

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**Tuesday Evening, June 17, 1969**  
**San Francisco**

...<sup>1</sup> Just to—just to practice zazen, you know, will not be perfect enough. So more and more I want to make our rule strict and maybe formal and rigid, or else [laughs], you know, you will waste your time, I think. How should we establish our system of practice in San Francisco is—will be our future subject.

I started to explain, you know, the way upward and way downwards—or to help others or—and to—or help yourself: to climb up [to] the top of the pole and to come down from the top of the pole. This is rather fancy, you know, more advanced practice. So it may be—it may not be necessary for you actually to explain this point, but it may be important for us to understand or to know what kind of practice you will have after you enter our practice hall.

And only when you actually started our true practice in our zendō, that practice will be extended in your everyday life. And this evening I want to, you know, explain this point more: how to develop our everyday zazen—our zazen practice to our everyday life, because to follow rigid practice does not mean Zen is always, you know, to—to follow rigid rituals or rigid practice is Zen.

It is necessary for you to get through that road—that door, but that is just door. So to make—I want to explain what I—kind of practice you will have after you enter the door, or else no one will come to Zen Center [laughs] if I—if you say, "Just to follow the rigid practice is the—Zen. And Zen Center way is just to sit—come and sit at certain time and to follow teacher's instruction, very formal—which is very formal." Then no one will come to Zen Center, I am afraid. So I want to explain little bit, you know, about this point, as much as possible.

It is rather difficult, you know, to explain what is not possible to explain, but as much as I can, I want to explain it—referring to several kōan—at least one or two kōan.

"Climbing up the top of the pole—this is—and step forward one step for-[partial word]—make—to make one step forward from it"—is very famous kōan,<sup>2</sup> and many teachers explaining about it.

And for Sōtō priest—for Sōtō students, the most we have a story, you

<sup>1</sup> The first words of the lecture are missing on tape.

<sup>2</sup> From *Ts'ung-jung lu* (J. Shoyoroku, E. *Book of Serenity*), Case 79: "Changsha Advancing a Step": "Climb one step beyond the top of the hundred-foot pole. The whole world in the ten directions is revealed."

know: "Four Kinds of Horse." Do you the story of "Four Kinds of Horse"?<sup>3</sup>

The horse, you know, which will run at the shade of the whip—before he get the whip. And the next one is—as soon as the whip reach to its hair, you know, he may start to run. That is the second one. And third one is, you know, when he felt the pain on his skin, he will run. That is the third one. The fourth one is—fourth one will not run until the pain penetrate into the—into the marrow of the bone. *Shht!* [Makes sound like a whip cracking, laughs, laughter.] Then he will start to run [laughs.] That is, you know—the whip, by "whip" we mean the teaching of evanescence of life—teaching of evanescence of life. Or teaching that everything changes. There is nothing to stick to. There is nothing to care for, in its true sense, because everything is changing. That is, you know, the Buddha's—the most important teaching.

But—many Buddhists from ancient times, to understand this teaching, they studied various scriptures and practiced hard. But Dōgen-zenji says, you know, that is not something to study [laughs], he says. It is actual fact which you see every day. No one can stay always young. Nothing is always same. Everything is changing, including you. That is actual fact you see. That is not something which you will study after reading many books. So if you really, you know, suffer—if you have a lot of suffering in your everyday life, you will actually, you know, feel the most important teaching of Buddhism—that everything changes, there is nothing to stick to.

But nowadays, you know, our system of the world, or society, is based on [laughs] to develop our desire, to stick to something, you know, to gain something. And we study many things just to develop our greedy desires. And our knowledge of science cannot stay as a science—scientific study. Scientific research is always a result—some improvement by doing something, by making some machine. As soon as we know it is possible to reach the moon, you know, we actually try to do it.<sup>4</sup>

So our, you know, study is not just intellectual study or scientific study. It is directly—it is directly connected with our desire. And everything—every system of our society is based on this kind of desire, without knowing what is human nature in its true sense, but to desire to see something, to gain something in its—not only some subject to study, but also some concrete way of achieving something.

This is what we are doing, actually. And we are, you know—every one of us is deeply or completely involved in this kind of activity—social activity.

