

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Tuesday, August 25, 1970
[One of two lectures for this date.]
San Francisco

As some of—some of you may know, tomorrow I am leaving San Francisco for—for a while and coming back December first or second. I'm not so clear yet, but for three months I shall be in Japan.¹

I feel very sorry for—for you—not to be with you, but there there is something I must do for Zen Center. First of all, Dick Baker will receive transmission.² And I am hoping that we can—Dick and me—can do something, you know, for—even a little bit of important—important teaching. If we can translate it into English, it may be one step for Zen Center practice.

Those, you know, teachings is not—is not something which we talk about for—for people in general. Only, you know, who is ready to receive transmission, you know, can study because it is pretty difficult to study. But at—it is, I think, it is important for us, you know, for you to know what kind of idea we have in—about our practice, or about our everyday life, or about our zazen. Without this kind of fundamental understanding, it is pretty difficult to make the purpose of our practice clear.

It is—usually, you know, when someone receive transmission, we had—we had, you know, lecture for some selected people—ten or more people, you know. Only for the—for that kind of lecture, only yellow-robed person could attend. It is—it is called *Zenka-e*,³ you know, or *Shitsunai sammotsu-hiben kōa*.⁴ I attended several times. Still [laughs] it was pretty difficult to figure out clearly, you know—clear my understanding. It was pretty difficult, especially when it is written in Chinese. It is very difficult. We can read it, but it is difficult even to make question about it. Maybe this kind of study will be our whole life study. And it [is] worth [it] to study over and over again. But it—it may be necessary, you know, to explain it—to translate it, you know, as much as possible.

This kind of thing I have in my mind, but I myself is very busy in Japan, and he will be also busy. And he has to go to Eihei-ji. So I—I cannot promise you whether we can do it or not. One by one, whenever we, you know, have yellow-robed monk or student, you know—little by little, if we

¹ This trip is discussed by Okusan-sensei [in her interview with Kazuaki Tanahashi reproduced at www.cuke.com] and in *Crooked Cucumber*, p. 358 *et seq.*

² Completed on December 8, 1970.

³ *Zenka*: [redacted]. -e: possibly realization.

⁴ *Shitsunai sammotsu-hiben*: a work on the "secret transmission of the law," written by the Sōtō monk Man-jin, concerning three dharma-transmission ceremonies (*shisho*, *daiji*, and *kechimyaku*). *kōa* (possibly also *kō*): lecture.

can contribute something for us will be—eventually result will be great, I think.

This not something which we can do without many people's help—many teachers' help. More and more we will be concentrated in this direction to make—to make our practice, you know, stronger and clear. Fortunately, Dōgen-zenji's way of study is not just, you know, study of Zen. Its study covers all—all the Buddhism. So it may take pretty long time, you know, to understand him, but we—if you—we make effort little by little, then I think we will have very good understanding of our way: not only Zen but also all Buddhism.

So for us it is necessary, you know, to study—intellectual study is also important. But one person cannot do everything. So according to your background, you can, you know, share our study. So we have—you have various chance, you know—various possibility in our study. Those who are interested in some other teaching, they can study some other teaching. Those who are interested in practice of Zen, they can prac- [partial word]—study practice of Zen. Those who has good understanding of some other philosophy or some other cultural study—they can—you can comp- [partial word]—contribute for our study.

So you don't have to, you know, afraid of anything, you know. You cannot—I—almost—it is almost impossible for you to get out of our study. Whatever you study, it will [laughs] contribute [to] our study. So we do not discriminate Zen or other teaching. At the same time, for us it is not so easy, you know, to organize or to, you know, to organize our study. First of all, we should be very friendly with each other, without insisting some—someone's own way, you know. We must have very wide generous mind, and we should understand with each other. That is, you know, actually why we practice together.

Although our study is very wide, but we have—fortunately we have center of the study. That center, you know, will be realized by your—by your practice of Zen and by your teacher. So, you know, teacher's responsibility is to give you the center of the study and to give you the center of your life. And for you, you know, it is important or it is indispensable to have the center of your study. When you have center of the study, you don't afraid of anything, because you can, you know, always—there is no—because you have, always, you know, some conviction in your study. The intellectual study is very superficial and sometime is—it is very stimulating. And sometime it is very strong.

So if you don't have center, you know, you will be always shaky, you know, like this [probably gestures]. But when you have center, you know, even though you go this way [probably gestures], back and forth, but you don't lose yourself. That is flexibility. Because—without the center of study, you will be easily get into some sectarian or fanatic, you know, religion. When

you have center, you know, you know, you have—you don't have to, you know, rigid, or you don't have to be even stronger—strong, you know. You will stay quite flexible.

