

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
THE ONLY DESIRE THAT IS COMPLETE IS BUDDHA'S DESIRE
Tuesday, April 8, 1969

[Recently]¹ I was talking about denial of, you know, desires. This is very confusing, you know—may be confusing. Our way is not asceticism, but actually, what we—if you read, you know, our precepts literally, there is no difference [laughs]. But what it means is completely different. What is the difference is what I want to talk about tonight. Or what is the difference between "to study" and "to listen to." "Go to the master and listen to what he says" and "to study." Or why you started to study Zen. There must be some reason why so many people come and—come to Zen Center and practice Zen and study Zen.

I think this is because of the—because our culture—our civilization—came [laughs] already [to a] dead end, and if you realize that you cannot go any more—any further more. So someone who notice—people who notice that this is the dead end may come to Zen Center [laughs, laughter] to find out some way to go further. That is, you know, your feeling, you know, whether or not you understand what is dead end or why we came to the dead end.

The foundation of our culture is based on individualism. And individualism is based on, you know, idea of self, you know. And from the time of Renaissance, we awoke in our human nature, and we started to put emphasis on our human nature rather than, you know, something which is called "divine nature" or "holy nature." We put more emphasis [on] how—what we are and what is human nature. And we wanted to express our human nature as much as possible. But—and, you know, the human nature—holy nature, you know, or buddha-nature, were replaced by human nature. And that human nature is not what we mean by buddha-nature. This is, you know, starting point of mistake. So whatever the—whatever sort may be—communism, or capitalism, or individualism—all those sorts are based on individual right, or individual power, or individual—supremacy of individual.

So, for an instance, you know, individualism or capitalism seek for the freedom of our desire, our freedom, you know. But capitalism—or—but communism rather put emphasis on equality of the profits or right. But equality of—equality and freedom is not, you know, compatible, you know. If you want to be free, you know, from everything, if you want to extend your desire freely, limitlessly, you know, you—you cannot divide things equally, you know, because you want to extend your desire as much as you can. If each one of you extend, you know, their desire, it is not possible to—or have—to possess things equally.

¹ The first word or two was missing on tape. "Recently" was added by the transcriber, based on usage in other lectures

But our conscience—our conscience always tell us, you know, "You should be free from—you should be free in extending your desire. It is all right. It should be all right to act freely, to possess things as much as you can, if you don't disturb people." But if you have too much, you know, when others do not have so many—so much, you don't feel so good. So [laughs] that is not compatible thought—those are not compatible.

Why, you know, this kind of—this individualism and to—and—or desire—freedom of desire and equality of our right is compatible is because our thought is based on, you know, self-centered idea. We, you know—when we say "equality," equality means, you know, equality of our human power. When we say "desire," "limitless desire," "freedom of desire," it means "our" freedom, "my" freedom, or "someone's" freedom.

So there is no idea of holy being, or Buddha, or God. There's no idea of it which will make some rule to—some background to give appropriate position to equality and desires or freedom. So those idea—those thought—if it is necessary for—for us to accommodate those thought without difficulty, it is necessary to postulate some big fundamental idea of non-selfish desire or limitless boundary of—boundary of material or place, which is not just material or spiritual. Something beyond spiritual and material is necessary. That is so-called-it "non-selfishness."

As long as our life is controlled or based on a selfish idea, you know, it is not possible for every thought to find its own place without fighting with each other. So there's no wonder why we have difficulty in our life when we—when our life is based on just, you know, superficial idea of self or individual.

Asceticism before Buddhism—asceticism before Buddhism put emphasis—they practiced asceticism for their future, you know, good life: to be born in some place where they have lot of enjoyment or more, you know, perfect world. That is, you know, a kind of selfish extension—extended selfish practice. But our mortification is not based on selfish desire. The purpose of our practice is to control our desires so that our desires find its own place and act properly. We control our desire. And so that every one of us, you know, without any difficulty, to extend our desire, we practice mortification.

So difference is our mortification is based on non-selflessness. And before Buddha's mortification is practice of mortification based on selfish desire or extended practice of selfish practice. When you practice—when you study Buddhism, you know, you have a lot of selfish idea: "I study. I must know what it is," you know. When you want to listen to your teacher, there is not much self, you know—selfish idea. That is the difference. This is very important point.