<sup>3</sup> Probably from the *Samyuktāgama Sūtra* (J. *Zō-ichi-agon*), one of the four *Āgama* sūtras (J. *Agon-gyō*). Also discussed in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*.

<sup>4</sup> Apollo 11 was launched July 16, 1969 (see also SR-69-07-20).

But we never, you know, try to understand what is ourselves, what is our true nature. And even a student, Zen students who want to study ourselves through and through is included—is involved in this kind of idea of study—way of study.

By practicing zazen, you know, you want to attain enlightenment. But that enlightenment must be very concrete, you know. Something—if you can fly, you know. If you cannot fly you don't think you attained enlightenment. [Laughs, laughter.] Or if you feel very good, you don't think you attained enlightenment. So [laughs] the effort to attain enlightenment is another way of developing your desire. To go to Japan. To know what kind of thing he is thinking, you know. Or without asking someone any question, to know what kind of mind he has, you know. That is a kind of power of enlightenment. And many people seek for that kind of enlightenment.

So maybe none of us, you know, none of us are really practicing true zazen. Before we stop try[ing] to find out something from outside, we cannot start our true practice. You may ask me how, you know, to practice. But it is rather difficult to say in its positive way—in positive way. But negative way, I can give you various suggestions.

And in—then, I think, Zen Center is not just for priest. And it is for layman, too. Most of us—you will be a student who want to study our way as a layman, I think. So it is—it may be rather difficult to follow our way as a layman—but even for one year or more, not, you know, forever. I think it is necessary to follow our practice as long as you come to Zen Center. And our way—although our way is not just for priest but to—to know, to realize what is our practice it is necessary for you to follow our way as much as possible.

I don't want to tell you what kind of idea I have right now, you know [laughs]. But some change should be done, or else we are too many. So we must organize or set up some system for you, I think.

And how you apply our practice—our practice in your everyday life is, in short: in your everyday life, the most important thing is to be involved in—completely involved in what you are doing. And to do something—just to—to do something as a means of gaining something else—you should do things for sake of—as a practice, as you practice zazen.

In your zazen, just to practice zazen is purpose of practice. You practice zazen for the sake of zazen. And we say: We practice zazen not for others, not for ourselves. We practice zazen just for sake of practice. That is true practice.

And that practice could be the practice to save others and to save yourself, to help yourself and to help others, and to develop Buddha's

way. But when you do it, you have no idea of doing something. You should be completely involved in your practice, and you will be—you must be able to do it. That is, in short, how to extend our practice in your everyday life.

To attain enlightenment—even though you attain enlightenment—in Rinzai, you know, you will—you must attain enlightenment innumerable times. [Laughs.] And you have to have big enlightenment two-three times. That is what they say. And in Sōtō, we should continue our practice forever. How we continue our practice is to be involved in what you are doing right now. If you are counting, you should count, you know. And if you are doing something with your mind, your mind should be always with what you are doing. Just as, when you sit, you just sit without thinking anything. But in your activity, you act or you think, so you should be completely involved in your thinking mind.

For [laughs]—for, you know—for maybe ten days or more, I was completely involved in thinking, you know. In one thinking. I was concentrated, you know, how to—what to—what kind of—which way we should take as a Zen Center group, you know. This way or that way. [Laughs.] I was completely involved in that idea. So I didn't know that I was completely involved in that thinking, but my wife told me many things. "You say [laughs] when you do something you should be completely involved in it, but look what you did! [Laughs, laughter.] What you are doing? What do you do—when you go to restroom?! [Laughs, laughter]" But, you know, I didn't say anything. [Laughs, laughter.] I cannot say anything, because I have—because I feel I have to go to restroom, that is why I went to restroom. But actually I didn't have any idea of going restroom, or where I was [laughs, laughter], you know—restroom and dining room, you know, were same to me. But, you know, I was completely involved in one thing only.

