

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Monday Evening, August 18, 1969
Tassajara

Suzuki-rōshi: Tonight I want to discuss about our way to attain liberation or enlightenment. When you study Buddhism through teaching or reading scriptures, it looks like Buddhist has some special way of thinking by which we attain liberation. If we understand Buddhism, and if we take the Buddhist standpoint or Buddhist way of thinking, that is the way to attain liberation.

Do you hear me?

Various Students: Yes.

Suzuki-rōshi: Okay? [Laughs.] Most people may understand in this way. If so, there will not be—no need to practice zazen. But—but it is necessary. And why it is so is the point of my talk—discussion tonight.

When the Sixth Patriarch attained enlightenment, his teacher Kōnin¹ thought it may be dangerous for him to accept disciples because of the situation of the world at that time—situation of the country at that time when China was culturally divided in two: South and—North and South, and partly because the Sixth Patriarch was unknown, you know, unknown disciple. He was just one of the many disciples, while Jinshū²—the head of the group—was very famous. And if people know that the Sixth Patriarch is Jinshū—[corrects self] [that] Hui-neng received the transmission from the Fifth Patriarch and become Sixth Patriarch, people—some people may [get] angry with him.

So he segregate himself in seashore, and he worked with fisherman. And when he appeared for the first time in some temple, there were several disciples were discussing seeing the flag, you know, whether the green—thin flag—what do you say? Flapping?³

Students: Waving?

Suzuki-rōshi: —waving by the wind [laughs], and some disciple say, "Because wind blows, the flag is waving." Some said, "Because," you know, "flag is waving, so we know that the wind is blowing." They are arguing about it. Actually maybe means that the flag may be, you know—each one of ourselves, and wind may be our objective world or

¹ Daman Hongren (Daiman Kōnin): 602–675. Fifth Chinese Patriarch.

² Yuquan Shenxiu (Gyokusen Jinshū): 605?–706. Disciple of the Fifth Patriarch, Daiman Kōnin. Founded the Northern School of Chan.

³ *Wu-Men Kuan (Mumonkan, Gateless Gate)*, Case 29: "The Sixth Patriarch's 'Your Mind Moves.'"

our surrounding. Because, you know, surrounding is not good, we are not so good [laughs]. Or because we are not so good, we will make our surrounding, you know, [something] which is not so good. There may be two ways of understanding of our life. They have been in dispute for pretty long time.

And the Sixth Patriarch appeared and, you know, while listening to them, and said, "Because," you know—"It is not because of the flag or because of the wind [that] we see the flag is waving. But because of our mind," you know, "flag is waving and wind is blowing." That was his, you know, answer for that. And he said very definitely, you know, he said so. So they thought he may be a great Zen master, and he—that was the beginning of his life as a Zen master.

There may be, you know—it may be interesting, you know, to think about the opinion that flag is waving because of the wind. Or that flag is waving—that wind is—because flag is waving, we know that wind is blowing. Or, you know, because our mind is waving, so flag is waving.

Actually, in Buddhism we have this kind of three—those three understanding. Actually, as the Sixth Patriarch said, the two, you know, two opinion—because of our surrounding, or because of our environment, or because of the society, we change, or because if we are strong enough, we can change our surrounding. This is true. And what the Sixth Patriarch said—in Buddhism, as the Sixth Patriarch said, actually we, in Buddhism, we do not discuss anything which is—which has nothing—which is nothing appears in our mind. Whatever it is—that thing exist means that we exist, that we—our mind exist. And our mind—when our mind see something to start to exist. This is, you know—there is some reason why we say so. But most people thinks—think things exist whether we observe it or not.

Maybe so, but what we discuss is something which has something to do with our mind, to do with ourselves. It—when we discuss something [in the] objective world which exist independent from our mind, is more scientific discussion but not religious discussion. Whatever it is, we discuss things as things which has something to do with ourselves. That is Buddhist way of discussing. And that was actually the answer of the Sixth Patriarch. Because that flag is waving means our mind is waving. We treat things—understand things, as something which is something to do with ourselves. This is actually pretty close, you know, to our final understanding. But that is—that is not complete.

