

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
May Sesshin Lecture: GENJŌ-KŌAN, PARAGRAPHS 1-2
Wednesday, May 25, 1966¹
1 PM or 6 PM LECTURE
Sōkō-ji Temple, San Francisco

The secret of all the teaching of Buddhism is how to live on each moment. Moment after moment we have to obtain the absolute freedom. And moment after moment, we exist in interdependency to past and future and other existence. So in short, to practice—if you practice zazen, concentrating yourself on your breathing moment after moment, that is how to keep precepts, how to have the actual understanding of Buddhist teaching, and how to help others, and how to help yourself, how to attain liberation. Why we call true Zen the capital city of religion is we have actually m- [partial word]—gist of teaching and secret of practice—to understand various religion and various way of practice through and through.

As I said this morning, we do not aim for or emphasize some particular state of mind or some particular teaching. Even though it is perfect and profound teaching, we do not emphasize the teaching only. We rather emphasize how we understand it, how we bring the truth into practice. And this practice also does not—does not mean some particular practice. When we say "Zen," Zen include all the activity of our life.

This morning, Reverend Katagiri explained our monastic rules. And Dōgen-zenji said, our practice—we are like a water and milk. When we, each one of us practice—are concentrated on this practice of Zen, we are not anymore each separated being. Oneness of the all the students or monks is there. When you live in each moment, each one of you are independent being. And at the same time, each one of you [is] obtaining absolute independency. You attain the same buddhahood that Buddha attained, that various patriarchs attained. So having—living in each one's absolute freedom, we attain same attainment.

So we are—each one of us is independent in the same realm. When this realm is understood, there are student, there are teacher, there are someone who serve tea, there are someone who drink tea, and there are independent being. And we are practicing the practice which

¹ The date is highly suspect. On the original tape it was listed as Saturday, 5/25/66. But 5/25/66 was a Wednesday. The date of 5/25/66 was arbitrarily retained and the day was changed to Wednesday. No *sesshins* were listed in *Wind Bell* for May 1966. This is probably the first lecture in Suzuki-rōshi's 1966 series of lectures on "Genjō-kōan" given at Sōkō-ji. For the probable sequence, please see the end of this lecture.

was started by Buddha—*buddha-sangha*. In this way, Buddhism was carried out by Buddhist.

So although Buddha was born 2,500 years ago, but Buddha is right here when we practice his practice. Buddha lives in our age with us. But Buddha is Buddha, and we are a student. So you may say there is student and teacher, but we are all the same—we are all practicing the same practice exactly the same way as he did—as they did at their time. Actually, we are practicing same practice with them. If so, whatever we do, that is Buddha's practice, and this is how we kept practice—precepts.

In Buddha's day, there were—their way of life—in China there was Chinese way of life, in Japan there is Japanese way of life. But when we live in that day, in that age, in this way, although the way of living is different, but actually what we do does not different from what Buddha did because we—there we express absolute freedom. There is no two absolute freedom.

So when in China—when they are too much interested in Buddha's—Buddhist philosophy, they ignored how to live in Buddha's way. In other word, they ignored how to keep precepts. To keep precepts is not to keep Indian way of life. When you eat here, you should eat here. You cannot [laughs] eat in India all the time [laughs]. Strictly speaking, if you want to keep precepts literally, you have to go to India [laughs]. Then you can keep the—keep precepts completely.

Eisai-zenji² referred to very interesting story in his work. There was some Chine- [partial word]—some monk from India [laughs]. When he came to India—China, he could not observe Indian precepts because the custom is different. So he returned to India because he was very much afraid of breaking Indian precepts [laughs].

So if you—misu- [partial word]—do not know how to observe precepts, or if you emphasize just written precepts without knowing how to keep it [laughs], then Buddhism will die immediately [laughs, laughter]. But if you know how to keep our precepts, Buddhism will continue and will develop as Zen developed in China. Various Mahāyāna school was lost in China except Zen because, you know, they—they were too much interested in the philosophy of Buddhism without knowing how to actualize the teaching. So eventually they ignored precepts, but they may say they did not ignore. "Zen student ignored it," they may say, because Zen student did not observe it literally. But Mahāyāna schools observed it as Indian Buddhist did. And they thought this is Buddha's way. So Buddha's way eventually separated from their everyday life. But Zen student understood precepts as a—as their way

² Myōan Eisai, Yōsai, Senkō (Zenkō) -kokushi: 1141-1215. Japanese Zen master of the Ōryō lineage. Dōgen practiced at his monastery, Kennin-ji.

of life. So they do not mind the formal way of life—formality. And they were so sure that their way of practice was how to actualize Buddha's teaching. And how to actualize Buddha's teaching is, in short, to live on each moment. And that is the conclusion of Mahāyāna philosophy—how to live in this moment, how to attain enlightenment. How to be Buddha is how to attain perfect freedom. How to attain perfect freedom is how to live in—in this moment.

