

Shunryu Suzuki-roshi
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Tassajara

Tonight I want to explain the outline of our practice. As a monk and as a layman, without understanding of what is practice, it is rather difficult to make actual progress in your practice. And what I will talk about tonight is a kind of universal practice for laymen and monks both, you know—which could be true for both laymen and priests.

We say, or you say [laughs] whatever you do, that is practice, our practice: to drink tea or to eat or to sleep, to walk, or to sit down. Whatever you do, that is practice, you know, we say. But how you, you know—with—with what kind of understanding you do things is very important point. Actually, whatever you do, if you do not do the point—that is true. But if you miss the point, even though you look like [you are] doing a proper practice, actually it doesn't work. The point is, whether you do it for yourself or for the sake of the truth, or for sake of Buddha, or for sake of people—this point is a very important point.

I—I didn't discuss or argue with you, but my way, you know, if there is many things in the basket, my way is to finish the fruit is—you know, start with—I st- [partial word: "start with"?], eat the worst [laughs] one first. I will make—eat best one first. And why you eat best one first is—according to the people who eat best one first—if you eat best one first always, you will always eat best one [laughs]. The last one, you know, will be also best one [laughs]. If—if—we eat worst one first, you will always eat worst—worst one. Last one is also worst one.

Maybe this is very interesting discussion: which will be the best way. I don't—I—let's not discuss—let's discuss—before we discuss it, we must limit our discussion. I—I want to discuss—just I want to discuss which is more appropriate or which is not, which is waste—wasteful, or which is appropriate. Or to best use of fruits. But that is very difficult to—to know—to discuss, because if we want a discussion [of] this point, we should discuss—we must have discussion each time we have fruits [laughs]. So let's not discuss in that way.

But what I want to say—the point I want to make is to—when you eat best thing first, it means that you discriminate best one from—from not-so-good ones. You choose best one. That is a kind of discrimination. And it means that in your attitude, the idea of self goes first. And eventual—naturally, discrimination will follow. If—if only one person is eating fruits, there will not be any problem. But if many people are eating—suppose many people are eating from the same basket—that kind, that attitude—if you eat in that way, you will be involved in trouble. On the contrary, if you eat worst one first there is [laughs] no—no

trouble, even though [you] eat with many people. And if you feel you are doing something foolish, you know, unless you feel you are doing something, you know, foolish for yourself. And this attitude of eating worst thing means non-discrimination. You may say it is a kind of discrimination [laughs], but at least self-centered attitude is not involved in it. So that is not discrimination we usually say [call] discrimination.

In short, the point is in our practice whether you develop your idea of self, you know, or you develop buddha-mind in your practice, in your everyday practice, is the difference and point of whether—which is Buddha's practice. We should always put the self, you know, next [laughs] and buddha-mind first. We should always follow buddha-mind. To follow buddha-mind, it is necessary to realize what is buddha-mind. How to realize buddha-mind is our zazen practice.

Zazen practice has two sides or two virtues. One is: through practice you will, you will know, you will eventually, or you will intuitively know what is buddha-mind because your selfish idea or your small self more and more become small. And another side of, another virtue of our practice is you, you know, you will get accustomed to what you have realized. Even though you realize some truth, if you do not accustom to it and if the realization become your own, even though you realize "this is right" and "this is wrong," but intuitively.

But it is difficult to actualize your intuition in everyday life. So how to actualize your small enlightenment or deep enlightenment to your everyday life is by practice. And more and more you continue our practice, your small self becomes smaller and smaller. And big self will become more and more. Big self take over your small self more and more. Just as you eat a fruits from the basket. If you eat all of the basket, you know, that is buddha. Whether you eat—you start with bad ones or good ones, if you finish everything, there is no problem [laughs]. Anyway, you have eaten. So in its wide sense, you know, it doesn't—if you continue your practice through and through, it is okay. But if you choose bad practice, you will have more difficulties, that's all.

It looks like easier to choose—always choose best ones. It looks like easier—easy practice; but actually, if you have to continue that practice forever or until you finish the fruit, you must think "which is better?" When you eat two or three, it looks like very easy. But when you have to continue to eat through and through until you finished everything, it is not so easy.