Why you should have a teacher is, without extending selfish practice or understanding, to learn the truth in its pure form, excluding selfish practice. Study is also, you know, practice. It is not just intellectual. It is intellectual practice. So it is nothing—it is not different from zazen because it is based on non-selfish idea. It is not selfish—extended selfish practice.

Why we say you should practice zazen without "gaining idea," you know: Gaining idea [is] based on selfish idea. And when you just sit because you are told to sit, because that is Buddha's way—only because that is Buddha's way—then you have not much selfish idea in your practice. When you have—you eliminate selfish idea from your practice, that is actually non-selfish practice—the true way of practicing true—true—truth.

In *Shōbōgenzō*, on the first chapter,² Dōgen-zenji refers to interesting story. There were a priest called Gensoku.³ Gensoku is the name of the priest who is taking care of a temple of Hōgen-zenji.⁴ And he—he thought he understood Buddhism very well, so he didn't ask any question to the master for three years. At last, the Hōgen-zenji asked him, "It—it is already three years since you came here. Why don't you ask some question to me?" And Gensoku said—[someone raises a hand to ask a question]⁵—excuse me?

Student A: The *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* said—says that, like, that there are two different classes of beings. And one class—one person is called a "non-returner," and one person—one class is called the—the "returners," "the once-returners."

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student A: I would—I would imagine that the former are the ones who would maintain or keep their selfish desires, whereas the latter would—would not keep their selfish desires.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah.

And "Why don't you come and ask some question?" he said—the master said.

But that acolyte, you know, said, "I—I studied for a long time under

² *Shōbōgenzō* "Bendowa."

³ Baoen Xuanze (PY), Pao-en Hsuan-tsê (WG), or Ho-on Gensoku-zenji (Jap.): Chan master, disciple of Fayen Wenyi (Hōgen Bun'eki) in 9th–10th century China.

⁴ Fayen Wenyi (Jap. Hōgen Bun'eki): 885-958. Founder of the Fayen (Jap. Hōgen) school.

⁵ The note in brackets is from the original transcript.

Seihō-zenji,⁶ and I—I think I understand what is Buddhism completely," he said.

"How did you—how—how do you understand Buddhism, and what kind of teaching did you receive from him?"

And the priest said, "When I—when my former master asked me, 'How do you understand?' When—the old master said, 'It is,' you know, 'to study Buddhism is like to seek for fire. It is like a—a man who were—who was born in the Year of Fire,' you know, 'seek for fire.' Fire seek for fire, you know. And to study Buddhism is to study Buddhism. Who is—who himself—who is—who—he himself is Buddha. Buddha study Buddha. That is my understanding of how we study Buddhism."

The—but Hōgen did not, you know, accept it. He said, "That is what I thought. You don't understand [laughs] what is Buddhism is at all."

So he was very much upset, and he went away. But before he traveled so long, he thought, "Hōgen is the famous Zen master. There must be some reason why he said—he said so when I said to study Buddhism is fire seek for fire."

So he thought, "It may be good chance for me to have real understanding of Buddhism. He must have some good understanding of our way."

So he came back to him and asked him, "What is the way to study Buddhism?" he said. And the master said, "It is like a fire seek for fire" [laughs, laughter]. He repeated same thing.

And Dōgen-zenji said, you know [laughs], and he enlightened, you know, by the same words. When—before he [was] enlightened, you know, he thought, "I understand," you know, "what is Buddhism." And he, you know—he thought, "My understanding is perfect." That is why his understanding was not perfect. When he gave up, you know, his intellectual understanding, his limited understanding, and seek for some more truth—when he tried to seek for some more, then he—his mind is open and enlightened.

So Dōgen-zenji says, "If you understand like the acolyte, and think—think that is the way to understand what is Buddhism, Buddhism will not continue so long." We should not be—if it is all right to understand some teaching literally and stick to the teaching is all right. The Buddhism cannot be, you know, transmitted to us. When we limitlessly extend—try to extend our true nature, instead of selfish, limited self, then Buddhism is there. When we forget all about the limitation of—intellectual

⁶ Qianfeng Chuanchu (PY), Ch'ien-fêng Ch'uan-ch'u (WG), or (Jap. Seihō Denso-zenji or Kempo): no dates. Dharma heir of Luopu Yuanan.

limitation of the teaching, then true Buddhism will be extended forever. In that way, Buddhism is—will have eternal future.

