

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION
Tuesday, July 8, 1969
San Francisco

Suzuki-rōshi: Tonight I have nothing special which I want to talk [about]. Of course, there may be many things which I must talk [about], but I cannot think of anything right now. And I don't know what kind of thing is to be told. Maybe—so may be better to answer your question. If you have some question please ask me. And at first I will—I want you to make several questions, and I will try to answer for it. Do you have some questions? *Hai*.

Student A: Will you speak of purity and worship?

Suzuki-rōshi: Purity? Uh-huh. And worship. Some other questions too?

Student B: Could you speak of *shikantaza*?

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: You said once that when someone's been enlightened it's just so much "candy." [SR laughs.] Could you explain that?

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] Oh.

Student D: With—with practice it seems that if I'm just following the natural flow, but if my practice changes often, sometimes watching breathing, sometimes just sitting, really involved in whatever I am doing, it just seems sort of unnatural just to try to stick with one particular practice like [1-2 words unclear] or watching breathing.

Suzuki-rōshi: Okay, that's maybe enough [laughs]. Most of your question is—excuse me, will you—

Student E: Could you—could you speak on the practice of not-thinking or no thought during zazen?

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh. Mostly, you know, the—your questions may be about practice, *shikantaza*, or your question is worship and purity of mind. And purity of mind is also something—the idea of purity of mind is how we practice *shikantaza*. Or "Enlightenment is just candy." That statement is rather [laughs], you know, maybe blasphemous or something like that. Or to attach to one practice is—looks like unnatural, you know.

Maybe, after all, I have to explain [laughs] how we should practice anyway: the purpose of practice or how you practice. Natural, you know, not—by "n-" [partial word]—our practice should be pure or should be natural. Or we should not be—our practice should not be encouraged by some candy, you know. To be natural or to be—to have pure practice or "to have no candy in our practice" means, after all, to have deeper practice. And our intention to practice zazen is not just in term of pure or impure, or successful or unsuccessful, or natural or unnatural. Those, you know—maybe what you mean is deeper than what you say, you know. But if I take it literally it looks like very—not so deep, you know.

When you say—when we say "pure," it is more emotional, you know: good and bad practice in its emotional term. Pure or impure is also—maybe emotional area—a field. You say "pure" or "impure." But our practice is more than that. So we do not practice zazen, whether it is Rinzai or Sōtō—we do not practice zazen to experience some special experience. And when we say "enlightenment" it does not mean to have some experience—some particular experience, according to Rinzai, you know. To—whatever it is, whatever the experience may be, if you feel it or if you understand it, that is not [what] we mean by enlightenment experience.

Enlightenment experience is some experience—to experience—to go beyond you or your surrounding, or teaching, or zazen, or—zazen practice—or enlightenment, or someone who practice zazen, and zazen in its—in some form. Of course there is no idea of kōan practice or *shikantaza*. Kōan practice—you know, you—you know, you may say that that is kōan practice, that is *shikantaza*. But when you experience enlightenment experience, actually there is no kōan practice or *shikantaza*. And if you say, "This is," you know, "the enlightenment experience," that is not actually the true experience—enlightenment experience.

So how you practice zazen is without expecting, you know, some special—without dreaming of something, you know, in your mind. Without expecting some special experience you should devote yourself fully in your practice. When that is difficult we count our breathing or we practice kōan practice. The kōan practice or counting breathing practice is some help, you know. To help our pure practice, we use kōan or counting breathing.

We say, "counting breathing practice." It is not actually to—purpose of counting breathing is not to count your breathing without mistake. Even though we try not to make mistake [laughs]—but we try [?] not to make any mistake. But the purpose of zazen is not just to count our breathing without any mistake. To engage in, you know, a full practice we count our breathing. That you can count your breathing

without mistake means you are fully engaged in true practice. [Laughs.] Do you understand the difference? Just count your breathing, and—between just to count your breathing and when you are—you are able to—when you are counting your breathing without mistake, that is perfect, you know, that is perfect practice. There is some difference. You may—you can count your breathing, you know, even [if] you are—you have lazy posture like this [gestures, laughs], without mistake, from one to ten and go back to one. But that is not true zazen because your body, you know, activity is not fully engaged in the practice. All of mind and body should be engaged in one full practice. And to help this kind of entire practice of body and mind, we count our breathing. So counting breathing is just, you know—handle of—handle of your jar, like this [gestures], you know. Not jar itself, just—that is just handle of the jar which you may take hold of. Or it is something to—some way to encourage your pure practice. That is, you know, counting breathing practice. That is not actual purpose of zazen, but it is aid of pure practice.

