

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
GENJŌ-KŌAN: PARAGRAPHS 7-9
Sunday, June 19, 1966¹
Lecture B
Sōkō-ji Temple, San Francisco

[Now it is specifically taught in Buddhism that life does not become death.]² *For this reason, life [is] called "no-life." It is specifically taught in Buddhism that death does not become life. Therefore, death is called "no-death."*

Life is a period of itself; death is a period of itself. They are like winter and spring. We do not call winter the future spring, nor spring the future summer.

Here he talks about life and death. But this life and death does not just mean the problem of life and death. By "life and death" he means understanding of existence and non-existence, or unconditionality and conditionality. When you practice Zen, our purpose of religion or goal of the religion is not in—to attain some state of mind non- —called non-existence. We want to attain enlightenment in realm of—both in realm of non-existent and existent. This is a Buddhist way of understanding—Buddhist way of practice.

So nirvāna is both existent and non-existent, and both not-existent [laughs] and non-existent. This is nirvāna. If I say in this way, you may feel [it is a] very unusual statement, but it is not so. For an instance, he says here it is not like—in next paragraph he says:

*We gain enlightenment like the moon reflecting in the water.
The moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken.*

The moon—what do—does he mean by the moon, and what does he mean by water? The water—you say "the moon reflect on water." It is not only the moon that reflect on water. Everything will reflect on water. And what is the water, and what is the moon or some other object which will reflect on water? Usually we think if you see—as long as you see something on water—on the water—as long as you see

¹ This date is almost certainly wrong: Four lectures on one reel-to-reel tape had been assigned the same date.

² 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translation by Kazuaki Tanahashi with Robert Aitken that appeared in: (1) *Shōbōgenzō Genjō Kōan: An Analytic Study* (unpublished manuscript, San Francisco Zen Center); (2) *Wind Bell*, 1967, VI (2-4), pp. 60-62, and (3) the [*Honolulu*] *Diamond Sangha [Newsletter]*. The tape for this lecture appears to lack the opening sentence(s) read by Suzuki-rōshi, so the single sentence in brackets has been restored here.

something on the water, you do not realize that there is water there. But when everything vanished, you will realize that there is water. When you are alive in this way, you know, what you see, what you feel, what you hear is you—according to understanding that is your life.

But when you do not see anything anymore or do not hear anything anymore, you may say that is end of all [laughs]—end of you. Nothing exist after you do not see anything or do not hear anything. That is usual understanding of life, maybe. That is why you become very anxious [laughs]. You become very uneasy when you think of your death because you think you cannot—there is nothing exist after your death. That is quite usual understanding. And some people may think if you—that is quite ordinal [ordinary] understanding, but when you believe in some God or some heaven, you will not have this kind of anxiety. After death you will go to heaven [laughs]. Even though you are various problem just—in this world, if you attain enlightenment by your practice, you will find out where you go after your death. That is enlightenment, you may say. But this kind of understanding is not our understanding at all.

Our understanding—according to our understanding, that the moon—that the moon exist, it means that the water exist. Because water exist, you can see the moon on it. If there is no water, you cannot see anything. That water exist means that the moon exist. If the moon does not exist, you cannot see water. In this parable we say "water," but by water we mean unconditionality, and by the moon we mean conditionality. Our life is conditionality of—succession of conditionality of unconditioned—unconditionality. Conditionality—conditional experience of life is uncon- [partial word]—unconditioned state of—conditioned state of unconditionality [laughs]. Do you understand [laughs, laughter]? If there is no unconditionality, there is conditional—there is no conditionality. When we—that we exist here means something, you know, which is unconditional. That we are unconditional being—because we are unconditional being, we change [laughs]. According to the condition, our life may change. So on the water many things will appear. The same—it is same thing with your life. Various experience will come out in your life because your life is originally unconditional being. You are unconditional being. That is why you have various exis- [partial word]—experience, including death.

So when you see nothing, what will exist is—the original unconditionality will exist—still exist. It is the same thing, even though projector stops. When—even though you cannot see any picture on film—on screen, when the projector stops [laughs], but film exist. By "film" I mean unconditional being. Film is unconditional. That is white. Film is just white being. So on—it is possible—because

it is white—pure white, it is possible to reflect various color on it, and various form on it. But usually after projector stop projecting the picture, you think there is no more picture [laughs]. You say no more picture, but film exist. By "film" we mean the unconditional—unconditional eternal being. And you cannot—but you cannot obtain—acquire a perfect renunciation or perfect composure by just understanding—by just idea of unconditional being. Even though I say you are unconditional being, it does not make much sense [laughs]. It is obvious that—logically it is obvious that we are unconditional being. Not only each one of us, but also various existence is unconditional being just like a picture on the film. That which exist is the screen, but no one [is] interested in the just white picture. But if I say that unconditionality is eternal present or now, you may be surprised. By "unconditionality" Dōgen-zenji means, now, this moment. So this unconditionality is the eternal being in which Buddha live [?]
—in which we live. But that is one eternal being and one eternal succession of present or now.

