

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Tuesday, March 2, 1971
8 am Tuesday Morning
San Francisco

There are various kinds of religion, but why we have to [have] religion —this question is answered not only by religious leaders but also by psychologist. So the understanding of religion nowadays become more and more deeper. And I think—I don't know not much about psychology, nowadays psychology, but so far I understand, as you know, just as purpose of religion is to save [solve] our difficulties, the psychologist is working hard to save or to solve the problems of our life.

Why we have, you know, so many problems in our life is, you know, because of, you know, our social structure, which is not so good, or human relationship, you know, which is not also good. So that is why we have difficulties, and if the difficulties become too much, it will result [in] a nervous breakdown or some mental, you know, disorder.

But why we have this kind of, you know, problem in our society or in our individual life is, according to Buddhism, our problems is based on, you know, our structure of, you know, way we live, you know. The foundation is something wrong [laughs]. Our way of living is something wrong. That is so-called-it "leakage," you know, leakage. Or you may call it "break" or you don't say "breakage" [laughs], but maybe, you know, something like that. Something is wrong with our fundamental framework of life, you know. Something is wrong. This point is already pointed out by Buddha. What is wrong is, you know, according to Buddha, because we have various desires, you know. But that desires are limitless, you know, as well as Buddha's teaching [laughs]. It is limitless, you know: no limit in our desires. But actually the things which will satisfy our desire is not limitless, you know. It is limited. So there is already, you know, big gap between your desire and things which will suffice your desire. Even so, our way of life is, you know, based on our desires: to, you know, to have complete satisfaction of our desire, which is not possible.

And sometime you may, you know, choose some desire out of many desires, forgetting the rest of the desires, you know. You will choose one desire. That is what you will say to your girlfriend [laughs]: "I don't care anything [for anyone] but you." [Laughs.] It means that you gave up, you know, the rest of the desire and, you know, you try to satisfy only one desire—"to have you."

But it looks—it looks, you know—that is, maybe, by choosing one desires from out of many, you can think it is possible to satisfy your

desire, but you will find out, you know, the nature of desire, you know. Even though you choose one out of many, that one desire is limitless [laughs]—no end—until you lose yourself in the desire.

And that is, you know, why we suffer, you know, as Buddha pointed out. Same thing is true with modern, you know, psychology or psychoanalysis—especially psychoanalysis based on existentialism, you know. According to them—modern psychologists—you know, the problem we have in our life is, you know, not because of something, you know, outside, you know, some object of desires, but based on, you know, your, you know, fundamental framework of life, you know. Something is some—you know, something wrong with it. What is wrong with it is in whatever way you seek for something, you know, you think things exist, you know, outside of yourself, not within yourself or not in relationship between you and things.

The way, you know, things exist is not in the way something exist independent from you. Or you do not exist, you know, in some way quite independent from your surrounding. So what actually exist is not you or not things, but some, you know, actual existence, you know, which is in the realm of relationship between you and surrounding. So as long as you think you—something exist outside, and you exist in spite of, you know, many things, you know, related with you, [and] you exist independent from them, then you have—you cannot get out of the difficulties.

Usually, I think, our—when we have difficulty in actual life, not in Zen Center [laughs], in actual life [laughs], in city life, maybe [laughs, laughter], you try hard, you know, in your own way, to have good relationship with people and, you know, and to get some money, you know. And to have good relationship with your family [laughs]. Even you do so, you know, it is, as you must have experienced, it is not so easy [laughs]. You have always difficulties.

You have, you know, so naturally you will, you know, give up, you know—not forever, but for a time—and you will find out some retreat, you know, like Zen Center [laughs]. That is why you come to Zen Center—some of them—because of this reason, come to Zen Center—and shut yourself up from the, you know, city life. And usually what—you know, usual people, you know, what usual people may do is, you know, shutting up themselves from the world and thinking hard to find out some, you know, good way. And when you feel you have some confidence in your, you know, way, you will go out to the city and work again, but still it is difficult. While you are repeating this kind of thing, you will be entrenched, you know, in some, you know, some line of thought or some idea, you know, of difficulty, and you will lose your confidence in yourself. That is, you know, how usual person is doing.