So it is rather difficult to say how you should be—how you should extend your practice in your everyday activity. But actually, you know, in short, your life, you know, should be always—instead of complete combustion, you know—you shouldn't be idle, you know. And when—to be idle—to think about something, you know, or try to think, "I must read this book," is—means still you are idle, you know. You are hesitating to read it. "I have to study," mean you are still hesitating to study. "I must go to Soko-ji and practice zazen"—that—it means that you are still involved in some lazy mind. When you are completely involved in it, without knowing you—your foot, you know, your body will be carried to the zazen practice hall. So you have—you will not have any regret afterwards, what you have done, if you [are] completely, you know, involved in it. *[Sentence finished. Tape turned over.]*

Why it is difficult for us to continue this kind of practice is because of our self-centered desires. And we should always know this point, and we

should always try to give up this kind of self-centered desire after you—even after you attain enlightenment. If you notice this point, whether you are Rinzai student or Sōtō student, you will start real practice, which Dōgen point out. The practice which is one with enlightenment. And in this practice there is no difference between Rinzai and Sōtō. Just before you enter—the approach is different—just before you enter the meditation hall, there are Rinzai students and Sōtō students. After you enter our hall, there is no difference at all.

There are various kinds of words to explain this idea of oneness of practice and enlightenment. Sōtō, you know, students always say "oneness of the practice and enlightenment." But this is one—one of the many ways of explaining our true practice. "To jump off from the top of the pole" is the same idea. Or "to kill Buddha."<sup>5</sup> This is rather [laughs] extraordinary word: "to kill Buddha." Killing-Buddha practice. It means that after you enter the buddha hall, you should be, you know, completely involved in your pure practice. You have no idea of buddhahood, what is buddhahood, or whether you are ordinal [ordinary] person or buddha.

So we say—they say, "Kill the Buddha!" After you attain enlightenment, you must kill the Buddha. You shouldn't have any idea of enlightenment. So you have to kill the idea of enlightenment. I have—you have to forget all about the idea of enlightenment. That is "Kill the Buddha." So when you have no idea of enlightenment, you know, there is no difference between Buddhist or non-Buddhist. When you have no idea of Buddha, you know, you are not Buddhist because you have no idea of Buddha.

The difference between, you know, Buddhist and non-Buddhist is Buddhist has—true Buddhist has no idea of buddha or layman. But ordinal [ordinary] people has—stick to the idea of buddha and laymen or ordinal [ordinary] people. That is the difference. So they may, you know, start to—they may start to come to zazen. But after he enter the buddha hall, he shouldn't have any idea of attainment in their practice. Even though, you know, he enter the buddha hall, as long as his, you know—his practice is involved in attaining enlightenment before he attained enlightenment, then he is not spiritually Bud- [partial word]—true Buddhist. That is the difference. But both—some ordinal [ordinary] people has no idea of buddhahood—what is buddhahood and what is ordinal [ordinary] people.

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<sup>5</sup> Quoting Linji Yixuan (Jap. Rinzai Gigen): "Whether you turn to the outside or to the inside, whatever you encounter, kill it. If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha; if you meet the patriarchs, kill the patriarchs; if you meet Arhats, kill Arhats; if you meet your parents, kill your parents; if you meet your relatives, kill your relatives; then for the first time you will see clearly. And if you do not depend on things, there is deliverance, there is freedom!" [From *Linji-lu* (Jap. *Rinzai-roku*), Sec. 20: I. Schloegl (trans.), *The Zen Teaching of Rinzai*, Shambhala, 1975, pp. 43-44.]

As Buddhist who knows what is our true practice has no idea of Buddha or ordinal [ordinary] people because he—he forget all about the idea [of] Buddha who is helping others. And no idea of people who wants Buddha's help. But Buddhist will continuously trying to help others forever. That is, you know, way, you know. That is his own practice to help himself. And that is also the way to help others. So there is no two ways. When you are able to extend our practice in your everyday life to help others and to continue your practice for your own sake, you know, [it is] the same thing. Not different at all.

So two way—way upwards and way downwards is the same. So actually, as I said, there is no point—no top of the pole. We should—what we should do is continuously keep on—keep going on and on. That is our way. When we realize this point—so some people may say "to jump off from the top of the pole" means to attain enlightenment. And "forget the top of the pole" is to jump off from the pole. Some people may understand in that way. But actually, when—after you jump off from the pole, you start, you know, real practice. Before you climb up to the pole—top of the pole, that is—was not true practice.