If I say so, at the same time you will have some mistake. If, you know, that is just aid of practice, you know, it is not so important. So you may make some mistake, but that doesn't matter, you know. But that is not also true. So even though you make best effort in your counting breathing, the purpose of counting breathing practice is not just [to] count. Even though it is not the purpose of practice, you sh-[partial word]—you must, you know, try to count your breathing without mistake.

Do you understand this much? Or, if necessary, I have to explain, you know, more completely. But I don't want to explain so—in so—in some—I don't want to give you another problem, you know [laughs], in an- [partial word]—by my answer. Is that okay with you, or—

And pure practice is, you know, the practice—when you practice—when your practice is beyond pure or impure, that is pure practice we mean. And to sit "without candy" means, you know, also to practice our way beyond our—beyond the idea of what is the purpose of zazen. Even the idea of enlightenment we should not have. Even though you—once you attain enlightenment, and you should not try to have same experience. That kind of thing, that kind of practice is not right practice. Does it make some sense?

And "natural," you know—and here is—natural practice, you know, our—you like word "natural," you know. Because you like it so much [laughs], I don't agree with your idea of natural. Because you like it so much, you stick to the natural—naturalness too much. When you stick to it, it is not natural any more. [Laughs, laughter.] We—we, you know—our life is not natural, you know. But, you know, to do something, you know, without any idea of what you should do, you

know, idea of any particular way, that is maybe naturalness. But "natural" we mean—by natural we mean more than that. Before we discuss naturalness, you know, we should know how unnatural our human being are [laughs]. We are very unnatural being. We are not natural being. Our way of life is not so natural—very, you know, twisted and very unnatural.

Recently, you know, people are going to extremes, you know. To go to the extreme will be natural [laughs] according to your connotation of naturalness. But we don't mean that is natural. Do you think usually what you do is quite natural? We say,¹ you know: "to be free from"—"to obtain our natural order of mind we should be free from greed," we say, you know. What does it mean? To open our mind fully.

So when we, you know—when we are free from greed, and anger, and foolishness, we will have natural order of mind. That kind of naturalness is our naturalness. Do you understand the difference? Your naturalness [is?] to be greedy, to be angry [laughs]—whenever you become angry, to be angry, and to eat as much as you want, that is naturalness. But that is not the naturalness we mean. Very different, you know, actually.

Naturalness—natural mind or—means maybe more flexible mind, you know, without sticking to something rigidly. When we—when we are—when we have—when our mind is perfect freedom from everything, and when our mind is open to everything like a mirror, you know, the mirror do not have any particular image on its face always. So it is naturally—naturally it will have various images according to the object. That is naturalness.

Zazen mind—we say stop your thinking, but when we think, you know, our—to think is to—to have some picture of something, you know, in term of long or short, or white or black, you know. That is thinking mind. So when we start to think, our mind will be dead, you know. So when we don't think, you know, our mind is open to various objects.

My friend is studying Chinese. After finishing his schooling, he started to study. Even he was at school he was very much interested in Chinese classics, about herbs and medicine. And he is still studying: collecting Chinese books about various therapy or medicine or herbs. According to Chinese classics we have two minds. One is here and the other is here [gestures]. This mind is called *yang* mind, and this is *yin* mind. *Yin* and *yang*, two minds. And this mind is, you know—the center of this mind is branch of this mind. According to—he says,

¹ From the formal meal chant: "Desiring the natural order of mind, we should be free from greed, hate, and delusion."

according to some American doctor, it is possible for us to be alive even [if] this mind of your[s] is cut off from the *yin* mind here. What do you call the center of, you know, nervous system in your—?

Student F: Solar plexus.

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student F: Solar plexus.

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. I don't know where, but—I understand it is some —center is here or here [gestures]. And Chinese people called our navel, God—"gate of God." This is very important, you know. So I don't know where, but according to Chinese—old Chinese people, we have five minds which has various different function. We have five organs here, and we have five function of mind here which is more autom- [partial word]—automnal—or what do [you call it]—au- [partial word]?

Student G: Genetic.

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student G: Genetic?

Student H: Autonomic?