But here in Zen Center what you are doing should be different from this kind of, you know, shutting out yourself from world. But to find out, you know, quite different attitude to work on this kind of difficulties which you think, you know, exist, you know, outside of yourself. But in zazen practice, as you must have experienced, the way you take care of yourself, you know, is—should be the way [you] take care of your kitchen and your room and Zen Center. And this, you know—in this way you have more subjectivity and you have more subjective attitude towards, you know, your surrounding and taking care of your, you know, your surrounding or things around you. You will learn how to be boss of your surrounding, and instead of being drugged [dragged?] by things, you know, you will, you know, work on your surrounding. Then, you know, your circumstances will be quite different. This is, you know, actually how we work on our life.

And if we, you know, if we want to explain this kind of practice more carefully, you know, or more maybe fancy scholarly way, maybe [laughs, laughter], which I cannot do it so well, but, the things, you know, as we always, you know, repeating, do not exist, you know, without you, you know. Because you are here, things exist. If you were not here, things does not exist, you know. Maybe you may say even though you are not here, things—this building will exist. Even though you die, this building will exist. This kind of, you know, argument, is, according to Buddha, it is useless [laughs]—useless argument which will not help you so much, you know.

You have difficulties, you know, in your life which is, you know, which is consist of you and your surrounding. The problem only arise between you and your surrounding, which is directly [laughs] something to do with you [laughs]. You don't mind what kind [laughs] of things Japanese people [are] doing in Japan. You don't mind [laughs]. But you will mind what I will do or what your husband will do or what will your wife do in everyday life or your neighbors will do. That is actually our life. And when you think, "Even though I am not here," you know, you are not here, "things exist," that is, you know, that—if you think in that way, that will create more problem [laughs] to you. So you must take care of, you know, things which you are related directly, and more and more you should extend this kind of activity, you know, to more things. We should live in reality, not in delusion. We call it delusion, you know.

And, you know, we think—you may think, you know—you may worry about your future, you know. "Your future," you say, that is, but your future is, you know, something, you know, some situation you project, you know. Your—things you have right now around you, you project something to the future, and you become afraid of it, you know. And because you have some difficulty now, you think in your future you will have same difficulty. This is, you know, fear.

But actually that kind of a fear does not—is a illusion, you know, because it is something which you project, you know, to the future. And, you know, magic is here [laughs]. You have various material, you know, here with you, and you project what you have in [to the] future. And you become afraid of it, and you are confused, as you are confused right now. So point is, you know, how to, you know, solve—how to take care of your surrounding, you know, before you become afraid of, you know, your future.

You say you have such-and-such difficulties when you were young, you know. You know, psychoanalysts may say because your mother was very, you know, strict with you, that is why [laughs] you have, you know, difficulty in adapting yourself [to] your surrounding. Because of the fear you had, you know, your mind does not, you know, work properly right now. But that is, you know—even though you talk about past, you know, difficulties, it doesn't help. All the result is now, right now here. So to work on, you know, your problem right now is the best remedy. That is according to Buddha, you know. If you [are] shot by poison arrow, you know, you shouldn't talk about what poison it will be [laughs]. To pull out the arrow is the way, you know. Same thing is, you know, true with modern psychoanalysis, you know. And it is—I was amazed by what they say, you know [laughs, laughter]. They teaches me what is Buddhism [laughs].

Instead of, you know—when you have difficulties, you know, with your friend, for an instance, what you should do, you know, fundamentally, you know, in conclusion, what you should do is not to be, you know, enslaved by your circumstances but to go beyond the idea of self or to give up the idea of self. And, you know, that is the only way to get rid of all the source of difficulties. And they say that is, you know, how to get rid of the idea of self, you know, maybe by religious practice [laughs]. They say so. Only by religious practice you will get rid of idea of self.

As long as you stick to the idea of self, you will be enslaved by your surrounding, and instead of being boss of everything, you will be enslaved by them. Because we have self, according to them, you know, we seek for some possibility or—not "some possibility"—you seek for something good, you know, for yourself because you are here. So you seek for something good. But something good, according to them again, something good is, you know, is in the realm of good and bad, you know, and it is in realm of possibility, you know. The possibility means possibility of being good and possibility of being bad, you know. If you drive a car, there is two possibility: to have accident [laughs], to arrive at Monterey, you know, safely. There is two possibility [laughs]. As long as you are going to Monterey, you know, another possibility of accident is follows always with you.

