

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Lecture after Trip to Japan:
JAPAN NOW
ZAZEN AS OUR FOUNDATION
Sunday, December 13, 1970

In this trip,¹ I studied in Japan [laughs], you know, and I found out many things, and many things happened. Many things has happened since I visited Japan four years ago.

Can you hear me? [Laughs.]

Japan changed a lot. Not only various food and materials now is very high. Transportation changed, and the road is pretty good now. And people there are very busy, and they—their life is more now Western-style and busy. If you go from here to America [Japan?], you will be amazed how busy life they have in Japan.

Because of the easy transportation, their—the area they work expanded. For an instance, before they—be- [partial word]—four years ago, the station I went [to] was Yaizu station, but nowadays mostly I go to Shizuoka station, which is three times as far, or four times as far as—from—from—to go to Yaizu. So accordingly, they have to buy something driving car four times more.

It looks like Japan has no more old culture, but actually it is not so. But it looks like they lost old Japanese culture. But if you go to Kyoto you will see many Japanese young generation who are studying old temples and old traditional culture of Japan. So I think if you say Japan has completely changed, that is not true. But it looks like Japan—life of Japan changed a lot.

Meantime, as you may know, Yukio Mishima² committed suicide [laughs]. Did you know that [laughs]? He is a—he is a novelist, and he was a—one of the most famous, you know, writer. But he committed suicide in *jieitai* camp. He tried to appeal his feeling to the—not soldiers, but to the people who is—who are working at *jieitai*. Do you know *jieitai*? I don't know—self—self-defensive, self-defense—not "army" but—³

¹ In SR-70-08-25-A, Suzuki-rōshi stated that he was leaving the next day for a trip to Japan lasting three months.

² Pen name of Japanese novelist Kimitake Hiroaka (1925-1970), who committed *seppuku* at the Ichigaya headquarters of the Eastern Army on Nov. 25, 1970, after unsuccessfully trying to rally his listeners to rise up to save Japan. His Shield Society (Tate no Kai) was dissolved shortly thereafter. Mishima's posthumous Buddhist name is Shobuin Bunkan Koi Koji.

³ Japan (Ground) Self-Defense Force.

Student: I think we call it "National Guard"—

Not—?

Student: —for the protection of the internal of the country. [2 words unclear: "Japan does" of "from vandals"?]

Uh-huh. Ah. Yeah. He expected *jieitai* will become—sooner or later will become a kind of army [laughs]. But *jieitai* didn't change. So—and he believed in former emperor system. But Japan did—has no sign of changing towards emperor system—old emperor system. So he was rather disappointed. But, on the other hand, he was a—a kind of romantist [romanticist].

Why he committed suicide is nowadays people talks about many things and write many things, but what they write or talk about is not much—things not much to do with his own life. He—they are talking about something in what he feels—what they feel or what they think. That is why—but he didn't like that. What he write was what he actually want—wanted to do. Peoples, you know, interesting is—people liked his work very much. But actually, you know, not much people take his art—take his work so seriously. So he—maybe he wanted to know how—how people accept his writing. He thought, you know, if he—if he has that kind of enthusiasm, people may change, you know, by writing something. But people didn't change at all. That is why he finally committed suicide. Maybe—I may be wrong, but I feel it that way.

When I compare, nowadays, life of Japan to the one you have in America, America has no tradition and no—no special culture. But they accept many cultures, as Japanese people, you know, accept various culture from abr- [partial word: abroad]—from Western countries. But as the land is so narrow, and, accordingly, as they have to work so hard, they have no time to, you know, to have—to have time to feel things, you know, while in America, you know, people has more time to think or to feel. Japanese people, you know, are always busy and always doing things in very fast pace. But in America no one works so hard as they do. Our life is not so busy here. So you have time to feel something from your bottom of heart. I think this point is very important.

You have time to sit and to bring your life right into your home. I think that is the meaning of sitting. So when you—it is necessary—I—I thought it is necessary for Japanese to spare [spend?] their time in sitting, forgetting everything, putting busy life aside. If they know how to sit, their life will change.

I think sitting is the bottom of our life. And everyday activity or

intellectual study will be the other two side of the triangle. Japan—the most people has no bottom [laughs]. They have just, you know, two—two side of the triangle. So the two side is not so stable, you know, because they have no bottom. American people, whether you know what is zazen, you have something like, you know, your life is—what you—your life is more or less has bottom, which—which is something like sitting meditation. In Japan, even though we talk about Zen, Zen is, you know [laughs], still two side of triangle. They think that is something which they should study, you know, intellectually. Or something they can find out in old, old, you know, classics, or something which could be found in Eihei-ji or various monasteries. They don't know actually what is zazen. But here you have no big traditional monasteries, but the life you have, you know, is more [or] less life with bottom of sitting meditation.

When I was, you know, writing something I thought it is easy to write something in nighttime rather than daytime. I could write many—many pages or ten or fifteen or sometime twenty pages at nighttime. But when I started to correct or to read what I wrote again, the part I wrote [at] nighttime, you know, more—more and more became less and less. [Laughter.] The part I wrote in daytime is very constant [laughs]. There was not much need to correct or to cross—to erase out [laughs].

So I felt it may be, you know, good for an artist, you know, to work in nighttime when your imagination, you know, is very strong. But for real thinker or for religious people, it may not—it may not be so good. Nighttime will not be so good time to work. Nighttime, I thought, we should rest. Daytime, you know, [we should be] with people and we should work more practically.

Advantage of the life of leisure, or life of—life with openness of our mind is very valuable. And that is what I felt, you know, in Japan, especially when I read Yukio Mishima's committing suicide. They didn't talk about his suicide so much, but people did not have so bad feeling about—about his—about what he did. Of course, you know, it is not our tendency to criticize people who passed away. Although they do not, you know, agree with him, they—they had a kind of sympathy. But that is, you know, just superficial influence of him over Japanese people.

Zazen practice is not, you know, a kind of formal practice which could be compare[d] with some other activity. The main point of zazen is to open our life for everything and to see things as they are and to feel things as they are, as they come, without any prejudice, without any special feeling, which could be the foundation of our life. That is zazen practice. So practice by itself does not mean anything [laughs], you know. But when something come [comes up?] or when you face to

something, it—it will have the tremendous—the important meaning. By itself it is just plain water, but if someone—something come, the plain water will reflect—plain calm water will reflect things as they are. If you, you know, have no zazen practice, the things you see is just a picture of something, not actual reality. But only when you have zazen mind, things you have will become real.

We say, "The painted cake cannot be eaten." [Laughs.] You cannot eat painted cake, even though it is beautiful. If you have no zazen, you—what you see, what you eat, is painted cake. You cannot eat homemade bread. You will eat just, you know, white [laughs, laughter] bread. That is, you know, why we sit.

I felt very sorry for Japanese sincere students who are studying old culture, you know, without realizing—realizing this point. Whatever they study, it is, you know—without zazen it is, you know, just picture.

I think my trip this time was very valuable—give me very valuable experience. I was very busy in Japan, and main purpose of my trip is Dick Baker's transmission ceremony which took about—more than one month. He has—he had been working for that—not ceremony—but for transmission—accepting transmission from me. You may ask what does it mean [laughs], but you shouldn't ask [laughs, laughter] because, you know, you will have—you will have just a picture of transmission, you know. When time come for you to receive transmission, or when you realize something, you know, that is actual transmission. So we have—we say we have nothing to transmit [laughs]. What you have is—to realize what you have is actual transmission. On December 8th, we finished his transmission ceremony.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997.
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