So in China they established Buddhist—Zen Buddhist established new precepts, which is called pure rules. New precepts for themselves. For other Buddhist, precepts is some rules Buddha observed, but for them precepts is their own way of life: how to live on this—in this moment in that place. When we are not so sincere about our practice or about our way of life—about ourselves, you may say there is teaching. "I am priest," you know, "but they are layman" [laughs]. "I am priest, and Buddhist teaching is written in the book—in some particular book."

So if you understand Buddhism in this way, they can ignore the precepts. Precepts is written in the book, and precepts is for some particular person. But if you realize the religion is for everyone and should be our way of life, you know, the some certain precepts, which is written in some particular book, cannot be actualized—cannot be bring into practice—everyday practice. So when we become sincere about our everyday life and the meaning of religion, we cannot live in old precepts which was set up for some other person. We should have our own precepts.

So in this way, Hyakujō-zenji established Mahāyāna precepts for the first time in eighth century. Mahāyāna Buddhism introduced in China in, maybe, four[th] century. For many years, they observed Indian precepts. It is impossible, you know. They say they observed it [laughs] but no one can believe [laughs]—no one can trust them. It is impossible for Chinese people to observe Indian precepts [laughs]. It is ridiculous. If they think they observed it, they are very selfish people. They observed it just for himself, for priest only, ignoring how—what kind of life usual, ordinal [ordinary] people have.

Excuse me, if you—if your car is in front of the door, will you [laughs] move it [laughs, laughter]?

So Zen Buddhist was very serious about their way of life and people's way of life, so they established—they renewed precepts—Indian precepts. So in India, you know, they practice zazen to attain—maybe they could practice zazen all day long if—it—it was possible as a group, even, because the monks were supported entirely by people. After they finish their household life, they became monks. And their boys and girls supported them. So [laughs] for them it was possible. But

for Chinese monks who must support themselves, by themselves, cannot sit all day long. And whatever they do, it should be Zen. So they developed the practice more to everyday life. So Chinese Zen was more practical. They knew how to apply the—apply Zen in everyday life.

And how to apply in everyday life is not difficult, because if we live on each moment, that is Zen. Whether you are sitting or working, when you live on each moment as you practice Zen, that is how to practice Zen. So Zen is in our everyday life. So you may say Indian way was rather lazy way [laughs], not active enough. So eventually—naturally Indian Zen emphasized some state of—some mysterious state of mind, but in China they emphasized more the attitude or way to have direct experience of various experience.

In this way, the Buddhist philosophy actualized in Zen practice. And oneness of the practice—zazen practice and everyday activity was brought to our society. So Zen is the source of the philosophy, and source of art, and source of various religious life.

In—in *Genjō-kōan*, at—in first paragraph he—Dōgen-zenji gives us the whole pattern of Buddhist way:³

When all things are Buddhist phenomena—

—when all things are Buddhist teaching, you may say—

we have enlightenment and ignorance—

—something to study or something to observe—precepts, or sūtras, or problem of philosophical discussion of life and death, or enlightened one, or the ignorance—ignorance.

When all things are without self, we have no ignorance, no enlightenment, no buddhas, no people, no life, and no—no death.

When all things are without self—when all things—all what we do is done in realm of selflessness, like milk and water, there is no water or no milk. When the whole textile is woven completely in various colorful thread, you know, what you see is not piece of thread, what you see is one whole textile. Do you understand? So [laughs] there is no need to say "this is water" when you drink milk. Do you say this is

³ Suzuki-rōshi is commenting on Eihei Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* "Genjō-kōan," following the translation by Kazuaki Tanahashi with Robert Aitken that appeared in: (1) *Shōbōgenzō Genjō Kōan: An Analytic Study* (unpublished manuscript, San Francisco Zen Center); (2) *Wind Bell*, 1967, VI (2-4), pp. 60-62, and (3) the [*Honolulu*] *Diamond Sangha [Newsletter]*.

water and this is milk [laughs]? You drink just milk, and there is no water or no milk.

So he says:

When all things are without self, we have no ignorance, no enlightenment, no Buddha, no people, no life and death.

Buddhist way is beyond being and non-being. Buddhist way—we know each colorful thread, and we know also the one whole woven textile. We know both side—both way—we observe things in two ways without any contradiction. But when we are not sincere enough, you may say, "This is Buddhism [laughs], and this is other religion. We are monks, and they are layman, that's all." So they don't understand the whole beautiful textile.