Suzuki-rōshi: Automatic—yeah, autonomous, maybe. Like blink of your eyes, you know. When I do like this [gestures], maybe this mind is, you know, working. But mostly this mind is not working when you blink your eyes or—nothing to do with this mind when our heart beats or movement of tummy. And 99% of our nervous activity is more autonomous or vegetable-like nervous system. And center of those vegetable-like nervous system is here [gestures]. And this is, you know—when we human being became more and more human-like, we started to form some mind here [gestures], which is thinking mind. And we started to talk, you know, to communicate, to give some idea to others. We started to have this mind which is branch of—maybe more fundamental one is [pats himself three times] this mind.

Why did I started to talk about [laughs, laughter] something like this?

But, anyway, we put more emphasis on here [gestures], you know. More original and more basic activity rather than limited thinking mind, which will, you know, be the disturbance, or which will give some strong disturbance or change [?], you know, to the original activity of life. The more you think, you know, the more your mind become busy, you cannot digest, you know, or you will have some

trouble in your tummy. So when your mind is open, this mind [gestures] is more open and natural, you know, in its true sense, you will have more active, more natural, good activity of your emotional activity.

So, anyway, in our practice, we sh- [partial word]—we put more emphasis on to get rid of various—to free our physical activities from our mental activity. So physiologically, you know, you can explain why we put emphasis on to attain more, you know, natural function of our mind and body. Usually, you know, this mind has too much authority, you know, to your emotional activity. "You should feel this way" [laughs, hits stick on table twice], you know. Or "Even though you feel in that way, that is not possible," you know, this mind will tell, you know, your emotional activity. "That is just superstition," you know. "Even though you feel good, that is just superstition." Or "It is—you have—we have no time to do so. Even though you feel sorry for him, we have no time to save him." So in that way, you know, our—this mind has, in our life—this mind has more dominating power over our activities of life, which is not, you know, so good.²

So naturalness, usually, is not true naturalness, you know. Maybe naturalness of your mind [laughs] maybe, mind only, which is not so natural in its true sense. Do you have some other questions? *Hai*.

Student I: You mentioned some practices which we could use in our daily practice besides zazen—formal practice—zazen, which might help us rid ourselves of this thinking mind or less addictive [?], our mind.

Suzuki-rōshi: Although I said, you know, in that way, I rather put emphasis on—right now put emphasis on more emotional activity rather than thinking mind, you know. But it does not mean thinking mind is not, you know—is bad, you know. It is important too. So in our daily life, you know, if we know this point, it will be help. But actually the best way is to practice Zen and to—to have this kind of naturalness in your—this kind of naturalness which you have in your practice should—could be—should be extended to your nat- [partial word]—everyday life, you know, usual activities. That is, you know, what we try to do more.

Student I: The difficulty seems to be that I use my thinking mind to rid myself of the influence it has on my thinking mind. [2-4 words.]

Suzuki-rōshi: But—that is more, you know—that will be the—I think, you know, even just to know, you know, this kind of thing actually doesn't help so much, you know. Even though you know it, you know, even though you know you have a lot of, you know, money in your

² The transcriber believes the antecedent of "which" is "activities," not the relationship of mind to activities.

bank, it doesn't help so much [laughs], you know. When you actually use it, it will be a great help. But just to know something about it—this kind of teaching or explanation—is not much help actually. So best thing is to have actual, you know, practice to control your thinking mind and to free your everyday life from thinking mind, and just to use your thinking mind when it is necessary. That is, you know, that is important, but how you do it is not just to know this kind of thing. And only way to do it is to have actual power to do it. And how to obtain this kind of power is [to] practice zazen.

So, you know, when you practice zazen, that is why you must have strong determination or confidence in your practice. The way you practice zazen is not—should not be like to read some book, you know, to find out something good [laughs]—something good, you know, or to be fascinated [by] some beautiful experience. This is very, you know, shallow, and your determination is not strong enough. So when you practice zazen, you must have strong confidence, like: "Whatever happen to me, I will not stop s- [partial word]—my zazen." This kind of—so your—you should be dead, you know [laughs], on your practice. That kind of, you know, attitude is necessary. It is not just to think something or to find out something. *[Sentence finished. Tape turned over.]*