Anyway, you will attain enlightenment, like if you—you—if you eat fruits, you know, continue to eat fruits, you will finish, you know, all the fruits. Then after you finish it, there is no problem. When you finish it—before you finish it, you think, you know—you compare which way will be better and you will wonder sometime which way will be better. But if you finish

it, you know, what you should do is—what you will know what you have been doing. And if it was not good way and difficult way or it was very difficult way, we should—I shouldn't do in this way. Better to do the worst one first for sake of everyone. That is much easier way.

So, enlightenment you will have after you finish fruits. You will en- [partial word: "enlightened"?]—you will be enlightened about what is bad [laughs]. And, on the contrary, the people who eat the worst one first, after you finish it, what you will realize is—you realize your enlightenment is over something good—what is good. But when the—the enlightenment itself does not different—is not different: same—same enlightenment. When you realize what is bad, and you will realize at the same time what is good—you will—you—when you know what is bad. Naturally you will know what is good. And if you know what is good, then you will know what is bad and what will be the way to follow the truth. To follow the truth is something good. And if you do not follow the truth, that is bad. Anyway, what you will realize is about the truth, and you will realize that it's the truth.

Same thing—could be same thing, but actually, self-centered practice does not last long. You will have time to give up self-centered practice. If—if you could continue that kind of bad practice through and through, that is—it means that you are bodhisattva [laughs]. You are bodhisattva. Unless you are bodhisattva, you cannot continue. So unless you are bodhisattva, or you do not follow Buddhist practice, it is not possible to realize what is true [truth?]. So whatever the practice may be, the practice which is self-centered is not Buddhist practice. Buddhist practice is how to reduce our self-centered practice. How much you can, you know, develop your buddha-mind is the point.

In short, we should op- [partial word]—we should be aware of is—the point we should be aware of is to put first principle first and second principle next. And put the big self first and small self next. So—and try to extend the big self always. That is the point of practice.

So Buddhist practice is called practice of selflessness—selflessness. Whether you are layman or monk, our practice should not be self-centered practice. And usually I think—I think layman is suppo- [partial word: "supposed"?]—layman who is supposed to be very self-centered. Actually, he is not so selfish. But priests are very selfish [laughs]. I—I understand in that way. Generally speaking, it is so. Material—materially, you know, [from a] material viewpoint—materialistic viewpoint, a priest usually are very poor; and their—their life looks like [it is] very unselfish. But from spiritual viewpoint, priests are very selfish. You know, priests may dream always [3-4 words unclear due to microphone noise]. This is Dogen-zenji, Shogaku [?]. Listen carefully [laughs] and often and literally speak about him. Explain it [?]. And if you don't, you know, in that way, even though I do not understand him

[it?] fully, if I have a book, then you trust me—you trust us. We cling to something, some teaching, and because Buddha said—because Dogen-zenji said “this is right,” that is, you know, big selfish way.

But laymen do not do that. Laymen may say “I don’t know [laughs]. I don’t know which is true. I don’t know what to do.” They are very honest. But priests are not so honest. And they think as if they know many things, but actually they do not know so much. They look character [?]. They can be priest role [?]. But actually, they do not understand so much.

And they feel as if they have a lot of treasure. And they usually—they study treasure. They want to accumulate treasures in their own—in their mind. And they—they are happy to count the treasure they have: “How much book I do? How much understanding, you know, I have?” But actually, why do they study so much is to talk about it, to be proud of the knowledge we have—priest have. So, spiritually, usually, priests are more selfish—more self-centered practice—involved in more self-centered practice.

But both—both—both priests and laymen—the most important point is to develop our buddha-mind instead of small self. Know—you know—it is not so difficult to know what is small self and what is big self. If you know that, you should try hard to develop the big self. That is our practice. Until you can intuitively choose the right path, we should continue our practice.

I’m right now—I’m talking about our actual—actual practice as a Buddhist. But we have at the same time many buddhas and patriarchs who attained enlightenment, who finished—who has finished eating everything in the basket—from the basket. They tried very hard, and they finished eating. Those are the patriarchs. Some patriarchs, you know, like the Sixth Patriarch, tried to eat something good as a layman for a long, long time and realized that this was not right path and switched over his path to Buddhist way. Maybe he attained enlightenment when he was a layman. Looks like so—I’m not so sure—it looks like so. But what he realized was this is not right path. That is enlightenment. And he followed Buddha’s way.

