

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
TRUE HAPPINESS AND RENEWAL OF PRACTICE AT YEAR'S END
December 21, 1969
San Francisco

NOT VERBATIM

Everyone seeks for true happiness, but happiness cannot be true happiness if the happiness is not followed by perfect composure. The —usually happiness does not stay long. Happiness is mostly just very short time and it will be lost in next moment when you have it. So, sometimes we will think rather not to have it because after happiness usually followed by sorrow and this is, I think, everyone experiences it in our everyday life. Buddha, when he escaped—can you hear me?—when he escaped from his castle, he felt this kind of—he had this kind of happiness in his luxurious life in the castle, he at last forsake all of those, this kind of life, so we say he started his religious trip because of evanescence, because he felt evanescence of life. That is why he started study of Buddhism. I think we have to think about this point more. I think everyone seeks for happiness, that is alright, but the point is what kind of—how to seek for happiness is the point. But whether our way, whether the happiness we seek for is something which we can ... it is something which is possible to have it Surely there is—we have to seek his teaching more carefully. He taught us the Four Noble Truths and first of all he taught us this world is world of suffering. When we seek for suffering—happiness—to say this world is world of suffering is very, you know ... you may be very much disappointed with your teacher. World of suffering. This world anyway is world of suffering, he says. And he continues. Why we suffer is this world is world of fantasy, everything changes. When everything changes we seek for some permanent thing, we want everything to be permanent. Especially when we have something good or when we see something beautiful or we want it to be always in that way. But actually everything changes. So that is why we suffer. So if we seek for happiness even though we seek for happiness it is not possible to have it because we are expecting something to be always constant when everything changes. So naturally we must have suffering. So far, according to this teaching, we are—there is no other way for us to live in the world of suffering—that is the only way to exist in this world.

Then it is not possible to obtain eternal happiness, or eternal composure of life. Though we have some way to have eternal composure of life or happiness of life, but first of all if we want to composure of life, we have to change our view, our way of observing things. To observe things as it is, we say, but to observe things as it is for usual sense and to observe things as it is in our way is not the same. This point is not truly realized by even Buddhists. Things as it is, way as it is. What is way as it is. Usually things as it is means to

observe things as if something exists in that way, constantly, forever. We say—here in incense bowl. But this is already mistake. There is no such thing exists. This is always changing. This is bronze, but even so this is changing, and you sense in it always changing. In ten minutes there will be no more incense, but if it is very good incense you will think as if something exists, not forever, you may not think in that way, but at least you think this incense exists and fire exists in that way, but the fire is not exactly the same fire as you observe this fire. This is actually, you know, instead of combustion, it is not red—red fire as you, as you see it. It is constant repetition of combustion—like this—there is electricity, but that light is always— current back and forth, this way, and doesn't exist in that way, but we see there constantly electric light, like so. But that is not true. So we Buddhists call this kind of naive way of looking— observing things is aspect of being because we think everything exists in this way. Aspect of being. And when you understand everything changes and everything is changing, like electric light or fire, we call this kind of view, is view of non-being. No such thing exists, so non-being. And for Buddhists, for you maybe if you seek for happiness, if someone who has view of seeking for happiness, it means that he is seeking for something which is impossible and if you have the view of non-being you will not care for anything. If you accept things in that way, you will be very, your way of life is very empty. And you will not find out any meaning of life at all. And our way of observing things is based on view of being and non-being, both. And we know that view of being is too naive, and view of non-being is too ... logical. Or too critical. Or view of—true view of life should be both. View of being and view of non-being. This is our way.

But view of being and view of non-being is not...is not possible to accept. We can accept one of the tow, but we cannot accept two of those viewpoints. And here there is another problem for us. But when you face—when you face this second problem, you will be said to be Buddhist. And you will give up to rely on your intellectual understanding of teaching and you will start our practice. To accept this kind of paradox.

Recently I ask you and I want you to reflect on why you seek for—why you study Buddhism. Because I think this point is—if this point is not fully understood, it may be difficult ... to put whole physical and spiritual power in our practice. Usually maybe in your practice without thinking about our life more deeply and you try to if you have problem you will try to solve it by means of practice or teaching, but if you really think about whether your view of life is right or wrong, whether you are trying to obtain something which is possible to obtain or you are doing—you are trying to accomplish something which is not possible to accomplish. Then you will not be sincere enough to practice our way because you are always fascinated by some teaching

or chanting. We don't know—what we study in intellectual way is very shallow, but what we actually experience is very deep. When—after—when I came to America, I found very, you know ... I found ... special, some special food for me and I enjoyed it, I enjoyed it very much—that was potato. Potato was delicious to me, but I don't know if it is so for you or not. I don't know what kind of nourishment potato has. I haven't studied anything about potato, but I like it very much. The reason why I like it is—I don't know why—when I was in Japan of course I liked it, but I didn't think I liked potatoes so much! But after I came to America, having very—various foods and I haven't not much chance to eat potatoes, maybe once a month or so. When I was invited for Thanksgiving, I had mashed potatoes. That was delicious. But usually I haven't mashed potatoes, or even baked potato.