Some—someone said, "Dōgen-zenji went to China," you know, "just to get flexible mind. That is why he w- [partial word]—what he studied, you know, what he studied in China. But that is—because of his, you know, strong conviction—because of—because he had center in his study, according to him that is transmitted, you know, way or spirit, he—he had, you know, flexible mind. And he didn't afraid of anything. He didn't cling to anything, and he said when he come—came back to Japan he said, "I came back with nothing." [Laughs.] "And I found out our eyes is [horizontal]—and our nose is vertical. That is what I have learned [?]"⁵—what he found out in Japan—in China.

That kind of, you know, conviction will—you will have that kind of conviction if you really, you know, understand what is the center of practice. Zen Center, you know—we, you know—we call ourselves "Zen Center," but "Center" is important. Zen Center Cultural Center or, you know, you can call us, you know, in various way. But "Center" is very important anyway.

We have, as you must have noticed already, we have started some formal and rigid, you know, practice. Maybe it looks like so, maybe. Why we do this is just to find out, you know, the center of our practice.

We have, you know—the meaning of, you know, or why we have—we started Zen Center is because our practice is—more and more our Zen practice bec- [partial word]—losing our center. And so, naturally, we Zen student will be involved in idea of Sōtō or Rinzai, you know, without knowing what is Rinzai or what is Sōtō. And especially, you know—I am sorry to say so, but especially in Japan, you know, Zen is not so healthy. And they are involved in various, you know, unnecessarily covered or, you know—covered by old, you know, old tradition—traditional way. Although we are, you know, practicing very rigid—rigidly practicing something, but our way is, you know—if you say "old" it is old—older than, you know, this—way of practice in Japan become popular. We are going back—we are—we don't—we want to study original, you know, old, old pure way of Dōgen.

So the way we are studying is Dōgen's way, which was not so popular when he started. He confronted with, you know, various way of practice which was popular at that—at his time. So to get rid of that kind of, you know, popular way of study, he rigidly, you know, practice something sincerely with few students. And that kind of way, you know, more and more

⁵ Dōgen-zenji, commenting on his journey to China: "I didn't go to many monasteries, but I happened to see my teacher and directly found that my eyes are vertical and my nose is horizontal. Then I was not to be fooled by anyone. So I came back with open hands" (*Eihei Kōroku*, Chapter 1, translated by Thomas Cleary, *Rational Zen*, p. 45).

developed. But at the same time, when Sōtō school become popular, you know, our way, you know, became more and more impure. So we want to go back to the original way just was—just—which was practiced just by Dōgen and his students.

And through this kind of pure st- [partial word]—practice, we want to understand or realize his pure way. As we are, you know, we have started this kind of group here, we should—we think we should not introduce, you know, something which is not so important. We want to introduce you something which is pure and which is easier to understand, which is even beyond cultural background.

I think if we introduce, you know, the way which was, you know, established by him when he—when he did not like, you know, the practice which was going [on] at his time. So in this sense, you know, to introduce his way—his pure way here means, you know, to introduce something which is more appropriate for American new generation. That is why, you know, we started Zen Center.

And another point was in Japan, you know, only priest are practicing Zen, you know. If you go to Eihei-ji, you know, no layman cannot practice Zen with monks. This is, you know, wrong. Here in Zen Center, you know, monks and city people or whatever they are can practice our way in the same place. Even though you listen to teaching of Dōgen, if you don't practice it is impossible to find out why he, you know, left that kind—why he practiced his way in that—in such a way.

So for us the most important thing is practice. And to practice with people is the motto of Zen Center—not just priest. With, you know, everyone to practice zazen is the most important point of our practice here, especially in city. And that is also bodhisattva way. And that is the only way to—only way for religion to survive.

If, you know, Buddhism—when Buddhism owned, you know—is understood just by priest, it doesn't, you know, help people. It doesn't survive in that way. In its true sense it doesn't survive. Rejecting various purpose of propagating our way, without nothing—without anything, to be with people and to help to practice with them, and what will result is real help for the people. With—when we practice our way with this spirit, I think true Buddha's spirit will be actually here.

