

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
MORNING *SESSHIN* LECTURE
Sunday, February 1, 1970
City Center

How do you—how do you like zazen? [Laughs, laughter.] And maybe—maybe better to ask you how do you like brown rice? [Laughs, laughter.] I think this is better question, you know. Zazen is too much. [Laughs, laughter.] Brown rice, I think, just right. [Laughter.] But actually not much difference. [Laughter.] Zazen has strong f- [partial word]—zazen is strong food like brown rice. And I was very much interested in the way you eat brown rice. [Laughs.] I'm—I'm very much impressed, you know, the way you eat brown rice.

Can you hear me?

I think you, you know, naturally, when you eat brown rice, you have to chew it. Unless you chew it, it is difficult to swallow, so you chew it very well. Your mouth, you know, looks like a part of a kitchen [laughs]. You are cooking, you know [laughter, laughing], brown rice in your mouth and to be a very good food—tasty food. While you are, you know, chewing, actually brown rice become more and more tasty. So I think brown—your mouth—when you eat brown rice your mouth is kitchen. But usually, you know, I realize that usually our mouth is not kitchen when we eat. You know, we—no—when, for an instance, when we eat white rice, you know, we don't chew so much. We just, you know, put—put it in our mouth and without chewing so much. And feeling is so good, so it naturally goes to our throat. So we don't chew it.

I think Japanese people, you know—at first I understand our ancestors who are eating brown rice. But because white rice is easier to eat or taste good, so they become more interested in white rice instead of brown rice. But actually when you, you know, accustomed to brown rice, the white rice is not, you know, so tasty. We, you know—when you put it in your mouth, we think it is good, but that's all. No more, you know, variety or no more depth of taste. But brown rice—at first it is not so good, and it is difficult to eat—swallow. So while you are chewing, it become more tasty. And when it become tasty, you know, you—you hesitate to s- [partial word]—even to swallow because it is so good [laughs, laughter]. Brown rice has that much, I think, taste in it.

That kind of, you know—I think the brown rice is more—much more natural to our body—or digest—stomach, because our mouth originally is a, you know, a kind of, you know, not just—not just a part of organ to digest or to eat s- [partial word]—to chew something or to taste

something, but also it is a part of organ to digest things. This kind of, you know, process of digestion should start from here, from our mouths, and naturally should be carried on, you know, to our tummy. And you know, we must think more about this. When we, you know, digest completely the food, what will become of it? It will [be] carried over, changing its chemical quality. It will, you know, circulate all of our body. And what will become of our body [laughs], is, you know, sooner or later we will die. [Laughs, laughter.] And from, you know, to eat brown rice is, you know, best, you know—you know, the most natural to our—to us who is, you know, changing one thing to the—to another.

Now when you eat white rice, you know, that kind of natural process will be disturbed by—by your mouth, you know, because your mouth stop chewing it, and stop cooking it, and stop changing it to—into something. Without changing it, your mouth will, you know, push the rice in your tummy. So there is some gap [laughs] in our organic process of activity.

This organic process is called—in one word, we call it emptiness, you know. It is, you know, we call it—our activity is—rice is—or brown rice empty because it will eventually die [laughs] with our body. But it, you know, it changes. And while it—it is changing, it carried on—it carries on our life energy. And this maybe called also emptiness.

Why we call it emptiness is—it has no, you know, form—no special form. It has some form, but that form is never—is never permanent. And there is no end in—in changing of its form [?]. So, you know, there is no other word than to call emptiness, you know.

We know we are empty, and we started to know now this earth is empty [laughs]. It is not permanent. We started feeling that way, you know, already. And then you may wonder, "What is this universe?" But this universe has no limit. If there is a limit to this earth, there should be something outside of it, you know.

So in one word, there is no other word, you know, emptiness—than emptiness. So emptiness is ultimate, you know, reality. And emptiness, you know, is not something which could be understand when you, you know, make a space trip, you know. Emptiness could be understood when you are chewing rice, you know, and when you are perfectly involved in chewing brown rice. And your world is, you know, with—with brown rice. That is, you know, actual emptiness.

But you may say that is not empty, you know. We are doing something. When you say so, we say that is illusive. You think in that way because of your illusive tendency. We have that kind of illusion. That brown rice has no form is, you know, right understanding

[laughs], you know. And brown rice is always changing with us is right understanding. And, "Here is brown rice, and here is I who is chewing it," is elusive—illusion, which was caused by our illusive tendency of thinking.

But we—we have to completely—but or because, I don't know [laughs] which to say [laughs]—we must be, you know, completely involved in, you know, chewing rice when we chew rice. When you are chewing, you know, rice, if you think of white rice, you know, which you ate at some restaurant [laughs], that is—that is wrong practice caused by illusion—illusive tendency of making everything substantial being. White rice doesn't exist, you know [laughs]. What—that which exist for you right now is brown rice and you yourself. Nothing else exist. You may say, "This floor exist," you know. "This zazen room exist." But that is also actually illusion.