And after he started to follow Buddha’s, way it took many years before he started to preach—to share his enlightenment with people. After he received transmission from the Fifth Patriarch, he escaped from the monastery and [laughs]—and lived with fisherman. And for a long time, no one knows where he had gone. What he was doing at that time was—he was trying to digest his enlightenment or trying to extend his enlightenment to our everyday life—to his everyday life. And he was trying to, you know, express his enlightenment in his everyday activity:

way he speaks, way he treat things, or way he treat people. It—it took pretty long time before he could do so.

You may wonder why, you know, you are staying at Tassajara and practicing zazen. It is, you know, that it is to digest the knowledge or experience—zazen experience? To completely and to extend your realization to your everyday life. The rules we follow is set up so that you can extend the Buddhist way of life in usual, everyday life: the way you eat here, the way you recite sūtra, is how to extend your realization to your everyday activity. Even though you feel [it is] difficult, actually more and more you will digest [?]. And eventually what you will do will help people even though you do not try to help people. This is very important point in our practice.

When you come to this point, there is no buddha, or there is no layman, there is no priest, there is no teaching. Because you have it, nothing special exist. And you are actually always one with people, one with your friend, one with your buddha. When you, you know, when you could extend your practice fully in your everyday life. So when we say “No Buddha”—sometime Zen master may say “No Buddha [laughs]. Kill Buddha.” What does it mean? What it means is to be completely one with Buddha. Doesn’t need Buddha any more. He himself is Buddha. How you, you know, attain this kind of attainment is through your practice.

At first, you know, when you fear Buddhism, it looks like there are many precepts to observe; there is many rules to follow; there are many buddhas to worship. It looks like so. But if you worship Buddha, according to Buddhist way, more and more, you yourself will become Buddha and you don’t need Buddha. You don’t feel you need Buddha. Whenever you come to Buddha, naturally you will bow to Buddha without trying to anything. That is not—that is more than worship. Just bow to Buddha.

When I was young, I didn’t like bow, you know. Teachers or monks just bow to Buddha. It look like without any speech [feet?] [laughs] they are doing. It looks like very superficial practice. If you do very visibly, you know, it looks like you—he is doing it if he is fall asleep [?]. But if you—if your back [?] like this, you know, as if he—your front [?] is doing something [laughs, laughter]. You will not feel so good. You will not— And you think that is very superficial practice, that is just habit. And some people may think, you know, especially young [one word unclear] may think that is, you know, a kind of profligate—profligacy. But there is, you know—it looks like so, but after long, long time—difficult practice, you will attain that kind of practice. You will have that kind of practice, but natural, usual practice for you.

So we have to have eyes to see whether—which practice is progressive [?] or sincere, good practice—mature, good practice. It is not so—actually, if you do not have self—selfish criticism or positive [?], it is not difficult to tell which is which. But when you are young, you know, most—we—we hate that kind of authority [?]. And we hate too much and we—we have no chance to see which is real practice. We do not see things actually as it is, as a small children may do. That is why sometime you do not like some formal practice. But formal practice, so-called-it formal practice, and mature, good practice—between them there is big difference. You can tell quite easily because you like, you know, even though you don't like someone who looks like chocolate, but you cannot hate him [laughs]. You will like him anyway because his practice is pure and natural practice.

Even though I understand why you do not like traditional religion from inside Christianity. I understand how you feel; but the feeling you have—if the feeling you have comes from your self-centered—strong self-centered criticism, then you must think more about what you say and how you understand and how you see. So before you say something, before, even before you feel something, you should think, you know, you reflect on yourself. That is zazen practice. Your mind should be very clear so that you can see things as they are. Without practice, if you say something it may be one-sided view. It may be very self-centered statement—feeling. Always what we should do is to extend our buddha-mind.

When you find right teacher, so you are—it is—anyway, important point is to make your mind clear. [*Sentence finished. Tape turned.*]

I think you must have understood outline of our practice. If you have some questions, please ask—ask me them. *Hai*.

Student A: When you do the [middle of question unclear] unconscious?

Suzuki-roshi: Unconscious—or what? Excuse me.

Student A: [Repeats question. Many words unclear.] Well say—say, for example, say for example you have a basket of fruit ... very last piece, and I think, well instead of ... I'll take ... fruit next week. And I think, "Oh, how good I am! You know, "I'm so unselfish! You left the last fruit." And then I think because I'm being like a—well, because I'm thinking I won't take this fruit, then ... you know, something special like that.