So some recent teaching or something which was told by someone, and if you stick to it, that is not true teaching. When you, you know, receive it—accept it with selfish—self- [partial word]—non-selfish attitude, you will have it. Something [If you have a?] humble attitude you will have true understanding of the teaching. The teaching is there. That is why Hōgen-zenji is necessary for the acolyte—for the students.

If—written [?] teaching—even though *Shōbōgenzō*, you know, is perfect, there will be no⁷ need to study Buddhism under some teacher. Even though *Shōbōgenzō* is perfect, you know, you want your teacher. That is why we recite sūtra, you know, before we start lecture. *Shōbōgenzō* is here, and I bow to *Shōbōgenzō*, and I study *Shōbōgenzō* with you. If I say, you know, "I know something," that is wrong. The extended practice of bow to the *Shōbōgenzō* is how I speak about it and how you listen to it, instead of, you know, some confidence. If you have confidence, that confidence is not in something which you have, but confidence in something you can extend forever: something which comes from selflessness, which is the base or foundation of all teaching.

So instead of putting emphasis on Sōtō way, or Rinzai way, or Tendai way, we put emphasis on nothingness. Everything comes from nothing, and our way will be extended forever, limitlessly. That is how we study Buddhism.

Our desire, you know—our desire—when it—the desire based on selfish, you know, idea, that is not acceptable. We cannot accept that kind of desire. But our—when our desire is based on—when our desire is unselfish desire, we—that is how we extend our way.

So [there is a] difference between mortification of asceticism in pre-B- [partial word] [?]-Buddhistic practice and asceticism. Our way is different. And the way to control our desire looks like same, but actually completely different. This is the most important point, and I didn't refer to this point on this lecture—when I give lecture at Tassajara.

So to control—to extend our desire is to be strict to ourselves, you know. Without being strict with ourselves, we cannot do anything, because that will be the wrong practice. So first of all, you should—we should reflect on our practice. And before we say something, you know, we should reflect on ourselves. This is a very, very important point. You should not rely on some teaching, but you should reflect on yourself, and polish up yourself, and get rid of selfish idea as much as you can, even though you attained a wonderful attainment or enlightenment. If you do not polish yourself—if you forget to polish yourself—that enlightenment will not

⁷ Suzuki-rōshi definitely said "no."

work. That is not real enlightenment.

When we realize ourselves, and when after reflecting on ourselves, and when we are able to see "things as it is," whatever the thought may be is acceptable: "Capitalism is all right. Communism is all right. Nothing wrong with it." But when we, you know, understand things—when our understanding is based on selfish idea, and when we try to force our opinion to others, then, without reflecting on our way, and when you attach to your own idea, rejecting other's idea, then you will be—your effort will end in dead end [laughs], you know. After all, you should fight—you will fight with others, that's all, and both will be hurt. You cannot survive any more because you lose your background—true background.

You will have some question? Please ask me.

Student B: Is deep breathing the same as introspection?

Suzuki-rōshi: Introspection, yeah? First of all, we have to have wisdom to see things as it is. When we have no selfish idea, we can see things as it is. So we know what we are doing always, and we know that we are not perfect, and our idea is a one-sided idea. So we have, you know, always room to accept someone's idea, too, because we know that what I say or how I practice is not perfect. That is humbleness, you know. That is how to accommodate our opinion to other's opinions. *Hai.*

Student C: You said that we should control desire.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: And I still don't understand how to go about that.

Suzuki-rōshi: How do you do that?

Student C: How do I control desire?