But that possibility is not, you know, on the freeway. It is on your side, you know. To seek for something completely, you know, something good, completely indifferent from something bad [laughs], that is not possible [laughs] to have it, you know. Most of time you will arrive at Monterey without accident, but no one knows, you know, when you are driving, you know, if you [will] have accident or not. No one knows. Case by case, if you want to, you know—you may be, you know, one case out of thousands, you know [laughs], so no one knows.

But you seek for, you know, something good. That is, you know, altogether wrong, you know, way of seeking—way of having to get rid of uneasiness from your life. When you, you know, you know what you are doing exactly, you know, there you have chance to practice our way quite seriously, you know, to have more positive way, you know, in your life. How you have positive way in your life is, you know, instead of, you know, pushing yourself, you know, you should forget yourself, you should, you know, you should get rid of the root of the trouble, which is "you"—idea of "you" [laughs]. That is the root of the trouble. Because of the idea of "you," you know, because you stick to the idea of you, you have to choose something which is impossible to have.

And, you know, so far, various, you know, religion has been helping us. But if we come to this point, you know, not many religion can help, you know. The most religion will encourage your [laughs] idea of self. Maybe most religion, you know, will. Christianity is not. They don't. They say something: "You cannot add one more feet over your head," or something like that, you know. But most religion, you know, encourage you to, you know, pull more [laughs], to make your hands one feet longer, you know, to reach for something or to make yourself higher one feet to reach for something. If they believe in something, you will have more power or more ability. So that you will have more power or more ability, you know, you believe in the teaching they give you. But that is not, you know—that will not help. That will encourage your problems.

But [the] only way, you know, is to get rid of the idea of self. And here, you know, if I say so, "That is not possible," I'm sure you will say so. "That is not possible," you may say. [Laughs.] But it is possible [laughs]. Someone may say, "If you get rid of idea of self, you know, what will happen to you?" [Laughs.] You will be very lonely, you know [laughs for rest of sentence], without any idea of self. If the purpose of practice is to get rid of idea of self [laughs], you know, what will happen after you attain enlightenment [laughs]? Maybe all the people get enlightenment, you know, attain enlightenment. It may be okay [laughs], but I don't want to attain enlightenment

[laughs], giving up myself, you know [laughs], to make other people happy [laughs]. "Oh no," you may say [laughs]. But, you know, it is not so. That is why, you know, Buddha, you know, had difficult time [laughs] to provide some way, you know, for people to get rid of this kind of idea.

Hmm.

Do you [laughs]—do you have some answer for that question? [Laughs.] What is our way, then, you know? How do you get rid of idea of self is the point. Of course, you cannot do it all at once. But there is a way to get rid of idea of self. [Drinks water. Says "Ahh" audibly. Puts cup down with an audible sound. Laughs, laughter.] Maybe I have [takes a sip of water]—if I start to talk about, you know, I don't feel, you know, so good. Before I tell you to have a cup of water, it is very good [laughs]. I feel I have some secret [laughs, laughter]. If I tell you, "Oh, that is what Rōshi is talking [about] all the time," [laughs], and you may be discouraged. So maybe better not to tell you [laughs, laughter]. *Ahh*. [Laughter.] Everything is written on this paper [lecture notes?] [laughs, laughter]. I am selling you, you know, snake oil now [laughs, laughter]. *Hai*. [Laughs, laughter.]

Hmm. Ahh. [Laughs, laughter.] I haven't talk one hour yet, you know. So I must continue, maybe [laughs, laughter]. Do you have some question [laughs, laughter]? Yeah, please ask some question, you know. *Hai*.

Student A: I have an answer to that one on how to get out of self—concern for self—and I think it's concentration on truth and love. Those two things will get you right out of your self, I think.

Suzuki-rōshi: Ahh—what?

Student A: Concentration on truth. In other words, any time you hear anything that you think isn't perfectly in agreement with how you yourself have thought about it, then you say what you think.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student A: You risk your—you don't care what they think about you because you're speaking the truth.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Student A: And love. Those two things. And an extreme concentration on both, I think, will get you out of yourself.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mmm. Yeah. After you have good practice [laughs, laughter]. And another side of it, you know—how you have good practice, you know. That is the other side of the answer, you know. When you are well-concentrated, you know, on what you do and on what is happening here—not you or me—but, you know, what is happening in the realm of possibility. If you best take care of things, you know, in realm of possibility, that is only one way. There, you know, small "I" is not there. Some object is not there. What exist there is not something on the mirror, you know, or, you know, is not something—it is something on the mirror but not mirror or not you, you know. You are in the mirror, actually. You see? In the mirror. You are watching yourself in the mirror, but that "you" is not you, you see, and not mirror. What is it [laughs]? That is true reality. That is something which I talked about the other day, you know. "You" in the mirror—in the river. You see yourself—Tōzan [Ryōkai] saw himself in the mirror—in the water. That is something real: not himself, you know, not water, but real self.

