

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi:
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Zen Mountain Center**

Last night, [SR-71-08-12, p. 9.] when we had question and answer, we came across the very important point. In Japanese, we say *sabetsu-soku-byōdō*, or *shinkū-myōu*. [*sabetsu* or *shabetsu* (speciality, separateness, or discrimination); *-soku* (immediately; is); *-byōdō* (equality; all the same; non-discrimination); *shinkū* (absolute void or true non-existence); *myōu* (wondrous or mysterious existence).] *Sabetsu-soku byōdō*. *Sabetsu* means "speciality," and *byōdō* means "equality." Speciality means various beings which are special. Each being is special, and each being has its own meaning of existence. When something exists, there is some reason why something exists. That is speciality. And equality is even though things are different, but strictly speaking each thing does not exist in that way, because they are changing, constantly changing.

So if it is changing, we cannot say something really exists, something we see [laughs] does not exist. You think you exist here, but it is not so. And which is easier for you to understand is, maybe intellectually it is easier for you to understand things do not exist. Equality is easier to understand, and speciality is difficult to understand.

When you say "freedom," the meaning of freedom or feeling of freedom is more like equality. "We are equal, so we must have freedom." [Laughs.] That is what you say, but to us it is absurd. If you want to be special, then it is not possible [laughs] to have freedom at the same time. When you are special, you have some special reason to exist. So, for instance, a woman should be a woman, and a man should be a man [laughs].

So when we put emphasis on the reason why you exist as a man, why you exist as a woman, then woman is valuable. Because she is a woman, she has her own reason why she exists as a woman. And he has his own reason, which is a different reason from woman existing. That is why a man is a man and a woman is woman.

So when you want to have equality, woman should be woman, and a man should be a man. When a man is a man, and woman is a woman, and a stone is a stone, cucumber is cucumber, eggplant is eggplant, then [laughs] they are equal. No one can change their value. Each cucumber is valuable as a cucumber. But as human being is very selfish, so someone who do not like eggplant may say cucumber is better [laughs]. But actually cucumber and eggplant is the same. And so is man and woman, because each being has each own reason to exist. And each being cannot be replaced by something else. So we say each being has same value—equal value. So equality we mean is not equality that you mean, maybe.

So when we understand this point, we say because everything is different, everything is equal value. How we can obtain equal value is to have their own reason to exist, their own way to exist. And it is same with one person. Today I should be different, and next day I should be different again. If I am always same, there is no reason why I should live. Day after day because I change from one being to the other our life make sense.

So equality at the same time should be speciality—speciality at the same time equality. If you put emphasis on just equality, we call you "*tamban-kan*" [laughs]. [See also SR-69-03-30: "We call someone who understand things from just one side, we call him '*tamban-kan*.' *Tamban-kan* in Chinese or Japanese means 'a man who carry a board on his shoulder.'"] *Tamban-kan* means—*tam* is carry. *Ban* is board. "Carrying board fellow." [Laughing.] He is carrying board, so he cannot see the other side. He can see this side only because there is partition. If it is very high I cannot see this side [probably gestures]. If I carry a big board here [probably gestures] I cannot see the other side.

So if you stick to equality or freedom only—freedom is at the same time restriction. Restriction is freedom. If you just stick to restriction or rules or freedom, you are carrying a board on your shoulder. So you can see just freedom or just restriction, or speciality or equality, emptiness or form.

"Form is emptiness and emptiness is form." That is our understanding. To see form is to see emptiness. To understand form or color means to understand something more than that—something more than color or form—something which makes form form and color color—something which give you color, something which give you form. Each one of us has some form, given by the emptiness. You call it "God" or something, but we call it emptiness. If you say "God," God could be someone who may create many things. But our God is not someone who create something—who create everything. If you are a Christian, you may be scolded if you say, "If God created earth then who created God?" [Laughs.] You may be scolded. But immediately we ask, who created God? If God is created by someone else, then God is also not different from us, because they are created as we are—as our form and nature is given by emptiness. Actually we came out of emptiness.

Maybe if I say so I am already creating some trouble or misunderstanding, because form itself is emptiness, and emptiness itself is form. We cannot say "create" or "to give form" or anything like that. But so that you can understand what I am saying easier, I am saying this way. And this kind of thing which could be understood by practice, by zazen practice, you cannot accept this kind of truth by thinking mind.

Anyway, I want to introduce you to some saying: *Tamban-kan. Tam-ban-kan* [S.R. says each syllable separately].