Suzuki-rōshi: You shouldn't, you know—why I say so—how—why I say "control" is your, you know, way of extending desire is, you know, based on selfish idea. So you—without reflecting, your desire is selfish one, you know, and you take it—you try to extend it. You think this is—there is nothing wrong, you know [laughs], to extend your desires. That is, you know, the mistake. Something matters [laughs]. Something wrong. It is something wrong if you extend—just extend your desire, without thinking or reflecting, without—not "control," but without observing your—without reflecting on your desires. What is desire, you know? Desire, in its usual sense, always based on selfish, you know, idea. Isn't that so? *[Sentence finished. Tape turned over.]*

But when you think, you know, "Nothing wrong to extend my desire" you

know—if—if someone say you should—you should control, you know—you shouldn't do so, then you will feel bad [laughs]—you will feel some restriction. But if you—that is "control" in its ordinal [ordinary] sense. But when you realize—when you reflect on your desire, as a—if you understand your desire [as] pretty selfish, you know, then naturally you will limit your desire to some extent. That is not control. That is the way desire should be. There is big difference. Do you understand?

Student C: Could you explain the part of the [*Heart*] *Sūtra* that says, "no eyes" [?]-until we come to our [2-3 words unclear].

Suzuki-rōshi: "No—no eyes--"

Student C: "No eye."

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: "No eyes," until we—

Suzuki-rōshi: "No eyes" or "no ears" means, you know—we—we think: "I have ears. I have nose," you know. But nose is not just nose, you know. Nose is some organ to smell, and ears some organ to hear. And combination of nose and, you know, the five senses—sense organs will have some understanding. So just nose or just ears doesn't work.

But we usually think: "I have nose. I have ears. Ears is—our ears is quite different organ from," you know, "nose." But that is not true. So even though you cannot see, you can tell—ear will—will "see" something [laughs], you know. The function of the ears will, you know, will change, and the ears will [have] some faculty to, you know, to see colors. And by listening to something, you know, you—you will see some color. That kind of change will take place, if you cannot see. So nose is not just nose, and ears is not just ears, as we understand. So "no nose"—"no nose" is right.

There is nose, that is right, and there is no nose. That is also right. And "yes" and "no" [laughs]. You should understand in two ways: yes and no [laughs, laughter]. That is complete understanding.

So you do not, you know, stick to your nose. "I have no nose. That's okay," you may say. "You have no nose." That's okay. "You have no ears." "That's okay," you may say. Both is true. The two ways of explaining something. So "no nose"—why it says "no nose" is because we think there is, you know, "nose." You shouldn't ask question like that, you know [laughs, laughter]. "No nose" is all right. When you do not ask question, if you take it for granted, you know, it is real understanding of things. That kind of, you know, wisdom is necessary if you want to see "things as it is." So as long as you have stick to some

selfish, you know, understanding or special understanding, you cannot see things as it is. *Hai*.

Student D: If things as they are require selfless—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student D: —or are selfless, where does the small self come from?

Suzuki-rōshi: Small self comes from?

Student D: Where does it—

Suzuki-rōshi: Actually, there is no small self, you know [laughter], but you—you say there is small self [taps stick on table four times as he says previous words beginning with "say"]. That is the mistake. We—we usually have that kind of mistake.

Student D: Where did that mistake come from?

Suzuki-rōshi: That mistake? That is not actually mistake, you know [loud laughter]. That is all right. But you say "mistake," you know. You may ask me why I say mistake. That is, you know, one-sided view [laughs]. You don't see things as it is because you stick to one-sided view [laughs]. Okay? [Laughing.] Judy, your eyes is wondering [laughs, laughter]—wondering "Is it all right? Is that true?" *Hai*.

Student E: You said that it is not good to allow our desires to extend themselves limitlessly. Would you also say it's not good to restrict them too much, so that it—one becomes unhappy and makes others unhappy too? [Laughter.]

Suzuki-rōshi: When I say restrict—you should restrict your desire, I mean you should not extend, you know, your desire in limited sense—limited sense. You know, for instance [picks up something], "This is my desire," you know. You limit the nature of desire already. So "without limitation" means to based or to have a wider understanding of the desire. Then you can extend forever.

Student E: What about a concrete situation [4-6 words]?

Suzuki-rōshi: Concrete situation? Concrete situation—yeah. Concrete situation—actually, you know, there is no concrete situation [loud laughter]. You know, if you say "concrete situation" [laughs] you should also say "limited desire," you know. When you say "concrete situation," the—your desire—your limitless desire—also limit- [partial word]—will be limited. But actually, you cannot limit your desire, or you—there is no concrete situation. It is, you know—somewhat it is changing.