Student J: ... So there's many types of work that we can do. We can do work that involves thinking, we can do work that involves teaching like with children, do work which is nothing but physical work, you know. Power [?] is very tiring. And all of these different kinds of work—it all takes some consideration, it seems. And lately I've been giving it quite a consideration, and sometimes I don't really know what kind of work would be most beneficial for a frame of mind which would be good for zazen. I wanted to ask you if there are certain types of work or employment that should be avoided and certain kinds that are more beneficial.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Yeah. Right is, of course, better to choose your work. But I think there will be two kinds of work, you know. It is just physical work, you know, without using, you know, your mind so much. And the other is opposite, you know, like office work or counting something—calculating something. This kind of work is just, you know, mental work in which you cannot, you know, practice kōan study, you know [laughs]. You cannot practice kōan study when you are counting something. But if that is just physical work, you can do it. But mostly I classified in this way, but most work is not purely mental or physical—maybe mixture of both. So I think best way is to be concentrated on what you do—what you are doing. That is mostly [how] we apply our practice in our everyday life. Not to—to be concentrated on what you do. Maybe most work is more mental than physical. Don't you think so?

Student J: I think it's better if it is more physical than mental.

Suzuki-rōshi: Excuse me?

Student J: It should be better for us if it was more physical than mental.

Suzuki-rōshi: I don't know which is better. Physical—physical one is also difficult, you know, and you will be very much tired of—physically tired. And it is not so good—if you are tired out too much, I don't think you can practice zazen after your work. So even though you practice zazen, it will not help, you know, immediately, you know [laughs]. Little by little you will gain the power, but it will not help, you know, like to drink some honey, you know [laughs]. When I cough, if I take some water it helps a lot, but zazen will not help so—so well immediately. But, you know, it will—what you gain in zazen will not, you know, go away. That is advantage of our practice.

Our practice make your mind clear, you know, and make your physical and emotional activity natural and stronger, and make your character more, you know, like this [gestures?], more natural and—so you will give good feeling to others. This is very important too. When you are —when you give good feeling to others, at the same time you will have good feeling too. Do you agree with that? [Laughs.]

Student K: What is the place of love and devotion in our practice?

Suzuki-rōshi: Love and devotion in our practice? Both love and devotion is very important. But, you know, love or devotion should be, you know, defined. It is not—love or devotion in its usual sense is not so, you know—is not polished up—love or devotion. We do not believe in some label, you know [laughs]: "love", "devotion," or some beautiful words. That is just paper [laughs], you know, picture. So we are not so interested in just picture. What it means is, you know, more important. Love or devotion is—must be something which is— which could be recognized by others, rather than to—or—to have some confidence in it, you know. Even though you say, "I love you," you know, or "I love practice" [laughs]—but if practice doesn't say, you know, "Oh, thank you," [laughing] it doesn't mean much, you know. Maybe that is your love, but it doesn't help—it doesn't mean so much for others, you know. So, again, naturalness is important: something which comes out from the source of your, you know, character. That is more important things than some idea or some beautiful words.
Hai.

Student L: For about the last hundred years, in Western culture, I think the idea that maybe we're too civilized has come up a lot. And

with Sigmund Freud, the discovery that the suppression of many animal instincts such as anger, may lead to mental illness, may lead to more problems—that on the one hand, if you allow complete freedom of animal impulses, you know, chaos [results]. But if you suppress them too much, people become unhappy and even destroy themselves in other ways. How would Zen Buddhism look on that problem and how would it resolve that seeming conflict which Freud could not see any resolution in that? He thought men must be always somewhat neurotic, somewhat sick because of that conflict.

Suzuki-rōshi: I couldn't clearly follow you, but Zen, you know—I cannot say, you know, our way is like this or like that, you know, because I— And we don't like to say, "this is Zen" or "that is Zen," or "This is the true way" or "That is not." But we—tonight I have no time to explain it, but we have some formula, you know, to avoid from going to extreme, you know, and to have always right judgement about things you see, about what you do, or about what you want to do. There is some, you know, not teachings, but some way to observe things more effectively and more clearly—to know what is wrong with it, you know, with your activity, or with what you did, or what you want to do.

So, usually, you know, I'm sorry to say that, but when you ask questions, you know, you want to know exactly what is Zen, you know, but we don't want to say, you know, what is Zen because something which was said will create some problem. *Hai*.