And how to get rid of stickiness of our mind is our practice. Our mind is very sticky. We easily stick to something—some idea, or speciality or equality, or man or woman, teacher or disciple. We easily stick to some idea. I am disciple. But you are not always disciple. Teacher is not always a teacher. Teacher could be sometime student. So we shouldn't stick to the idea of teacher or disciple. That is real freedom.

So that we can be free from stickiness of our thinking mind or emotional feeling, we practice zazen. And if you will practice zazen, your character will be more and more clear and simple. If someone says, "You are student." "Yes, I am student." [Laughs.] And if someone says, "You are teacher." "Yes, I am teacher." No stickiness. "You are like a man." "Yes, maybe so." [Laughs.] "You are like a woman." "Yes, it is so." No stickiness in accepting various idea. So you have freedom. That is how you attain freedom. That is the point of practice.

And many teachers or many people have pretty difficult time to get rid of this kind of stickiness of human mind. So you should remember this point, and you shouldn't lose the point of practice or study. So whatever you do it is study. If you eat something, if you don't say "I like this" or "I don't like it," then that is freedom. If you eat something well-cooked, you should appreciate the taste of it. If it is raw, it is also good [laughs, laughter]. That is how to get out of stickiness—stickiness of our feeling. "Everything is good." Then you are free—you have freedom.

So you shouldn't be concerned about what people may say about you. You know, it is okay. Whatever they say it may be so [laughs, laughter]. As they say so, maybe so [laughs]. But because of your sticky mind, you say, "No, I am not so." [Laughs.] Then you will lose your freedom. You make your world narrow—small for you. Wherever you go you have freedom if you are free from the idea of sticky mind, if you do not carry a board on your shoulder. It is very heavy—actually very heavy. Because of this board you will suffer a lot [laughs]. *Tamban-kan. Kan* means "fellow." Exact translation is "fellow." *Tam-ban-kan. Tamban-kan.*

And we have this kind of technical term: *aku-byōdō*. [*aku* (wrong); *byōdō* (equality).] "Wrong equality." Wrong—when you stick to the idea of equality, that is wrong equality. If you stick to the idea of equality, you want everyone the same size. You will be too high. Chuck Hoy is extra high. So we must cut their head [laughs, laughter] to make them equal. That is wrong equality.

Our equality is—because Chuck is high he is equal, and we need him. When I cannot reach for something he may help out [laughs, laughter]. That is why he has his own virtue. [Laughing.] If I make you same size,

all of you will be dead. There is no reason why we have so many people. Maybe one is enough. If you are same size, and your hand and feet and face are same, one person will suffice. We don't need so many people. That is so-called-it wrong equality, *aku-byōdō*.

So something should be equal—only one thing should be equal, but rest of things should be different. And to understand how important it is to be different is actual practice. This is the practice to which many teachers devoted themselves. Practice of difference is very difficult. That was the point we came across in last night's lecture.

Here is a Zen story about Hyakujō. Do you know Hyakujō? [Hyakujō Ekai (Baizhang Huaihai): 720-814. Ch'an master of T'ang period. Student of Baso Dōitsu, master of Isan Reiyū.] Hyakujō is a great Zen master in China who established Zen precepts. And what we are observing at Tassajara or in Japan is mostly Hyakujō's way. How we live in the zendō and what kind of sitting we have is almost completely set up by Hyakujō. And we are still following his way. It is difficult to go out of his way.

Hyakujō once mounted the pulpit—the altar like this, and kōan says whenever he appears on the altar, an old man also appear at the rear of the row—in the corner of the lecture hall. And when people leave, when students leave, that old man also left. One day, almost all the students left, but that old man did not leave. He was still sitting. That is trouble [laughs]. Anyway, I have to explain. [Laughs.] That is already trouble.

And Hyakujō asked him. "Why don't you leave?" And the old man said, "In the day of seven buddhas"—before Shākyamuni Buddha we count seven Buddhas—and Buddha Shikin [One of the six buddhas who preceded Shākyamuni Buddha.]—"in the time of Shikin Buddha, I was a teacher." And someone asked him if wise man will fall into the teaching of cause and effect or law of cause and effect. And I said to him, "Well-trained teacher or enlightened man will not fall into the law of cause and effect. Because I said so, since then I became a fox—wild fox. And actually—I am actually an old fox who live in the mountain." And the fox or the old man asked him, "What will be the right answer for that question?" And Hyakujō said, "Enlightened person will fall into the law of karma—even an enlightened person cannot get out of the law of karma. That is my answer." And old fox attained enlightenment and vanished. That was the story.

What do we mean by a fox? Fox is not fox. It is actually emptiness, or absolute, or source of all being, or forms and colors is the old fox. So when people appear, it is okay. When an idea of emptiness or absolute is in our mind, it is trouble because we are already—our mind is already stick to the idea of an old fox, or idea of emptiness. That is trouble—already trouble.