This "now," this moment is where we should go after you are dead [laughs]. You go to this eternal present, and you appear from this eternal—not "from"—you appear on this eternal present. And to obtain this eternal present actually is to practice Zen. So in your practice if you find out, this nothingness—this not "vacuity," but this eternal present, you will be—you have no more anxiety. But when—when you just thinking about it, you have still emotional anxiety. But if you actually feel or emotionally feel this present moment in your practice, you have no more intellectual anxiety and emotional anxiety. So you have perfectly free from the problem of birth and death.

So when you reach this point in Buddhism:

How—now it is specifically taught in Buddhism that life does not become death.

Life is, you know, one conditioned period. Life is conditional expression of unconditionality. Death is conditional expression of unconditionality that is unconditionality itself. So we do not say "life become death." Life and death is the same.

For this reason, life is called "no-life."

Life—what is life? Life is conditioned—conditionality of unconditionality. So death is unconditionality of—death is conditionality of unconditionality, and life is also conditionality of unconditionality. So there is no difference.

So in Buddhism we do not say "life become death."

It is specifically taught in Buddhism that death does not become life.

Death does not become life because death is not something different from life. Death is conditionality of unconditionality, and life is conditionality of unconditionality [laughs]. So it is the same thing. So we do not say "death become life."

Therefore death is called "no-death."

Death—this "no" means emancipation or liberation. Why we put "no" means to point out the thing itself. It does not mean—it is not negative. It is emancipation or to point out thing itself. Death is death. Life is life, you know. When we point out something directly, we say "no." Because when you say "death," you are comparing death is to—death to life. We do not—when we reach this understanding, death is death, life is life. And death and life is same. Both are conditionality of unconditionality.

So based on unconditional being. Life is based on unconditional being. Death is also based on unconditional being. If you see death through and through—if you understand what is death through and through, there is no more death which life result. When we say "death," period. That's all [laughs]. No more life. When we say "life," that is period. No more death. Death and life is same thing. It is the —just picture on the film—no, on screen. But when you see the picture, there is screen, you know [laughs]. You do not just realize—you do not just see it, but without screen there is no picture.

So this "no" means emancipation or direct experience—direct experience of death, [and] direct experience of life. Life is period of itself, death is period of itself. Death is death, and life is life. They are like winter and spring. When we—winter—winter is the unconditionality of the climate—conditionality of unconditional climate. And summer is also some special season based on our various—based on one universal weather [?]. So:

We do not call winter the future spring, nor spring the future summer.

When we say spring, you know, when—there is no need—why we call it spring is we want to know whether it is warm or cold, you know. When we say spring—"Oh, that's wonderful!" [winter?] [laughs]. If you—if you—I say, "This is future summer," you will feel [laughs] funny. Future summer or future winter [laughs]. You—you feel as if you are going back winter [laughs]. So when spring come, you should feel very warm [laughs], and you should feel very happy. That is why we say it is spring now. So it is ridiculous to say this is future [laughs]

winter. It is ridiculous to say life is future death [laughs]. You may say death is future life. This is—this statement gives you some [laughs] hope, but not exactly. Still you have some, you know, anxiety until you see it [laughs].

So as your religion is based on this kind of understanding, it will not work [laughs]. Even though you die, by re- [partial word]—by reincarnation you will appear in this world, but someone will want to stop [laughs] reincarnation. It's awful to be born to come back in such a nasty, uncomfortable world again. It's much better to stay in heaven [laughs, laughter] indefinitely. This kind of understanding will not help you at all.

So perfect composure or unperturbable compatibility of your life should be attained in—on each moment without just [being] caught by conditioned state of life. Actually conditioned state of life—why we have many conditions is because we stop our think—because we have some particular understanding of life. You cannot stop your life, you know. You are always changing into something else. Always. Incessantly.

So there is, strictly speaking, there is no—nothing called "now." Now is always going. To live in now means to live in eternal—eternity. So strict—in our practice, we do not think anything. Just let ourselves go as we go [laughs]. That is our way.