I have no special, you know, purpose of—oh, you cannot hear?—I have no purpose of my trip to Japan this time, but I want to be, you know, with Dick and with my close friend as much as possible. And I don't want to try to, you know, explain what we are doing here, you know. But for some people it will be a good stimulation, you know. For the sincere person what we are doing will be, you know, will be good news. And more teachers like

Yoshida-rōshi⁶ or Tatsugami-rōshi⁷ will come and help us, I hope.

Actually, he—they will be also helped, you know, st- [partial word]—you know, by you, you know, as I am very much encouraged by your sincere practice—sincere pure practice. And we feel, you know, a kind of responsibility. You do not come to Zen Center—you didn't come to Zen Center to be a priest or to be a, you know, to—to have some special, you know, status. You just, you know, came and studying something which we have here. And you are—you are sticking [to] our way for many years, now. And you don't leave Zen Center [laughs]. It is, you know—it is awful thing, you know, to see [laughs, laughter]. You know, it is terrible thing. And I myself don't know what to do, you know [laughs, laughter]. But anyway we are—here we are doing something.

Some time I feel very bad, you know, because I am losing my physical, you know, strength more every day—each year, you know. When you are growing fast, you know, maybe as long as you keep that—this kind of, you know, sincerity in your study—study of yourself, then I think you will have naturally good teacher from everywhere. This is, I think, something amazing, you know. And we—and at the same time, we should be very grateful to come across this—this kind of situation.

I don't think this kind of chance—I don't think human being will have this kind of chance so many times—maybe—many—once in many hundreds of years. I think we are now in very, you know, important—we came to very important time. Without this kind of, you know, understanding, you know, our—what we are doing doesn't make any sense.

You know, we are—we do not contribute our society so much, you know. But because of the world situation—our human world situation is like this, we have to do this. And because you feel you have to do something with this kind of situation, you are here studying. Not only ourselves: I think many and many people in America has same feeling, and even in Japan the younger generation, you know, is—has—have same feeling. Maybe, you know, crazy people, you may say, but in usual time, you know, if it is fifty years or thirty years ago, we are crazy people [laughs]—we are crazy. But now, you know, we are not crazy at all.

So I think we sh- [partial word]—must be very grateful to be here and studying something here, even though we don't know what—what is it [loud laughter]. I think something will, you know—if you believe in your buddha-nature within yourself, something must come out from us. Something must result from our activity or from our effort.

⁶ Yoshida Eshun-rōshi: Teacher of *okesa* sewing in the lineage of Hashimoto Eko-rōshi.

⁷ Sōtan Ryosen Tatsugami-rōshi: *Ino-rōshi* from Eihei-ji who served as head of training at Tassajara for the Spring and Fall 1970 practice periods.

As long as you have this kind of pure effort, no one can fool you, you know. When you have some idea of study, you will be easily fooled by him, or someone. But when you don't care for anything, there is no way to fool you [laughs, laughter], even though, you know, he show you, you know, beautiful car, "Oh, I don't care for that." Even though someone, you know, give you so- [partial word]—a lot of money, you may say, "No, I don't—I don't care for money," you know. There is no way to fool you.

But there is some danger, you know. I—the danger I feel, you know, is when you—your—you start—you have involved in, you know, involved in practice of gaining idea, you know. That is one danger. So as Dōgen, we should not practice our way for something else—not even for ourselves. We should study our way just for the way, not for anything else. Then no one can fool you. So eventually, you know, you—you— *[Sentence not finished. Tape turned over.]*

... some idea which is called truth, you know. You will be fooled—easily fooled by the word "truth." So even Buddhism will be, you know—the name of Buddhism will be very dangerous for us. That is, you know, our way, actually.

So we—we should—we must not give any chance, you know, for anyone to fool you, you know. You shouldn't be fooled by something. When he—Dōgen-zenji said, "I found," you know, "our eyes is level and our—my nose—our nose is horizontal [vertical], and I am not fooled by anything, fooled by anyone." [Laughs.] That is, I think, very strong, and very strong conviction in his practice, you know, in himself. Even though I don't understand anything, it is okay. Even though I am nobody, it is okay. Then no one can fool you. That is important.

So on this point, you know, you should be very strict with yourself. Don't be fooled by anything. Or don't try to be fooled by something [laughs]. You know, sometime I see many people who is try—who is studying, you know, Zen, just to be fooled by [laughs, laughter] someone. But it is, you know, it—if so, he is going opposite way.

When you have this kind of spirit, naturally you will be friendly, you know, and you will help with each other. And we can extend our way. Maybe three months will not be so long time. The end of December I will see you again [laughs], if I am not fooled by [laughs, laughter] something.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Bill Redican (12/26/00).