We Buddhist teachers usually give some instruction or lectures according to the audience, you know. And the Sixth Patriarch thought they may not understand if he say something more difficult, so he made it easy—he made his answer easy and explained in that way. I

think most people understand if we attain enlightenment or if we study Buddhism, you will have some special experience or you will have some special understanding. So, so-called-it "wisdom" is some power of understanding things. If you think in this way, your understanding is nearly the same as the two—the people who were discussing about the flag—waving flag. And if you think—if you train your mind, or by training you will have some special power to change your environment, that is, you know, so-called-it more philosophical understanding of life, more idealistic understanding of things—a kind of idealism. Mind is first, and object is second.

But Buddhism is not idealism. So according to Dōgen-zenji, when we say "mind," that is not mind—that is not our mind which observes things. What is our mind is—when we say "mind," it means big mind. The small mind—to observe things, you know, even though it is right, we do not say that is our big mind. When we say "mind," the mind is big mind in which everything happens. So waving flag is mind—itsself mind. And waving flag include everything. If so, waving mind is big mind itself. That is, you know, maybe right understanding. And how we attain this kind of mind is our practice.

If I explain this much you may, you know, already understand what is our practice, what is *shikantaza*, or what is our everyday life in its true sense. When we say "one is all and all is one," you know, that is how things happens in our big mind. This mind is not mind in relative sense. It is—this mind is beyond subjective and objective world.

We say, you know, when you eat you should eat. When you sleep, you should sleep [laughs]. That is the big mind, that is selflessness. And best way to get rid of small mind is just to, you know, sleep when you should sleep. Just get up when you should get up, without hesitation. Do you understand?

In monastery, the basic practice is, you know, to follow people. Follow waves and drive waves, that is our way. Wind may follow the waves, you know, of the wind. And at the same time wind drive flag. So—if so, wind and flag moves, you know, at the same time, and that movement include everything related to various movement in this world, in this cosmic world. That is actually to realize the true activity of true mind.

If you go to monastery [in Japan], you will see the big notice: **Dōjō daishuni ichini**.⁴ *Dōjō daishuni ichini*. That is Chinese and Japanese. "Whatever you do, you should do with people at the same time." That is [1 word]. Basic practice: "When they sit, you sit." So zazen practice is not actually—we do not practice zazen just to attain

⁴ Japanese: *dōjō*: "temple, meditation hall." Possible *daishu* ("monks") and *ichi* ("one"). See also lecture SR-66-08-15A.

enlightenment but to practice zazen itself is the realization of the truth. And to, you know, to realize this point, we practice zazen. To get up, you know, when you hear the bell, you know, is the most important practice for us. The moment you hear the bell, you should get up and you shouldn't feel rested [laughs]. "Two minutes more, three minutes more." You shouldn't stop a lot [?]. Okay? If you do so, you are not practicing our way. But you should not, you know, run into wall [laughs, laughter] or into door, you know.

As I have, you know, now in my room three mats. At first, to enjoy spacious room of three *tatami*. I slept this way, using all three mats [laughs, laughter]. I felt I am a giant, you know. Like a giant I slept using all three *tatamis*. But if I do so, I have to sleep east and west, like this. And someone tell me—someone—someone tell me that is not so good. You should sleep this way, south and north, you know [laughs, laughter]. So I change my way of sleeping. Last night, you know, I got up all of—this is my habit, you know—if alarm or if I get up, immediately I wake up, I get up, and [laughs] I lost my place [?]. Usually if I get up and walk this way [laughing, laughter], that is my rest room. But last night, I, you know—learning to [where it was]—by lamp, that was not so good, but—you know, this kind of habit, you know, is—usually it is good, but sometime it is not so good.

Without hesitation, you know, you must have—you must be able to do something without hesitation. Even though it is cold you should be able to get up and sweep the garden or clean the garden if you have to. If—when the garden is very frosty, you know, you may hesitate, you know, to work on the garden without *tabi* or without sandal. In wintertime [laughs] we do not, you know—we small disciples do not use sandal. But summertime we use something. We have to wear something. But nowadays we don't, even in monastery. But we do not wear *tabis*. Why we do so is to have some habit of doing something without hesitation.