You know, the atom has no—no weight or no size [?], as you know. It has no weight and no size [?]. It is same thing with time: Time has no length. It is smallest particle imaginable—imaginable. So we can imagine how small it is, but [laughs] there is no such thing exist. You say the atom is smallest particle of material imaginable [laughs]. That imaginable. That is just theory. There is no such thing exist. If so, we do not exist. What exist is unconditional being. "Is" exist. One unconditional being exist. If you want to attain liberation in realm of time or space, there is no other way to explain in this way. But at the same time, it means we should not try to attain liberation by the idea of good or bad, long or short. How—the only way is to understand our life in term of being or non-being. Good or bad. In term of just we understand the material by the idea of atom. That—that is just idea. That is just some way to—of understanding of life. But actually those way is just way. It does not mean—it means something but that—this understanding means is one big unconditional being. Not particular trivial event.

It is same thing to divide big thing in various way. You can cut one radish in various way [laughs]. How to—according to the skill of the person who cut the radish it, you know, looks very beautiful. But actually what exist is one big radish [laughs]. When we reach this

kind of understanding, I think we have understood what Dōgen-zenji meant by *Genjō Kōan*. All the kōan is to mean—means of explaining our life. Even though we say "attainment," or we say "like" [life?], we should not be [1 word] [laughs]. Even though we say "ignorance" or "death," we should not be disappointed. That is just, you know, explanation of our life. Life does not change.

We gain enlightenment like the moon reflecting in the water. The moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken. Although its light is wide and great, the moon is reflected even in a puddle an inch wide. The whole moon and whole sky are reflected in drop of dew in the grass.

This kind of, you know, wonderful composure—absolute meaning of our life will be realized when we reach this understanding. There is no more big—or matter of no more problem of big or small. Each moment of our life is one expression of conditionality of one unconditional being. It is not matter of long or short. According to some psychologist, the moment of our—one moment for us is three or six seconds. Three or six second in—is for us one moment. When we say, "I see something," you know, that means that image will stay in your mind—imbedded state three or six minutes [seconds?]. That's all. After three or six minutes [seconds], it will turn [into] to some idea. So direct experience stay three to six minutes [seconds] only—oh, not "minutes," "seconds" only [laughs]. But three or second—we cannot say three or second, you know, strictly speaking. In that three or six second, the moment you see, you know—I—we don't know the—there is no length, you know, the moment [laughs]. When you see something, there is no length of time. It is not even one second. But in that moment, it—the object you see will be clear and genuine. But in next moment, it will, you know, change into something which is not so actual—accurate to you.

So "this moment" or "this world," we say, but what is this world? So it is silly to—to try to find out something in our—just in our conscious world. So here he says there is no more problem of good or bad, long or short:

The moon is reflected even in puddle an inch wide. The moon—the whole moon and the whole sky are reflected in a drop of dew in the grass.

We cannot say the moon is bigger than drop of dew. It is the same. It is one period of our life, long or short. Three or six minutes is one period of our life. And seventy or eighty years of our life is also one period of life. Which is long and which is short [laughs]? You cannot compare. The way of understanding is different. But the life you understand [is] originally the same. There is no particular life for us.

We are just expressing our unconditional being, which is universal to everyone.

So that is why we say even though you are eating, there is Zen. There is unconditional being. When you sit, of course [laughs], you are unconditionality itself. But before you have some experience of unconditional—unconditionality of the being, you cannot, you know, accept it. Even though you do not have the experience, it is better not to try to attain enlightenment somewhere else [laughs]. You will be lost.

And it is obvious that you cannot attain absolute composure by comparing this world to other world. It is useless. It means nothing [laughs]. If you find out there is no other way to attain enlightenment, even though it is hard, we should attain the absolute attainment by right practice. If you do so, sooner or later you will attain it. Even though you do not attain it, you can practice your way with conviction. Do you understand? If you practice it with conviction, that practice works. Even though it does not work, it's all right [laughs]. It is working, actually, but you do not think [laughs]—you yourself do not think that is not working. But actually it is working. That is our practice. So there is no problem in our practice.

So whether you attain enlightenment or not is secondary problem. The first of all you should stop comparing this world to the other world, this moment to the next moment. We should live in eternal present. Here we have eternal life in its true sense. No one can deny this eternal life we mean. And no one can ignore it. If you—if they ignore it, they will be sympathized by us: "Oh, he—[laughs]—he is wondering about—he is just caught by one side of the view of life. Existence—or existent or non-existent, when life is existent and non-existent, conditional and unconditional. That's all."

Thank you very much.

Source: Original City Center tape. Verbatim transcript by Adam Tinkham and Bill Redican (2/20/02).