At Tassajara I told Ed I like potato [laughs]. Sometimes—as we have various food, various kinds of food, so Ed cannot give me always potato. So only once in a while I had potato. As soon as I come back from Tassajara I go to the grocery store and buy three or four potatoes. And as it takes pretty long time to cook it, I cut it and fry it. My boy doesn't like it, but I like it. My wife doesn't like it much. So I cook it just for myself. Do you know why? Potato was—when I was young I—my home town produced a lot of potatoes, so I was eating potatoes always when I was a boy. So that is why I like it. When I was eating I didn't like it so much because I had it almost not everyday, but four times or more a week. This kind of experience characterized our character.

I think you may not like zazen so much, but you think this is good, so you may practice it. But you may not realize how much progress you made in your zazen practice. So may do, but most of you don't, I am afraid. But that is alright. This kind of experience which is not just reading or listening to lecture and something which you experience, both physically and spiritually, without thinking about it. Without trying to find out the meaning of it, beyond our intellectual understanding, to practice our way without any gaining idea. To practice our way is valuable and you will have real power of digesting things.

In *Lotus Sūtra*, as you know, Chapter 3, Buddha told Shāriputra, "You may not know what you have done before you will not remember what you did in your former life or even in this life—you may not remember all of it, but," he said, "you have been practicing our way for so long time that is why now you have been practicing our way for so long time that is why now you have attained enlightenment." I know that, but you may not know it—why you have attained enlightenment. I ask you why you came here so many times. I think you don't know why you came here, but there is some reason why you came here. You didn't come here just by curiosity. Why you came here is, I don't

think possible to figure out. But there must be some reason. This kind of reason—you practice your way is so-called-it, there is no other way to say so we say—your Buddha nature seeks for Buddha. Buddha seek for Buddha. This is very mystic way of putting it, but there is no other way to say it so we say Buddha nature seeks Buddha nature.

We have various Buddhist philosophy and we have a lot of teaching to study, but Buddhism is not actually philosophy or teaching. Buddhism is always within ourselves and always helping us. But we do not—when we are not—when we don't realize it, then that is so called it suffering. Or when we live in the realm of good or bad, right or wrong, we lose our meaning of life. Only when we do something we practice, with right understanding, whatever you do that is our practice. Because we are so intellectual being, it is necessary to—to be free from our reasoning or our intellect. That is necessary. And instead of being caught by intellectual mind, we should seek for something more or we have to rely on way things goes and the way we live without—without every reason ... why we are practicing ... Indian way or Chinese way or Japanese way—you may feel in that way but actually there is no special way, our way is not just for Japanese, or Chinese or Indian people. This is for everyone. We sit in cross-legged position, but if you think just cross-legged position is juts Zen, that is a big mistake. If you want to practice our way, we should free our mind from intellectual or conscious activity in term of right or wrong, or good or bad. Whatever it is we should try it and we should have taste of it through direct experience. Not just feeling or thinking, but direct experience. That is zazen practice.

So many people here practicing our way. I feel a great responsibility as a teacher. If I am not here maybe you will not come here. If I am here you come here and spend all day in our practice. But if you misunderstand—if you have misunderstanding in our practice it will not work at all. It is quite natural for us to think some result or effect as long as you do something, but our practice is something different from that kind of activity. Just—we practice our way juts to have ... [tape turned]

Next Tuesday we will have no lecture, so this may be—will be the last one for this ... at the end of the year we clean up our house and we ... throw old things which we do not use anymore, and we renew our equipment, even things in the ... furniture we renew it. And after cleaning our room we ... we put new, new _____ and which is distributed from temple—like this. We take off old mats and put new ones, like this. This is—when in temple we have prayer for the—to control fire, this is what you call it _____ taking care of fire it says in Japanese. And this is—in temple at end of the year we have ceremony to read *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*—600 volumes of *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, but actually we cannot read 600 pages of sūtra,

so the priest conducting the ceremony read one, one volume of the 600 sūtras. The we have one volume, one of 600 ... [tape inaudible] ... just to turn it instead of reading and so the most important volume will be recited by the priest who is conducting ... and we ... and you receive this kind of prayer card from the temple. That is what we do...and end of the year is the most busy days. We have to clean up our rooms and if you have some debts you should pay. For someone to collect the money ... he lent and for the most people it is time to pay the debt and then we—after cleaning up everything, spiritual and physical, we decorate New Year's decoration so old times (?) those should be done before twelve o'clock and after twelve o'clock there is no need for you to pay, payback the money you owned, so the man who, who wants to collect his money _____ even after twelve o'clock, if he had chosen (inaudible)

So usually it is pretty exciting week. This kind of custom still in Japan and each one of us, rather we enjoy this kind of activity. We understand each other—we fool ourselves in some way and enjoy the last day of the year. This idea is based on Buddhist way of understanding life. Moment after moment we should renew our life, we should not stick old idea of life, or way of life, we should renew it, our life day by day, especially at the end of the year. Especially at the end of the year we should completely renew our feeling and completely renew our car. If we stick to old ideas always, or if you have no chance to renew it, it is rather difficult to renew your way of life. Some encouragement is necessary if you always repeating same thing over and over again, then even though you have no feeling of sticking to old way of life, actually you are confined in old way of life. Some excitement or some occasion is necessary. For instance, we use this kind of stick. This is to renew your practice, if you become drowsy, if you don't receive a stick you will have chance to renew your _____ and in this way, you can live moment after moment. Actually ... faithful—you will be faithful to your own life.