So to climb up to the top of the pole means, for Sōtō student, you know, to enter zendō after you see the—all the notice, you know, on the bulletin board. "Okay!" [Laughs, laughter] You may say, "Oh my! Anyway, I will do it." That is to enter—to climb up the top of the pole. Not, you know, step by step—all of a sudden! *Rrrr!* [Makes a mocking roar.] [Laughs, laughter.] Jump off from the top of the pole.

It may take many—pretty long time, before you make that kind of decision, you know. Before you feel the commitment as a student. It may take time, but anyway, when you do it, they way you do it—jump! [Laughs, laughter.] That is the way.

If you wonder: "Why he is so mean? Why he say? Why Sōtō way is so rigid?" Even though you ask, you know, your teacher, he will not say anything. "Just do it!" That will be what he will say. That is, you know, to climb up from the—to jump off from the pole of the—top of the pole.

Dick [Baker] wrote me [from Japan] and said: "Sōtō way looks like gradual way," but he said "I don't think so," he said. "Sōtō way [laughs] is more sudden way. Our way is to push something from the —someone from the cliff," you know. *Whaa!* So I think that is more Sōtō way. Rinzai student, you know [laughs], can practice zazen, you know, until he find out big ox, you know. Wandering about mountains and stream, and appreciating beautiful sight, and he may encounter, by some chance, a big ox. But [laughs] Sōtō way is to show a student big, you know, hip of the ox. *Wraa!* "This is [laughs, laughter]—this is the ox! You should see! Did you see it?" It is so big that even though you hit it, he will not

move. [Laughs, laughter.] That is more Sōtō way [laughs].

Do you understand? That is what he s- [partial word]—Dōgen said. It is not matter of something you will find—find out after reading many scriptures or after listening to fancy explanation of great Zen master. It is actual fact you are confronting right now, here! That is Dōgen says—that is what Dōgen-zenji says. It is not—not those things. You should, you know, see the big ox in front of you, without any explanation, without practicing zazen. [Laughs.] It is true, you know.

You—just you don't want to see it, you know. It is so big and so ugly! [Laughs, laughter.] "Nooo! No! That is not Buddhism. Oh, no! [Laughs, laughter.] So may be better [laughs]," you know, "to take a walk," you know, "to take a trip. Trip of study." And, "I may come back same place, but not now!" [Laughs, laughter.] I feel in that way.

So if you don't want waste your time, I think, you should establish some rules for American Zen student. It is very big problem for me and for you, and I was thinking about it for many and many days, until I forget [laughs], you know, where we—where I was. Restroom or dining room—I didn't know. I think—I want you [to] join our, you know, problem: How we establish our way of studying Zen in America. It is not matter of Rinzai or Sōtō.

Thank you very much.

Do you have some question?

**Student A:** Rōshi, what is the difference between concentrating on something and allowing yourself to actually do it? During the day I continuously work with this—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah.

**Student A:** —whether I should concentrate when I do it, like, "Okay, now I am going to do this"—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm.

**Student A:** —or whether I should just do it and allow it to be done. It seems like two different things.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah, maybe. In your everyday activity, you know, it is necessary to be concentrated—try to be concentrated on something especially. In your zazen, I think, especially for you, better to allow yourself to do it. You are very good in, you know, concentrating on one thing. So if you practice, you know, that way in your zazen, you know, your mind will be like this, you know. Your mind will be very sharp—

very sharp concentration. And your mind will not open. But when we are in some situation where it is difficult to be concentrated on one thing, because of the noise or, you know, disturbance, it is necessary to be concentrated on one thing, I think.

**Student A** You know, once I experimented. We hiked with the mountain yogis up the mountain—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm

**Student A:** —you know? And they use a *mantram* like *Om mani padme hum* while they hiked. And as they hiked, they are just going over this *mantram* like this. So sometimes when I go downtown, and there's all this noise and all the billboards, and I just hear all this sound in my head, I'll start doing this *mantram*—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah.

**Student A:** —*Om mani padme hum*.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah. That is good, I think.

**Student A:** That—that keeps me—gives me a center as I go through all this confusion.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Uh-huh.