But Buddhist way is beyond being a thread or a textile—beyond thread or textile. Therefore we have life and death, ignorance and enlightenment. Still we see the various color in the woven textile, and we appreciate the color of the—the textile.

So he says:

We have life and death, ignorance and enlightenment, people and buddhas.

—and so many interesting colors on the piece of—one whole piece of cross—cloth.

However, flowers fall with our attachment and weeds grow with our detachment.

However, even though we are Buddhist, we live with people seeing the flower fade—fading away day by day. With our attachment, the thing that we—bring out the weeds day after day with our detachment.

That we move ourselves—

—he explained more about it. Here in the second paragraph, there are many—various idea and various practice, not only Zen but also Pure Land school—way of Pure Land school and various way of religion. But those are, for him, one beautiful textile. So it is—so that is why his teaching is called the source of all religion—not "source," but [laughs] —not source but, you know—each religion makes sense, you know. Thread does not—a piece of thread is not useful. When you make beautiful cloth with it—it, you know, it is—it become useful—it become perfect religion.

So each schools of Buddhism and various religion find its own meaning in big religious—human religious life. It makes sense. It means to weave a beautiful cloth with thread. Each religion is just a piece of thread. Maybe it is colorful, you know, maybe it is beautiful, but if you weave something with it, you can use it as your beautiful dress. In this sense, his teaching is called—not "source," but [laughs]—sometime we say capital city—not "cap-" [partial word]—because various road come to the center.

Anyway, in this sense our way has two faces. One is as a secret of the religion: how to find the meaning—true meaning of religion. And, on the other hand, we remain as one of the school of Buddhism or one of the various—one of the many ways of practice.

So we have two face [?]. We are actually—we—I belong to Sōtō school. I am a just a—I am just a piece of thread [laughs]. But we know how to, you know, how to make ourselves a piece of useful material. This is Sōtō way. Without knowing how to make ourselves useful, to observe some lofty way of acting [?] does not make much sense, you know.

So in the second paragraph he says:

That we move ourselves and understand all things is ignorance.

He give the definition of various thread—this is red thread, this is pink, this is blue—like this. "That we move ourselves and understand all things is ignorance." Then what is enlightenment? Enlightenment is:

That things advance and understand themselves—that is enlightenment. It is buddhas who understand ignorance.

Who is Buddha? Buddha is someone who understands ignorance. Who is people? People are ignorant of enlightenment. So he says:

It is people who are ignorant of enlightenment. Further, there are those who are enlightened about—above enlightenment—

—like Sōtō school—

and those who are ignorant of ignorance—

—like Pure Land school.

When buddhas are truly buddhas, they are not necessarily aware of themselves as buddhas. But they are enlightened ones and advance in enlightenment.

I—we are not necessary—necessarily be just Sōtō priests, you know. We are one of the Buddhist [laughs]. But we cannot practice all the ways of practice. Although we practice just Sōtō way, but we are—nevertheless, we are Buddhist [laughs]. That's all.

So here you will find out how important it is to live in each moment. This—our way to live—to live on each moment makes everything possible—makes precept observation possible, makes attaining enlightenment possible, makes to attain absolute freedom from various sectarianism possible. And, first of all, this practice makes us possible to attain perfect, complete satisfaction in our life.

Thank you very much.

Source: Original City Center tape. Verbatim transcript by Adam Tinkham and Bill Redican (2/21/02).

The dates of various lectures for the "Genjō-kōan" series at Sōkō-ji are inaccurate. Based on the sequence of paragraphs Suzuki-rōshi commented upon, as well as comments such as, "We have already finished the first paragraph," the following sequence is suggested:

1. SR-66-05-25 (¶¶ 1-2)
2. SR-66-05-26 (¶¶ 5-13)
3. SR-66-03-13-A (¶¶ 1-3)
4. SR-66-06-19-B (¶¶ 7-9)
5. SR-66-06-19-D (¶¶ 11-13)
6. SR-66-06-19-A (¶¶ 1-11, recapitulation).

These and other paragraphs were discussed in the later series of lectures on the "Genjō-kōan" that Suzuki-rōshi gave at Tassajara in 1967 (for which no tapes are currently available):

1. SR-67-08-21 (¶¶ 6 and 9-11)
2. SR-67-08-23 (¶¶ 12-14)
3. SR-67-08-20 (¶¶ 15-18).

Suzuki-rōshi also commented on "Genjō-kōan" briefly in a 1971 lecture:

SR-71-07-24.