Suzuki-roshi: That is selfish thought. That is not the practice I mean. When— When— When I was young, my teacher [Gyokujun So-on?] would say, "If you," you know, "do not waste—if you are not wasteful—if you are wasteful, so wasteful, eventually you are," you know, "you will exhaust your practice [purpose?]" you know, "special practice." So you

shouldn't be wasteful. Or—if you—you must accumulate virtue, you know, accumulate virtue by doing good things. Then you will have—eventually you will have—you will be a good person or a good priest or something.

That is a kind of selfish practice, you know, to accumulate virtue. Like you save money [laughs]—that is selfish practice. And knowing this practice is good, to do something good, you know, something which is different from usual practice and feel good is actually very selfish practice. We should go beyond that kind of idea of practice. And you should do something good. It takes— Unless you continue that kind of practice, you will not realize, you will not have real unselfish practice. It took you almost maybe six months to go beyond selfish practice.

I have spend— When I was in dormitory, I would get up forty minutes before my friends get up and clean the restroom—our restroom—to make them happy, that's all. But why I do it—why I'm doing some selfish, you know [laughs]—I am involved in selfish practice, and I feel very bad, and I almost stopped my practice because I felt very bad because sometime head of the school—head of the school get up because he was old man—an old man, so he closed the restroom [laughs] before we get up. So when he get up—when I hear him coming to the restroom, I hide myself [laughs]. It is a ridiculous practice, you know (laughs, laughter). I didn't know what I had—what I was doing, you know. Very complicated feeling. When I'm doing something right, you know, there is no need to hide myself. If I do not hide myself, I feel as if, you know, he may like me or something like that. That is also selfish practice.

It is very difficult to escape from selfish practice. Even though you are doing something for the people [laughs], still it is not possible to escape from selfish practice until you give up, you know, your practice and switch over [to] Buddha's practice. Because you do it, you feel selfish practice. But if Buddha did it, then that is not selfish practice. Whether head of the schools see me or not doesn't matter—only Buddha [laughs]—Buddha's practice. Until you have that kind of clear mind, it takes time [?].

Anyway, you know, you cannot have good practice from the beginning. You may ask me how to practice unselfish practice, but I cannot tell you exactly. I cannot help you so much unless you confront with your problem of small self. You see? So anyway, you know, if you try to do something, if you feel good, [you have] some bad feeling first always, because you are involved in selfish practice, and that is your fault [laughs]. So you must have big, you know, confidence. You must have big determination to do—to start Buddha's practice. And you shouldn't stop it, you know—anyway you should go—go on and on and on until you finish your trip. You will have time to reflect on what you have been doing heart and soul [?]. It was good or it was bad. You may say from bottom of your heart. So—so you should [?] depend on another, you

know, fix-it [?]. You should go your own way. Okay? Some other question? *Hai*.

Student B: Is it possible to know when you've finished the fruit or do you just pretend [?]?

Suzuki-roshi: Possible to—

Student B: Is it possible for [3-4 words unclear] ... finished eating the fruit, or do you just pretend that there ... [4-8 words unclear].

Suzuki-roshi: We say so, you know, one with something—become one with practice. We usually say so. But actually it is—you can say so, but you—you should not say, “I can do it,” you know. “I become one with the practice.” That is very [laughs]— Mostly [?], you know, we—we cannot do that. We will be involved in dualistic feeling, anyway. So when we—when we say, “One with everything,” it is—it is so—from Buddha’s viewpoint it is so. When you have complete enlightenment it is so. [Laughs.] But for us it is not so, actually.

That is why we should follow some path. It is necessary, you know, for us to have to have some guideline, you know, some rules or something. Or else you—it is almost impossible to have clear practice. It is much better to follow some rule rather than to, you know, to go your—by your own feeling. If you go by your fee- [partial word: “feeling”?]—by your own way or by your own choice, you will be involved in very selfish practice. It doesn’t work. But if you are very, you know, special person, before you go very far, you will realize [laughs], “Oh, no, this is not good!” [Laughs.]

But here in America, you know, the people who goes in his own way will be admired. [Laughs.] That is another difficulty you have. But it is very silly of you, you know, to do something because people may admire you. It is your practice, not their practice; so you should be very independent. [Laughs.] But there are, they may say, you know, you should go your own way. Your own way is, you know, when you—the way you feel good. That is very clear.

Source: Transcribed from original tape by Jeffrey Schneider (8/6/99) and checked against tape by Bill Redican (8/23/99).