Whatever it is, you should be able to eat it. You shouldn't say, "This is good" or "This is bad." And if you, you know, eat it, and if you determine to—decide to eat it, everything taste good. Before you eat it, you don't like it. But if you start to chew it up, then everything has some good—its own taste which is very good.

This kind of practice is based on the teaching to do something with people, without not much self-centered idea—without not much discrimination. Then your manner will change, and your countenance will change, and your face will change. We say when you are young your face is given to—was given by your parents. But after forty, you know, your face is—will be given to you by your practice. If you continue a good practice you will have generous, happy face. If you don't practice our way, you will become more and more nervous

[laughs]. You will be very mean father or mother, you know. That is why we practice our way [laughs, laughter], and—to be a good father or good mother or good teacher.

And we say, after forty we should not have thought—we should not, you know, have thought—we should forget all about our [1 word—sounds like "weapon"]. If he has, you know, [same 1 word] after forty, he will be a, you know, a kind of fool, we say. It means that we have accomplished selflessness before we become forty. And without any [same 1 word], without anything to rely on, we should be able to manage our life. But usually, you know, when we cannot, you know, work properly we cannot do something properly because of the old age, we stick to some teaching [laughs]. And we talk about too many things, like me [as I do]. That is not so good.

Without, you know, saying anything we should be able to communicate with each other. That is the best way to accomplish something good. Not by words, not by rules, or not by teaching, we should be able to accomplish things, especially when you become over forty years.

If you have some question, please ask me. [*Sentence finished. Tape turned over.*]

Why we are—maybe before twenty—for woman, maybe before twenty-, you know, twenty-two or -three, have to study something, you know. That is the time you make foundation of your life. And after, for a man, maybe, after twenty-five, we should—before twenty-five—we should make background or foundation of our life.

And after twenty-five, we should try, you know, things—try out things which—which—by all means. And when we become forty, you know, we should be able to manage our life without using some special means or special things. And we will, you know—after forty we will help people and help ourselves in its true sense. But still we will make a great effort to do so. But after, maybe, sixty we should be able to do it without so much effort. We should be able to do—to manage—able to manage things quite naturally, without much effort. By doing something which we like, you know—by doing something by his own way, he should be able to accomplish something without much effort. *Hai.*

Student A: If best way is without speaking, what would we do—what do we accomplish here with rules and teaching?

Suzuki-rōshi: Teaching?

Student A: And teaching.

Suzuki-rōshi: Teaching.

Student A: Rules and teaching and schedule. What—what good do we do with all of that?

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] Yeah—I [laughs]—without words or, you know—I mean, we have to see our schedule or we have to remember our names, you know. That much effort—words or rules—may be necessary. But rule is not the first, you know. Just to observe our rules is not—is not the—is not the most important thing. Do you understand?

Student A: Mm-hmm.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. I, you know—I cannot say literally, but I put more emphasis on our natural, you know, activity with good concentration, and with tender mind, or with soft mind—not rigid mind. Not—we should not use very sharp knife, but, you know, dull, you know, maybe big dull knife [laughter]. Most of the time that is better because there is no danger, you know, of cutting your fingers or [laughs]—. It may be difficult, you know, to use blunt, you know, thick knife—big knife [laughs]. That is—most of the time, it is safe and bigger. And we should not—we should try not to use something so sharp. Sharp knife is necessary, you know. Of course it is necessary. But to use it always is not so good. Do you understand what I mean [laughs]?

Do you have some question? *Hai*.

Student B: If we do not exercise discrimination, many times we will get into situations that are dangerous or bad for us. How do—is that not so?