**Student A:** And sometimes during work, too, when there's a lot of things happening, to have a center like that. Would you consider that concentration also, as an aid to concentration?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah, but more—best way is, you know, to extend our—your practice in *zendō*, you know. You are try to be concentrated on one thing. Still you are trying, you know. So that is not—that is not best way. You should be more natural in your doing things. *Hai*.

**Student B:** What is the difference in the discipline to practice and attachment to practice?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Oh. [Laughter.] Same, maybe. The difference is whether you do it [with] big strong conviction or, you know, sm- [partial word]—or you do it with small ego mind—egocentric mind. That is attachment, literally. That is attachment. But if you do it with big mind, it is—may be attachment, but—it may be strong attachment, but it has no—it will not—that attachment will not [leave] any trace in your practice. So it is also detachment, you know, because you have no trace of doing something.



So when you are doing, that is strong attachment, you know. You are doing. [Hits table for emphasis during preceding two sentences.] But after you did it, the difference is you will—you have no trace of activity. When you do it with big mind, with strong conviction, you have no—you h- [partial word]—you don't have to, you know, think about it because you did it with big mind. You don't—you are not regretful. So it is detachment. And when you are doing, it is very strong attachment.

**Student B:** When you do it with big mind, then you don't worry about attachment or discipline.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Excuse me?

**Student B:** When you do it with the big mind, then you don't question whether it is discipline or attachment?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**Student B:** You just practice—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah. The word "disciplined" is—I don't think appropriate words for our practice. Practice is more—something which should be done with big mind, not by small ego—egoistic mind.

**Student C:** Rōshi, when you sit zazen and you feel pain in your legs—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah.

**Student C:** —do you think we should concentrate on the pain or—or to try and concentrate on something else?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Anyway, that is every day [laughs], you know—that is, you know, quite natural, and that is a kind of everyday routine, you know. That is not problem, you know. Do you understand? It is same thing you feel hungry, you know. There is no difference.

**Student C:** Well, when you are hungry you eat, usually.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** You eat. [Laughs, laughter.] But what will happen to you if you eat whenever you will feel hungry? Maybe it is necessary to feel hungry for one hour or so.

**Student C:** I know. I want to know if you think we should concentrate on the pain [?] or just ignore it.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Maybe—that is not big problem, you know.

**Student C:** Sometimes it is. [Laughter.]

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah. Not big problem in comparison to the problem Buddha points out. This is your problem. [Hits table four times in previous sentence.] You know, that is big, big problem. So many people—Zen student and Zen master say: "We must achieve buddhahood," you know, "next life. If it is not possible to do it next life, we will achieve it someday," you know, "after many life." The problem is so big. But pain on your—our legs is small problem. Nothing wrong to have pain in your legs. And, you know—crossing, if it is too painful, you know, there is no need to—if it is almost impossible for you, there is no need to cross your legs.

**Student C:** I—but—what I—what I was interested in was what did you think you should devote your concentrate to, in terms of on the pain itself or—or away from it?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** No. Away from? No. No. Don't try to be away from it. And don't try to be concentrated on it. [Laughs, laughter.] You know, let it painful. Let it be painful always. [Laughs, laughter.] That is your problem, you may say. I have to practice zazen. If you are painful, you know, that is your—your problem. [Laughs, laughter.] *Hai.*

**Student D:** Rōshi, when counting the breath—when—excuse me—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Uh-huh.

**Student D:** —is it better to let your breath take its natural rhythm and observe it, so that when you're counting, be detached from it, or to sort of "make" the numbers—like to push the breath in [?] a while and then push it out?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** I think, you know—why I suggested to practice counting-breathing practice is—in its—to practice following-breathing practice is more advanced practice—more advance—advanced practice. And it is difficult, you know, to practice it in its true sense. So—so you should do it, you know, after you are able to practice counting breathing practice. Then your breath- [partial word]—practice will be more complete.

**Student D:** I—I guess I didn't make myself clear. What I meant is should you be detached when you're counting the breath? Should you let the breath take it nat- ... [*Sentence not finished. Tape ends.*]

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Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997.  
Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Dana Velden and Bill Redican (12/11/00).