

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Sunday Morning, March 16, 1969

Our practice should be based on the idea of selflessness. This selflessness is very difficult [to] understand. If you try to be selflessness, you know, that is already selfish idea. [Laughs.] We don't know what to do, what—how to cope with it. Perhaps you may—you must have tried various way, but selflessness is not something which you can try, you know. It—selflessness should—should be there when you do not try anything. Selflessness is not something which you can be aware of. But for us, we have to—it is necessary to try and to know—it is necessary to know how difficult it is.

And because it is difficult, you want some guidance or teacher. Maybe when you have good teacher and when you are practicing with good teacher, you will be naturally not so selfish. Why our teacher is so hard on us is because of our selfish attitude. Whenever he see our selfish attitude he may point out—or he may be angry with it. Usually—for an instance, you know, when I was a little boy, I was going [to] primary school at that time—grammar school, you know. And I learned something about animal—small animal and—like, you know, some—some—some animal which live on fish['s] body. When we were working in the pond to clean the water from the muddy—mud and worm in it, I, you know, picked up a small goldfish and found a small worm on the body. So that was the worm I studied at primary school. So I point out that worm and said: "This is"—in Japanese—"mijinko!" You know, "This is *mijinko!*" Maybe I proudly, you know, pointed out that *mijinko*. And my teacher said: "Shut up!" [Very loudly. Laughs, laughter.]

I didn't know why he shouted at me, but now I know [laughs, laughter], you know, why he was so angry with me. You know, to encourage student by showing some example is the mercy, but [laughs] to shout at me when we proudly showing—that is another mercy, another kindness. So whatever we do, he is watching us, you know, whether he—we are selfish or not.

We small disciples would eat anything he—he wants, you know. When guest come, if he has a good Japanese cake, he would put—he would hide it from us, you know, because we eat always what he want to use [laughs]. Whatever it is, as soon as we find out, we would eat it [laughter]. At first, you know, we have not much, you know—at first we cut a corner which—[laughter—probably demonstrating the technique] it is in the box, like this. And we would cut just a slice of it, four corner [laughs]. And next time a little bit more [laughs, laughter], until, you know, it is obvious we cut it. So when we realize that anyway he may find out what we did, so we cut [laughs, laughter—probably demonstrating the technique] and divided, you know, between us. When

—but when we divide the cake and eat it, he was not so angry. But when he thinks some—someone, you know, ate it all by himself, he became very angry.

Once he put a persimmon—big persimmon—a bitter one, in the rice so that it will be ripened. But someone—it was just one—someone ate it, you know. But I didn't know that when I—and my master thought that we must have eat it. So he asked me who ate the persimmon. Because I didn't know who did it, so I said, "No, I didn't." He became very angry, not with me, you know, but someone who ate it by himself without sharing it—sharing it among us. And as soon as he found out who did it he was very angry. And, you know, I became very sorry for him, to say that I didn't—I didn't eat it.

Any kind of selfish—selfishness is strictly observed by our teacher. Selfish attitude create arrogance, you know, arrogance—arrogant attitude based on selfish idea. Because he is selfish he became—become arrogant. So this arrogancy is strictly observed by our teacher. This arrogance is sometime—most—when it is positive, it is easy to find out. But negative arrogance is rather difficult to see or to know. The negative arrogancy is the arrogancy when you say, "No, I cannot do that," you know. But it means that—what I mean by "I can do it" is to do it perfect, you know. Better. So he may say, "I cannot do, it but you do it," he may say. And if he cannot do it as he expected, he may, you know, express arrogancy, you know. He said he can do it, but look at it, you know. Look at it, what he did. That is arrogancy.

So in Zen School we put emphasis on self-power—to do it ourselves. And Pure Land way is, you know, we are originally sinful being. But teachers of Pure Land School strictly, you know, pointed out that kind of arrogancy: "I cannot do it. I am sinful!" you know. It means that everyone must be sinful, you know. "I am a one of it." Here, you know, if you misunderstand, if your understanding is not close enough, you know—"I am one of it. Everyone is sinful." That is most of the time—most of the time it is arrogancy, the negative arrogancy. It is better, much better to say: "Although I am—now I am sinful, but we can—by practice we must conquer it." That is more, you know, faithful to the sinful nature of ourselves: sometime, not always.