If something bad happens, you know, happens to you, but you should know the other side of it is good [laughs], you know. When you say, "This is good or bad," already you say so, but things itself is not good or bad, you know. So you shouldn't be bothered by it. Something bad happens? It is okay, you know. It appeared in that way. How you have this kind of actual understanding of life is how you practice zazen. In your practice you don't hear, but sound comes, you know, to your ear, and your ear and something, you know, create something new here [hear?]. That's all. To understand in that way, you know, is to be—to go beyond you and things, you know. That is real love, you know. But when you carelessly say, "Love others," you know, in that case there may be, you know, some danger, you know, because you feel you love others, you know. But in real love there is no idea of or feeling of loving anyone else, you know. [Tape turned.]

... [through practice] ¹ ... you know, experience, and you cannot even take hold of it, you know. You cannot understand yourself even [laughs], but real "you" is there. That's all.

Student B: Is it possible to make a mistake in some way?

Suzuki-rōshi: Actually there is no mistake, you know, in our life. Whatever you do, it is not mistake [laughs]. But when I say there's no such thing like mistake, when I say so, you know, I am saying it, you know, in the viewpoint of our real practice. So in usual sense there is, of course, mistake, you know. But even though you make mistake, you don't have to, you know, have to worry about it too much. You must be, you know, free from it, and you must, you know, instead of being worried by it you should, you know, work on the result of your

¹ The text in brackets is from a note on the original tape case (not on tape).

mistake, which is present [taps with hand or finger] right here.

Student B: The reason why you wouldn't call it a mistake is because like it's a step up the evolutionary ladder, and you learn from it, so it is really good. That's how I look at that. I mean, I don't have to worry about the good and bad of an act. I look at it like it's a test of you, so that you don't say, "Oh, that's a terrible thing that happened to me." Instead it was a testing situation. You were just tested. How did you come out of it?

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] Testing. Yeah. Maybe, yeah. To live on this moment is, anyhow, you know, important. Or else somehow you will create some confusion and distress. *Hai.*

Student B: When I—when I sit, I'm also—it's the same situation all the time.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mmm.

Student B: When I get close to doing something without watching myself, when I get close to being balanced and just breathing and sitting, just before I seem to catch myself and say, "Oh! Now this may be as close to zazen."

Suzuki-rōshi: Mmm.

Student B: And I've lost it. And I—I keep stopping myself. And I don't know what I'm afraid of or why I do that, you know.

Suzuki-rōshi: You—

Student B: I couldn't get beyond it.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh, I couldn't follow you so well. Uh-huh? You—

Student B: My thinking mind won't—I feel like I'm controlled by it. And the minute that it begins to lose its control, and I just feel myself sitting just for half a second, and I'm just breathing and sitting and—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student B: —that's all that's happening. The minute that that begins to happen, I begin to think about it again. And I watch it. And then I'm no longer sitting. I'm thinking about it.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student B: And, and—seems like my thinking mind is so strong.

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.]

Student B: I—I'm afraid, I think, to stop thinking that way because I hold on to it. I don't know how to—

Suzuki-rōshi: Ohhh. I see. Stop, yeah. I am not saying to stop your thinking, you know. To think is okay.

Student B: I don't mean I'm trying to stop it. I mean that, uh—

Suzuki-rōshi: Naturally you stop it, or intuitively, or—

Student B: I'm afraid of stopping. I continue it. I'm holding it.

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh, I see. You are afraid of stopping it, and you want to continue it.

Student B: Yeah, but I also don't want to [laughs, laughter].

Suzuki-rōshi: But it goes. Thinking mind goes even though you don't try to stop it or try to continue it. It goes. Is that what you mean?

Student B: Yeah, but I go with it is the problem [laughter]. I guess I can't [1-2 words unclear].