So when people, or everyone leaves zendō or leaves lecture hall, there should not be any idea of the first principle or idea of form or emptiness, because each being, each student in zendō is the absolute itself—emptiness itself. When each one of you feel you have the absolute value, you are embodiment of the absolute truth. So when you leave, everything should leave. When you leave, mountain and river should leave. Everything should leave. Then there is no trouble.

Because you stick to the idea of form or the absolute, there is trouble. And the question and answer here they made back and forth, "to fall into the law of karma" means to stick to the law of karma, cause and effect—to lose freedom from the law of karma. So that is to fall into the idea of karma. Not to fall—the idea of karma or law of karma means not to stick to it, and stick to—not to fall. The idea of karma is to ignore the law of karma. You cannot ignore the law of karma. And we shouldn't stick to the law of karma. There is two of our attitudes.

Sometime, even though you follow the teaching of karma, it does not mean you lose your freedom from the law of karma. Do you [laughs] understand? So when at first—when he [the soon-to-be old fox] said so, because he thought he understood equality of various being, he said, "Wise man will not stick to the idea of karma." But when he does not stick to the idea of karma meant for him, no, there is no such thing like law of karma because each being does not exist [laughs] originally. We are empty because we are changing. So when I don't exist—when everything doesn't exist in its strict sense, how is it possible to live? For everything to follow the law of karma, that was how he understood. He was *tamban-kan*. Because of his one-sided understanding of the truth he became a fox.

But when Hyakujō said you must follow the law of karma, even though enlightened person, as long as he is human being, he has physical body, it is not possible for him not to follow the law of karma. So he could understand the reality he felt from both sides. That is why he [the old fox] could vanish from the zendō. That kind of fox shouldn't exist in zendō. In zendō there must be only student, and teacher and student. Teacher or student is each being in the realm of speciality. So what you can see is each student; you cannot see the absolute or old fox. When you have real understanding of the reality—old fox, does it exist? That was the parable—manifestation of [1-2 words] Hyakujō [1-2 words].

Do you have some question? *Hai*.

Student A: If... in the beginning you said that if you're not in the zendō, then you don't have any..., and then you don't have to go, well—everybody is centered in the zendō—at least they are now.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, yeah.

Student A: Then the fact that we're in freedom resumes that center, and I think... what we have.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes. Uh-huh. That is real freedom. But whether we feel, at the same time, specialness—so you cannot be arrogant even though you have some special talent [laughs]. That is your speciality. And someone else may have his own speciality. And so that is why everyone is same. And you cannot be arrogant about it. And at the same time there is another danger. "This is my speciality" [laughs]. So you will be very much individualistic—selfish, sometime, which actually does not exist. Self doesn't exist. At that moment, when you say, "This is my speciality," speciality exist. But it doesn't exist in the same way always. If you stick to your own speciality always, in the same way, you will be dead [laughs]. No one will be interested in you if you are saying same thing over and over again like a fake record. What you say should be changed, and your feelings should change.

So speciality exist, and at the same time it doesn't exist, so both exist and doesn't exist. So double-edged sword. Exist/not exist. It is not so easy, [laughs] this practice. You have no time to rest. "This is my speciality. All I have to talk about is in this book." [Laughs.] Even though you become buddha, buddha cannot stay always as a buddha. *[Sentence probably finished. Tape turned over.]*

... buddha must be someone else. Buddha should be a friend of people, or else buddha cannot help people. That is why Jesus is a messenger or son of a god. God himself cannot do anything with people [laughs]. Buddha is not buddha—he can help people. The same thing is true with everyone. We cannot be same way always.

Student B: Would you say that equality cannot exist with differences?

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student B: Would you say that equality cannot exist even with differences?

Suzuki-rōshi: Ahh. Cannot exist in the same way. At that time, right here, in this moment, it exist, actually. But I don't know next moment—I don't know. Next moment you will exist in some other way. Like Dōgen-zenji said, when firewood is firewood, firewood has its own past and future. And when firewood become ash, ash has its own past and future. Firewood is firewood, and ash is ash [laughs]. So I am here right now, but tomorrow I shall be ash, not firewood. Looks like same, but actually it is not, strictly speaking. That is why, when you understand all things in its strict sense, we cannot stick to any idea. But right here, at this moment, everything exist. I'm—looks like arguing [laughs] something,

but it is so, isn't it?

Student B: So the things are constantly in change—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes, constantly.

Student B: —the young ones—

Suzuki-rōshi: Everyone.