Student L: My question really wasn't, "What is Zen?" It's more, just, how to live.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student L: Maybe it would be simpler [?] if I give an example. If I am angry at something—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student L: —if I completely suppress my anger—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student L: —but it stays in me—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student L: —it may be bad for me. It may—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student L: —be very bad for my life—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes.

Student L: —for my practice—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes.

Student L: —say, sitting. If I express it, I get rid of it—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student L: —but I may hurt somebody else.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Yeah.

Student L: So what am I going to do?

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] I think it is more harmless to express it, you know, than to suppress it. But at that time you know—you must know what is anger, you know. Anger is not something which, you know—actually, we cannot be angry with anything, you know. [Laughs, laughter.] Actually, when you are angry at it, something wrong with it—with you, yourself, you know—or your understanding of you about something. But to show, you know, "I am so foolish," you should be angry. Not to, you know, not to stop someone, you know, to do something or, you know, to suppress something, but to show your foolishness you should be angry. "Oh, I am sorry. I must be angry!" [Thumps table dramatically at "angry." Laughs.] Then it will —it will be [a] help [to] you yourself and others too. So at that time you are free from anger, actually, and you—being angry you will be helped, you know, because you don't suppress your feeling.

We have precepts: "Don't be angry," you know [laughs]. And Dōgen-zenji's explanation to it is: Anger will be the beautiful cloud in the sky, or beautiful, you know, waves of water. When the sun lights or the moon lights, you will—we will have, you know, water in the sea, in the wa- [partial word]—moon in the—on the water. The anger is something like that.

So according to him, there is no need to suppress it because it is so beautiful [laughs]. But when you say it is so beautiful it is not so beautiful. When you [are] just angry, you know, like a boy, like a naughty boy, it may be very beautiful. That kind of humbleness is more important, and if we practice our way you will understand how difficult it is to be humble. So maybe better to be just honest. Whatever you do, you know—we should know that whatever you do or

whatever you did is not perfect, so you should say, "Oh, excuse me" [laughs]—whatever you do, "Excuse me."

If a master slaps his student [makes mock scolding noise], and you should say—he should say, "Excuse me" [laughs] to himself. [Whispers:] "Excuse me" [laughs, laughter]. But usually, you know, after you hitting someone, and you should kick him [laughs], and toss him, and he would be tired out [laughs, laughter]. That is not so good. Some other question? *Hai*.

Student M: You suggested to us that as students we should try to steal our teacher's way.

Suzuki-rōshi: Ohhh. [Laughs.] [Mistakes "way" for "wife."]

Student M: I—I—[you said] something like that.

Suzuki-rōshi: Did I? Did I say so? No. [Laughter]. I have no idea, you know, being stolen my wife. [Laughs, laughter.] Okay.

Student M: Do you—will you please explain how we commit that crime?

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs, laughter.] How? [Asked with astonishment.] Do you want to commit that crime? [Laughter.]

Student M: To steal your way.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh. Way?

Student M: Your way.

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh! I thought you said "wife." [Laughing, laughter.] "How—how I should steal my teacher's wife!" Way! I see. I shall be very glad to be stolen my way.

How you steal teacher's way may be not difficult, but may take pretty long time. But even though you are—if you are patient enough, or if you like him, naturally you will—eventually you will steal his way completely. That is true. It happens in that way. Even though you don't try to imitate his way. Or even though you hate to, you know, to steal his way, it is quite— I don't know why it happens in that way. So, you know, to be a teacher is awful, you know [laughs]. We don't know—because we don't know who is stealing—who or when, you know, stealing our way.

So it is—you should—you reminded me [of] a[n] awful thing I was almost forgotten. And students will learn something a teacher, you

know, want him not to, you know, steal or learn. If, you know, his teacher is forgetful, his student may be forgetful easily, quite easily. But even though his teacher is patient it may be difficult—it may take long time when his student become patient as his teacher. So something what, you know, teacher want his student to steal something, he may not steal it.

So we say—Dōgen-zenji says, "You—we must practice hard for our descendant, for our disciples," you know—not for himself but for—if he—if we know how important it is to have good disciple, then he must practice very hard. That is very true. When we come to this point, you know, our practice is not just for us—or our practice is just for disciples, or for others, rather than for ourselves.

So when we have real relationship of teacher and disciple, that relationship is much deeper than the relationship between your children and you, or your wife and, you know, you or husband and you. It is much deeper than that.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997.
Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Diana Bartle and Bill Redican (2/1/01).