enlightenment. When you practice it, the practice is the expression of your true nature. Where you practice it, you have your true nature. And so you have to accept that true nature—express on that moment. That is Nangaku's suggestion.

When you understand this way, you can apply—whatever you do, it is expression of true nature. Scientific research, philosophical study, or artistic work—all our culture is expression of our true nature. But if you understand our practice as a means of attaining enlightenment, you cannot apply our practice before you attain enlightenment [laughs]. But if you have right understanding of practice, whatever you do, that is expression of buddha-nature. There is big difference in your understanding in—between those two understanding of practice.

Thank you very much.

[Recorder stopped and restarted.]

Tape operator: This is the end of the *sesshin* lectures for October twenty—of August 28th.

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Bill Redican (8/8/01).