So it is not matter of what you say or how you, even, behave. When you reach this point, you will find out the real practice of repeating Amida Buddha's name or practicing zazen. There is no other way than to repeat Amida—just repeat Amida Buddha's name without any reason. There is no other way to sit, you know, without any gaining idea.

So before you have this kind of struggle, you may wonder why we say you have to sit without any gaining idea. After you try various way to be free from selfish idea, then I think you will find yourself in the position

where you can sit—just sit.

We say "conscience," but that conscience, you know, [is] mostly based on selfish idea. Con- [partial word]—real conscience is more than the verbal thing. More than you can think about or you can feel. Until you, you know, you are when—only when you are every strict with yourself, that real conscience will appear. In other words, as long as you are seeking for something, some truth, or some way, or some understanding from outside, you will not find out what it is. Only when you are strict with yourself you will find out what is needed for you.

So instead of being attached to some verbal thing or something which you can hear or see, you must feel impulse from inside which support everything, every phenomenal world. And to be grateful for—for the life energy from inside, which support everything. That is buddha-nature. And maybe that is Amida Buddha's mercy.

But usually, you know, when—when you have selfish practice, you stick to something, you know, which you can see, which you can understand. And when you stick to something which you can understand, you will forget all about what is supporting the understanding, the color you see or the beautiful shape it has. So instead of being one with the flower, your friend, or your teacher, you will stick to—you will be caught by your teacher, the flower you see, the friend you have, without, you know, direct—without having direct intimate relationship. You will make, you know, some barrier between you, and what you will see is dead flower or wooden teacher.

So in short, what—the best way is to get up, you know, when people get up, to eat whatever it is when your friend eat, and to sleep where our friend sleep, to behave, you know, like other students behave, without any reason. [Laughs.] That is, in short, the best way. That is *shikantaza* in everyday life. If you are not able to do that, you don't know what is zazen. In your zazen, you know, every sound comes [?], you know, but you do not think about it. You do not discriminate it. You just hear it. So in our monastic life, you should be able to do whatever it is. Whoever it is, your teacher is teacher, you know. That is the only way to get rid of your selfish practice. You should forget all about why or how, even [laughs.] You should do—whether it is creative activity or imitation. It doesn't matter.

If you become too fussy about things, you know, you will lose your practice. So I don't like to discuss something too much [laughs]. You will be lost in your discussion. It will take, you know, night after night, day by day, and you will not have any conclusion. The last thing you will do is to decide by vote.

Discussion is necessary if you understand the fundamental attitude or

fundamental practice of selflessness, discussion is very useful. But usually—when you—because you [are] caught by some idea, some way to solve the problem, you cannot solve the problem. Because no way can be perfect. It will create some other problem, whatever you do. So when you know that whatever we do in term of good or bad, right or wrong, that is not perfect, then tentatively you can choose some way. That is, in another words, selflessness. You do not [taps stick twice] force anything. Tentatively: "Let's do this way." That's all, you know.

Religion is, after all, for ourselves—each one of ourselves. [*Tape turned over.*]¹ And it is—if so, it is necessary to observe our way as a personal practice and independent effort. And when you get through the superficial activity, you will find out some universal things within yourselves. That is a kind of mystery. When you think—when you can accept things—you can accept completely the things which people may accept—the truth which is truth for us was the truth for even Shākyamuni Buddha. There is no difference.

If we—if our understanding, you know, [is] deep enough there is not much difference, there is not much time difference or space difference. Whatever it is which is true with us is true with our ancestors and maybe for our descendant, too.

As we are, you know—as we are practicing our way with so many people, the personal—and we are busy to organize our practice. But we should not forget our personal practice.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Dana Velden and Bill Redican (10/30/00).

¹ Sentence was repeated at head of Side B, so the "original" tape must have been a copy. No text was lost at the (non-)turnover of the tape.