So we have to get rid of—we have to get rid of this kind of illusive practice, or else we cannot practice right practice. And at the same time, we should accept this illusive practice too [laughs], you know. We should accept it, knowing that it is illusion, you know. To know that is illusive practice—when you know that is illusive practice, that is not illusive practice. That is true practice. For the right practice it is illusive practice, but right practice exist because of your illusive practice. So our, you know, imperfect bad zazen is very important—very, very important.

If you seek for—if you try to perfect practice—if you try to practice perfect zazen only, ignoring your illusive practice, that practice is not true practice because even though you say "pure right practice," but that is illusion for you because that which you have is illusive [laughs]: brown rice, which doesn't taste so good. So even though—even brown rice, if you think—if you chew it so that we can get some delicious, you know, taste of it, that is for us also illusive practice.

So when you put brown rice in your mouth, [the fact] that you don't feel so good is, you know, there, you know, there is right practice. When you feel pain in your leg, that is the practice you have now. That is a practice you should strive for without, you know, thinking about some, you know, wonderful feeling of practice. That is illusion. So if you [are] caught by it [laughs], you know, you will lose your practice and you will hate your practice. So you lose—you—your practice will be completely [laughs] lost. Even though you continue that kind of practice for a thousand years, you will [not] gain anything. But even though you do not practice zazen, if you chew brown rice, if you accept brown rice and started to chew, you know, over and over, and you—and you—if you find true meaning of emptiness in each chew, then, you know, that is real practice. That is real zazen.

We say "Accept things as it is." Or we say "eternal present" or "emptiness" or "buddha-nature." The words—meaning of those words is, you know, quite simple. Understanding our life—positive way and negative way—and appreciating our life moment after moment, and completely satisfied with the surrounding, completely. And continue our life in this way is, you know, our practice. And Buddhism—Buddhism is there when we have that kind of practice.

Dōgen-zenji says, you know, we like something which is not true, and we don't like something which is true [laughs]. I think that is very true [laughs, laughter]. We don't like something which is true. Something which we like is—mostly is not true because mostly it is just idea created by yourself, you know, and which will create some difficulty for you [laughing]—some trouble for you. And that is something by which you will be sacrificed.

So forever we are, you know—we cannot escape from our suffering, and there is no chance for us to attain enlightenment. But if you like it, that is another matter [laughs]. If you like it, it is okay. But you should know this is not true, you know. And if you know that is not true, you know, it means you accept—you have there reality. When you say, "That is not true," that is reality. Or when you say, "This is true," and "This is complete," you know, then that is not reality any more. There no such thing exist in this world. You—if you say, "This is permanent," that is also not true.

Something which exist is bound to change or bound to be—to vanish, you know. If there is something which does not, you know—which exist forever, that is not a true—true being. That is something—something wrong with it or with you, you know. Maybe mo- ... *[Word and sentence not finished. Tape turned over.]*

To—to make further, you know, effort to understand things, that is to deny, you know, like scientist, you know, you deny the truth you found out—you have now, and, you know, deeper understanding of the truth is true denial. In, you know, Zen—Zen training is famous for its, you know [laughs], for its difficult—for its strictness. We are raised up, you know, under the scolding voice and slap.

But it does not mean you are no—you are, you know, useless or you should, you know, you shouldn't be here—you should go out. It means that, in other word, help—help you, you know, to find yourself more—to study yourself more. So we try to give you chance to find yourself more—to study more. If you go out, you know—if you run away [laughs], that's all, you know.

You are, you know—you know, also—you think if you go somewhere else, you know, you will find some good teacher [laughs]. But, you

know, as long as you have that kind of attitude, you know, choosing or discriminate—discrimination, you will not have a good teacher. It is you which is wrong [laughs], not teacher. If you met with good teacher, you know, because you cannot accept good teacher because of your discrimination, because of your lack of effort to be yourself. Actually you are escaping from yourself, but that is not possible. If that is possible, you may find out some good teacher [laughs, laughter]. But that is not possible.

So the most important point is, you know, to deny yourself and to establish yourself in its true sense without establishing yourself on your delusion. So we say, "Establish yourself on yourself, not on your delusion." And without—but without delusion we cannot live, we cannot practice. So delusion is necessary. But delusion is not something on which you can establish yourself. It is like a, you know, stepladder, you know. You can use it, but you shouldn't stay on stepladder [laughs, laughter]. But without it you cannot, you know, climb up.

So with this, you know, confidence you must study our way. So that is why I said, "Don't run away! Stick to me!" But it does not mean [laughs], you know, stick to me [laughs, laughter]. It means stick [to] yourself, you know, not to delusion. Sometime I may be a delusion [laughs]. You may, you know, you may overestimate [laughs]: "He is a good teacher." That is already delusion—a kind of delusion [laughs, laughter], you know. I am, you know, your friend, you know. I am just practicing with you as your friend who has many stepladders [laughs, laughter].

So anyway, you know, we must—we cannot be—we shouldn't be disappointed with bad teacher [laughing], with bad students. Bad student and bad teacher, you know—if we—bad teacher and bad student strive for, you know, truth will establish something real, you know. That is our zazen, you know. We must continue to practice zazen and continue to chew brown rice. Eventually, we will accomplish something.

Source: City Center transcript by Barry Eisenberg. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Jazmin Hicks (02/21/00) and Bill Redican (03/21/00).