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughing.] How you go with it. "You go with it" is pretty good, you know [laughs, laughter]. "You go with it." You follow, you know, with it, so thinking mind is going, not you, you know. And thinking mind is stronger and "you" is weaker, you know. I think so. Isn't that so? So if—and if you are not, you know—soon, I think, you will not be afraid of, you know, going with it or afraid of stopping it, you know. You will just follow your thinking mind without being afraid of it or without trying to stop it. Then your, you know, your ego is very weak, you know, and thinking mind is so-called-it, you know, "think non-thinking." Dōgen says, you know, "Think non-thinking." Non-thinking is pure thinking. Think—

Student B: Without any direction?

Suzuki-rōshi: Without any direction. Follow. Then, you know, what is happening there is—cannot make any harm to you, you know, and rather it will help you.

Student B: But I'm afraid of that.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mmm?

Student B: I'm afraid of that.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Don't—yeah—that is, you know, that is, you know, it is some evidence that your practice is involved in some, you know, some usual practice, you know, of, you know, doing something. Our practice is just sit. Let everything happen on you. That is, you know, looks like very difficult thing, but there is no other way to get rid of the root of the problem. And how you do it is to take care of yourself, you know, to take care of your breathing and thinking mind, we say, but, you know, if you do not reject it, or if you do not want to stop it with warm feeling, if you follow it, you know, if you are very kind with your thinking mind, then there is not much ego—as if you take care of your, you know, friend or children. You see? Thinking mind at that time is like a children [laughs] running around you, you know. "Ohhh [laughs], be careful!" [Laughs, laughter.] You know, that is the way. There is no—when you practice in that way there is no "you" anymore. That is the secret of, you know, to go beyond self-centered practice.

Nine o'clock [laughs]. Maybe one more question [laughs]. *Hai.*

Student C: Is it possible that it isn't because we are afraid of—because it seems we are not used to the experience of experiencing ourselves as one whole thing? It happens in a blink of an eyelash, that you are absolutely still and absolutely in one piece. They're not used to that.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student C: If you can that aspect of [10-15 words unclear] that you extend the time, I think, that it is possible to be like that.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: It comes upon you while you are doing zazen. All of a sudden [2-5 words] some idea of what zazen is about. But it doesn't stay with you, as she said.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: It stays for a second or for a few seconds. So it's a model of how you feel, I think.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Mm-hmm. Not only—our practice is not just sitting, you know. Way we eat, way we walk, you know, is a, you know, practice too. So if you walk or if you eat the way we eat, you know, then more and more you will have that kind of mind, you know. That is why we have—we practice tea ceremony, you know. Tea

ceremony is established by Rikyū.² Rikyū? And, you know, because of his lord—his lord who is very impatient person, you know, and who did not like him so much, but he was his lord, so he has to offer tea, you know, always. But with perfect calmness of his mind, he, you know, made tea and offered [it to] his lord. When he does this, you know, he—in Japanese, we say **suki no nai**.³ *Suki no nai*, you know, means his lord has no chance to, you know, kill him. With his complete calmness of mind, he is ready to [for] anything which will happen to him [laughs]. Complete calmness of his mind. But at last, you know, he killed himself, but tea ceremony was established by him [laughs]. If you act like he act, you know, you will feel his spirit.

So our zazen practice—not only zazen practice, but also meal practice or rituals is provided in that way originally. But nowadays, I don't know [laughs] so well. So if it is difficult for you to practice sitting zazen, you can study tea ceremony, you know.

Some student who was taking movie of tea ceremony invited me, you know, and asked me to explain what kind of, you know, action is Zen and what kind of action is not Zen. "Tell me," [laughs] he said. But all from the beginning to end, you know, what they do is supposed to be, you know, Zen—Zen practice. Not this part or that part. From beginning to end it should be zazen practice. So whether they know what is Zen or not, if they do it, you know, he will eventually, you know, find out what is Zen through action.

Thank you very much.

Sources: City Center transcript and note on original tape case. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Translation of Japanese phrase by Shōhaku Okumura-sensei. Transcript made verbatim by Bill Redican 3/30/01.

² Sen Soeki Rikyū (1522-1591) is credited with developing the Way of Tea in Japan. He served as tea master to the *shōgun* Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598), who eventually ordered Rikyū to commit *seppuku*.

³ *suki ganai* (Jap.): *suki* = unguarded moment, flaw, space, or room; *no* = of (possessive); *nai* = no. Hence, to be always on alert; to be thoroughly guarded.