Student B: —... when I was growing up that things can be constantly in change, and change can be different. ... you know, you have a tall man and—you have a tall man and a short man. But they can be the same.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student B: Anyway, thank you. Abstract things can be rhetorical.

Suzuki-rōshi: Rhetorical? Abstract? Abstract? [Laughs.] Yeah. There is some difference between your understanding and my understanding. The equality is not—to me it is not abstract thing; it is very real. But to you, because you have no experience of the abstract, to you it is some idea. So idea doesn't change—has no validity. It is equality because—ahh—[laughs]—it is rather difficult to say. Maybe you understand.

Equality, if it doesn't have any power or any meaning—for instance, everything has salt. Each plant has salt. But salt for you is something—salt is salt—salt for you. When you eat vegetable, you don't feel there is salt in it. But once you know the real taste of salt, then you will find out the salt in each vegetable. So for you, salt is something in some container, and white stuff is salt. There is not much difference.

Salt for me is—even though actually I don't feel salty when I eat apple or some other vegetable, I don't feel salty. But imagine if there is no salt—no salt in vegetable [laughs], what kind of taste you taste? You cannot imagine. It may be terrible taste. Because of salt, apple tastes like apple, eggplants taste like eggplant, cucumber taste like cucumber. Do you understand? That kind of difference.

That is why we practice zazen, and we start our life from nothing. After you sit, especially in morning, instead of lecture, you stand up, your feeling will be indescribable. That feeling is something quite different from feeling you have in your ordinary practice. That is the feeling you have when you come out from emptiness. That is the taste of the real vegetable.

Okay? Maybe [laughs], I think—does it make some sense to you?

Student B: ... I can see the idea that ...—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Yeah. That is enough.

Student B: —the idea of a vacuum—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student B: ... the fact that I am even telling you about it—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Uh-huh. Yes.

Student B: —it would take a lot of discussion, first of all. I don't know if...

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, I know. Anyway, old fox appeared [laughs], right here. So we have to discuss about the old fox. It appeared last time and still almost vanished [laughs]—almost. If you practice zazen tomorrow evening, it will go [laughs, laughter]. Something like that, okay? It is impossible to explain it fully. It is not something which is possible to explain from the beginning.

Some—some question? *Hai.*

Student C: Rōshi...

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: —and in my mind I get some pictures and they're...

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: —and I try to get rid of them so that I don't have any picture of what it is.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student C: Then I don't feel that I have any understanding of what it means when you say "emptiness."

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student C: So both ways it seems like there is not right or not left. Is there some other way?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mmm. [Laughs.] Some other way is practice. You have to be trying to figure out intellectually what it is from various points, comparing one understanding of emptiness to another understanding of

emptiness, because we use many words: symbolic words, first principle, buddha-nature, or emptiness. Each time, why we apply various words is to destroy various idea of—special idea of emptiness. So real understanding of emptiness is—you should experience what is emptiness rather than idea. In Rinzai that is *kenshō*. Even though it is not so big, once you have *kenshō*, you have taste of it, which is not words.

And in *shikantaza* you have also taste of emptiness through actual experience, or else it doesn't make much sense. If I talk about it, it is already a kind of philosophy. Our teaching should be philosophical, but philosophy doesn't reach to the reality; it is still words, and result of thinking mind. But if you understand this kind of thought—Buddhist thought, your practice will be more and more concentrated on important point, or else your practice will be lost in various direction. You will go round and round same place, or you will go in wrong direction. And there are so many directions, so you will be lost.

So, in that way, for long, long ago, Indian philosophers, teachers discussed about our religious experience: What is real religious experience? And those people were called *ronji*. [*ronji* (Jap.): master of discourses.] So Zen priests or teachers of various schools of Buddhism were at the same time a kind of *ronji*—a kind of philosopher who can discuss the truth with various teachers of various schools. And they tried to be concentrated on some important core of religious experience.

That is something what I am trying here with you. Okay? You may be confused, I know, because maybe you are trying to understand—trying to—maybe you are—instead of thinking by yourself, you depend on, or you are trying to understand what I mean. But what I am trying is to destroy your various wrong idea of practice. That is the difference.

I know you have various obstacles. So to get rid of those obstacles from your mind is my purpose of lecture. Do you understand? Because you may have so many ideas, so that is not what I mean—that is not what I mean. This is wrong, and you take off various obstacles from your mind, so that we can be concentrated on most important point, so that you can trust yourself, trust your buddha-nature which you have. Okay? I am not trying to give you any idea, but I am explaining something by your words [laughs]—not my words, by your words. I am using your words, but what I mean is something more than that.

Thank you very much.

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