Student F: Well, if someone comes up [to you] and you want them to do what won't—what they want to do, and—I had a—we have a choice. I mean, if someone comes up and like—someone goes and felt my arm to see how big it was [laughter].

Suzuki-rōshi: Um-hmm.

Student F: And instead of showing off, I just let my arm—they held it—they grabbed my arm, and they expected me to go like that [possibly flexed his bicep]. But instead I just raised it. And then when I moved it again, I just lowered it. And wherever they put it I put my arm.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student F: And I was really surprised at my response. And I said, "Gee!" [Laughter.] What it is is a big [1-2 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: Mmm. Yeah. But if you—if you see—if you reflect on your situation, as long as you see your situation, it is all right. Then you will not, you know, do anything too much or too little. You can do just [what] he wants.

Student G: Does reflecting on your desires make it—I mean, when you reflect—I mean—go ahead, Rōshi [?]-I'm getting confused by it [laughs].

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student G: I don't know. Do you mean that—I think that you say that if we think about our desires, then when we reflect on them, then we can—if we see they they're selfish desires, then we can limit them.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student G: Yes?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes. You—you limit the desire.

Student G: Can you—can—could—could we—or should we limit our desires and, two, not ourselves but for other? In other words, like, if we have a desire and it's affecting the [2-4 words] what I want or maybe what someone is likely to need to pretend [4-6 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: The point is, you know, the point is whatever the desire is, you know, it is necessary [laughs], you know, to—to control. It should be under control, in short. But why we should control our desire is [that] the desire we have right now, you know, in this moment, is not

perfect one. More or less, our desire is involved in selfish, you know, selfish desire. So only one desire, you know, which is complete is Buddha's desire [laughs]. We should know that. And Buddha's desire is not desire—is not some desire which we have actually right now.

All the desires we feel we have is actually limited desire, not—not perfect desire. We should know that. But when we don't know that, we will get into trouble [laughs]. That is what I mean. The only perfect desire belongs to Buddha: perfect one which include everything. Whatever he does, it is all right, because he is just one whole being [laughs]. He is no—for him there is no friend or no enemy. What exist is Buddha himself. So for him it is all right, but for each one of us, which is a part of him, you know, it is necessary to, you know, to accommodate our desire. If I desire so much, you know, you should ask someone if I extend my desire little bit more [laughs, laughter] or not, you know. *Hai*.

Student H: Is our desires conditioned by our human nature?

Suzuki-rōshi: Conditioned by?

Student H: Our human nature?

Suzuki-rōshi: Human—when we say "human nature," you know, maybe human nature will be understood in two ways. In comparison to buddha-nature, we say human nature in its humble sense and humble attitude. And—but some—sometime most people say human nature—when most people say human nature, he may think, because this is human nature [taps something repeatedly], you know, nothing wrong to have human nature for a human being [laughs]. So I can do whatever we like! You know, that is another kind of understanding of human nature. We should know that, you know, when we understand human nature in its more humble way, you know, in comparison to perfect nature, then human nature makes sense. That is what I—we mean by human nature. *Hai*.

Student I: Supposing I would like a cheese—I have a desire for cheese.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student I: Then, as I understand you, to limit my desire is to eat some cheese but not eat too [?] much cheese.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student I: To not be greedy.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student I: But someone might interpret you to mean, "Well, since I

have the desire for cheese, I must limit my desire. I will not allow myself to eat any cheese." And then that person might become envious and angry when he sees other people eating cheese.

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.]

Student I: He will—he will be angry at them because they are eating cheese, and he doesn't let himself do it—

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.]

Student I: —but he has the desire for it.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student I: So—

Suzuki-rōshi: But so—

Student I: I just think [?] it would be bad to be too strict—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student I: —as well as too free.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. So you should not interpret same, you know, words in always same way, you know. It is how—how we study Buddhism. If we can, you know, read same word same way—by the same way, that is another mistake. So constantly, you know, we must open our eyes, open our mind, and see the situation. That is the point.

Okay?

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997.
Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Tanya Takacs and Bill Redican 11/20/00.