Suzuki-rōshi: No, it is not so [laughter]. I don't think so, you know. [Laughs.] We feel in that way, you know. We have some fear of, you know, something we—we feel some need of being smart, and, you know, but it is not actually so. Everyone knows what we should do and what we shouldn't [laughs]. And for us it not so—it is not necessary to be so smart and so clever, especially to understand Buddha's way. It is one of the difficulty, you know. One of the difficulty of being Buddhist is "too smart." "Too smart people is difficult to enter the true way." That—that is what Buddha said.

But for—for such a person who is very alert, strong practice is needed. And after practicing very hard, he will attain—his attainment will be great too. But mostly, you know, smart people think, "Oh! I understand that. I know that. That's all." [Laughs, laughter.] They

will not make so much effort, you know, so he cannot be a good Buddhist. If he is [having] some difficulty in doing things with people, like a donkey [laughs, laughter], he should, you know, practice hard to be a donkey.

We—we say we should get through donkey's way [?] and horse way [?] [laughs]. We should get through. It means we should get through life of donkey and life of a horse. That is, you know, important practice.

Do you have some question? *Hai*.

Student C [Bill Shurtleff?]: One of the last times that you spoke here—

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student C: One of the last times that you spoke here—not tonight, but before—

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. Oh.

Student C: —you said that—I understood you to say that we may think of the whole world as existing for ourselves.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student C: And often I feel that there is a mind or a magician or a buddha who knows my problem and keeps creating a world—

Suzuki-rōshi: Who know whose problem—his problem or?

Student C: My problem.

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh, your problem [laughter].

Student C: The problem that I think I have.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: And he keeps creating a world that comes to me which helps me to see that problem.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: And in this sense I often feel that the world does exist.

Suzuki-rōshi: World?

Student C: That the world does exist—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student C: —for me—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student C: —and that it keeps showing me this problem again and again and again.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student C: And—as if it's instructing, like in the *Diamond Sūtra* it says, "The *tathāgata* instructs—"

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student C: "—the bodhisattvas."

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: And—

Suzuki-rōshi: Do you mean some particular person or things?

Student C: Things and—

Suzuki-rōshi: Many things.

Student C: —the world and situations—the—

Suzuki-rōshi: Situation, yeah.

Student C: —anything that happens—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, yeah.

Student C: —seems to be constantly—

Suzuki-rōshi: And it may be—he may be many things, you know—various things. Do you mean that, or—?

Student C: Yeah. Sometimes a bird, sometimes people, sometimes—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, yeah.

Student C: —the kind of work that I'm given.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student C: Sometimes missing a bell.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student C: Missing hearing something. Sometimes taking too much food.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student C: All of those things together—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Yeah.

Student C: —seem to keep speaking to the same thing—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Yes.

Student C: —as if there were something outside that was sending all of these things—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student C: —like a magician.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student C: And somehow—I don't know how—but I feel that this is very closely related to what you're saying tonight—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: —about the flag and the wind. And I can't—I can't grasp quite how, but somehow in a very formless way, they seem to be one and the same thing.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student C: Could—could you talk about that a little bit?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mmm. You talked about it pretty well [loud laughter]. Yeah, I—you know—that is very true. That is what Dōgen-zenji said, you know. Buddha guide us and teaches us with everything. And when we talk about the truth, my mouth—our mouth become Buddha's

mouth. And when we—what do you say to do like this [gestures]?
Not—the opposite of grasping thing.

Students: Let go?

Suzuki-rōshi: Let it go, you know. My hand become Buddha's hand. Not grasp, you know. To talk about is something to grasp. Here is teaching, you know, in my mouth. But this mouth, actually, when you feel—we feel in that—in that way, my mouth is not any more my mouth. Buddha's mouth. And if you—we let my hand open, my hand become Buddha's hand. If you hear something, that is not something. It is something more than that. So if you—if you cannot hear or see things or talk about things in that way, we are not Buddhists, he [Dōgen-zenji] said [laughs]. Very meaningful, you know. He express that kind of feeling very well. It is not so interesting if I translate it in English, but if you say it in Japanese in that way, it is very poetic. And it is more than poem.

Thank you very much.

Source: Original City Center tape transcribed verbatim by Diana Bartle (10/30/00) and checked by Bill Redican (5/7/01).