So, as it is we say, but actually when most people say 'way as it is' is not at all way as it is. Without clearing up your mind and body, physically, you will not have chance to live on each moment. So the (end) for us is laziness. If you are always lazy and drowsy, spiritually and physically lazy, you actually have no chance to live truthfully to yourself. That is why we practice various practices. But if you—if we stick to old way of practice it is not so good also. So it is necessary maybe to change our way of practice sometimes. For instance, at some monastery they start to bathe in cold water from January, December 1 until December 15. All the monks getting up about 4 o'clock and going to the lake and bathe _____. This is not _____—just to get out of drowsy mind. And you will not catch cold. Recently flu is all over, but if you make up your mind to bathe every morning and evening in cold water, your mind do not accept _____

because you are so physically and mentally very active. So we monks rather _____ ourselves when we catch cold. Lazy monk! _____. Especially—it is rather difficult to take cold-water bath, and more difficult—after working so hard and to take cold bath in evening very difficult. Maybe I don't know why but anyway when you get up you need some situation, natural, but in evening usually we are not prepared for that kind of situation. That is—it is so difficult to take cold bath in evening. This kind of practice is not orthodox practice, but according to the situation of the monastery we apply various ways of life and to keep chance to renew our mind and body. Especially people who live in San Francisco where climate is always same, it may be necessary to, to have some pool for Zen monks to take cold baths. Maybe exciting practice for us, and it will give pretty good stimulation for San Francisco people. I am busy now, everyday activity, but if you want I think you can do it, and you are young enough to do it. It doesn't mean to be involved in ascetic practice, it is the purpose of those practices _____ physically and spiritually. We say Zen—if we, if we are caught by even the idea of Zen we call—sticking the _____ he is not fresh enough—old stinky Zen student! But if we do not have some chance to renew our practice we will soon, soon we will be stinky student. As if you wear same underwear one week or two weeks. What will happen to us _____ ... and so my teacher or my master always told us, "You stinky boys, wash your underwear!" Not just underwear. And so my teacher—my master, his way of training his students was—disciples was pretty different from usual master. He did not allow me to stay at Eihei-ji so long time. "Two years is enough! You will become stinky Eihei-ji student! That's enough, you should go to Sōji-ji."

And when I stayed at Sōji-ji more than one year, one day he appeared, and after talking with me ten minutes [said]: "Maybe it is time for you to leave Sōji-ji." And he always put emphasis on Dōgen-zenji's beginner's mind. You should always be all right—it means you should not stick to old style of practice, or any kind of practice and you should be always new student. When you go to Rinzai temple, you should be new Rinzai student. And if you go to Japan, you should be new student. You should forget all about what you have studied in America. You will know ... the fundamental practice is the same, but we should practice the essential practice with renewed feeling. This is important. To practice always with new fresh—freshness of the feeling is rather difficult. Necessary for us to change some part of our practice.

My master didn't give me—didn't give us any idea of what we will do next day or next week. He didn't talk about tomorrow and it was—he was very unpredictable type of monk and monks and priests were very much afraid of him. They couldn't get what he had in his mind. Maybe he didn't have any idea, but he was always concentrated on

what he was doing. That is, I think, too much, but it is necessary for us to practice our way moment after moment, with our best effort and _____ mind. As we are pretty new students, so it is rather difficult to practice our way without much rules, but each one of you should make your best effort to study without, without instruction in detail, detailed instruction. You should feel as if you are study ... with few people, you shouldn't think that we have so many students. You study our way as if you are studying with your teacher only. I think that help you to ignore other's practice. But we should not be involved in group study only. This is not school—not school system. I want you ... to understand this point more, whether you are you have only one teacher. We have each one of you are only disciple, disciple for teacher, for a teacher. With this spirit we should practice our way. If this point is missing, we cannot practice Zen _____. Originally Zen master do not have so many students. When Dōgen left China, receiving transmission from Tendō Nyojō. Tendō Nyojō-zenji said to him: "After you go back to Japan, you should practice your way in remote country with few students and keep always our practice fresh and new, and take good care of your students." That is what he said when Dōgen leave China _____ and he secluded himself in remoted country, northern part of country and built his small temple in Fukui Prefecture where there is Eihei-ji now. Tassajara may be ... at Tassajara they may have small, but Eihei-ji they ... at this time of year the ... all the buildings is dark because of the snow. We have to cover all building by _____ to protect building from heavy snow. Such a remoted country he practiced his way, with candlelight, when winter come. That was his way.

That kind of practice is very important. Even thought we are many people now, we should not forget this spirit.

Thank you very much.

This transcript is a retyping of the existing City Center transcript. It is not verbatim. No tape is available. The City Center transcript was entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. It was reformatted by Bill Redican (10/25/01).