

71-03-02

SUZUKI-ROSHI LECTURE

March 3, 1971. San Francisco.

I am aware of various kinds of religions, but the questions answered by religious leaders are also answered by psychologists. So the understanding of religion may become deeper and deeper. I don't know much about modern psychology, but as far as I understand it, just as the purpose of religion is to solve our difficulties, the psychologist is also working hard to solve the problems of our life. Why we have so many problems in our life is because of our social structure which is not good, or human relationships which are also not so good. If the difficulties become too great, they will result in a nervous breakdown or some mental disorder.

We have this kind of problem in our society or in our individual life, according to Buddhism, because of the structure of the way we live. Something is wrong with the foundation of our way of living. That is called "linkage," or you may call it "breakage." Something is wrong with our fundamental framework of life. This was already pointed out by Buddha. What is wrong, according to Buddha, is that we have various desires. Those desires are limitless, as is Buddha's teaching, but the things which will satisfy our desires are not limitless--they are limited. So there is already a big gap between your desire and things which will satisfy your desire. Even so, our way of life is based on having complete satisfaction of our desires, which is not possible.

Sometime you may choose one desire out of your many desires, forgetting the rest of them. You will say to your girlfriend, "I don't care about anything but you." It means that you give up the rest of your desires and you try to satisfy only one desire--"to have you." By choosing one desire out of many, we can think it is possible to satisfy it, but you will find out the nature of desire. Even though you choose one out of many, that one desire is limitless--there is no end--until you lose yourself in the desire.

And that is why we suffer, as Buddha pointed out. The same thing is true with modern psychology or psychoanalysis, especially psychoanalysis based on existentialism. According to modern psychologists, the problem we have in our life is not because of something outside, some object of desires, but is based on your fundamental framework of life. Something is wrong with it. What is wrong with it is that whatever way you seek for things, you think they exist outside of yourself, not inside of yourself, or not in the relationship between you and the things. But things don't exist independent of you, and you do not exist independent of your surroundings. What actually exists is not "you" and not "things," but some actual existence which is in the real of a relationship between you and your surroundings. As long as you think something exists outside, and you exist in spite of many things that are related with you, or you exist independent of them, then you cannot get out of the difficulty.

In city life, you try hard in your own way to have good relationships with your family.

This is, as you must have experienced, not so easy. You always have difficulty, so naturally you will give up. Not forever, but for a time, and you will find some retreat like Zen Center. That is why some of you come to Zen Center and shut yourself away from the city life. What usual people may do is shut themselves away from the world and think hard to find out some good way. And when you feel you have some confidence in your way, you will go out to the city and world again, but still it is difficult. While you are repeating this kind of thing, you will be entrenched in some line of thought or some idea of difficulty, and you will lose your confidence in yourself. That is what the usual person is doing. But here in Zen Center what you do should be different from this kind of shutting yourself away from the world. You should find out a quite different attitude to work on this kind of difficulty which you think exists outside of yourself. In zazen practice, as you must have experienced, the way you take care of yourself should be the way you take care of your kitchen and your room and Zen Center. In this way you have a more subjective attitude towards your surroundings and towards taking care of the things around you. You will learn how to be boss of your surroundings, and instead of being dragged by things, you will work on your surroundings. Then your circumstances will be quite different. This is actually how we work on our life.

To explain this kind of practice more carefully, or maybe in a fancy scholarly way, which I cannot do so well, things do not exist without you--because you are here, things exist. If you were not here, things would not exist. You may say that even though you are not here, this building will exist--even though you die this building exist. But this kind of argument, according to Buddha, is useless and will not help you so much. You have difficulties in your life which consists of you and your surroundings. The problems only arise between you and your surroundings, which have something directly to do with you. You don't mind what kinds of things Japanese people do in Japan, but you do mind what I do or what your husband or wife does or what your neighbors do in everyday life. That is actually our life. When you think that even though you are not here, things exist, that will create more problems for you. So you must take care of the things with which you are directly related, and you should extend this kind of activity to more things. We should live in reality, not in delusion. We call it delusion, you know.

And you may worry about your future. But your future is some situation you project. From things you have right now around you, you project something to the future, and you become afraid of it. And because you have some difficulty now, you may fear that you may have some difficulty in the future. That is fear. But actually that kind of fear is an illusion, because it is something which you project to the future. And you know, magic is here. You have various materials here with you, and you project what you have into the future. You become afraid of it, and you are confused, as you are confused right now. So the point is how to take care of your surroundings before you become afraid of your future. You say you had such and such difficulties when you were young. Psychoanalysts may say because your mother was very strict with you, you have difficulty in adapting yourself to your surroundings, and because of the fear you had, your mind does not work properly right now. But even though you talk about past difficulties, it doesn't help. All the results are here right now. So to work on the pure problem right now is the best remedy. Buddha said if you are shot by a poison arrow, you shouldn't talk about what kind of

problem it maybe--to pull out the arrow is the way. The same thing is true with modern psychoanalysis. I was amazed by what they said. They teach me what Buddhism is. When you have difficulty with your friend, for instance, what you should do, in conclusion, is not to be enslaved by your circumstances, but to go beyond the idea of self, or to give up the idea of self--that is the only way to get rid of the source of all difficulty. And they say that the way to get rid of the idea of self maybe by religious practice. They say so: only by religious practice will you get rid of the idea of self.

As long as you stick to the idea of self, you will be enslaved by your surroundings, and instead of being boss of everything, you will be enslaved by everything. Because we have a self, according to them, we seek for something good for our self. Because you are here, you seek form something good. But, according to them again, something good is in the realm of good and bad, which is the realm of possibility. This means there is the possibility of being good and the possibility of being bad. If you drive a car, there are two possibilities: to have an accident and to arrive at Monterey safely. As long as you are going to Monterey, the possibility of an accident is always with you. But that possibility is not on the freeway--it is on your side. When you seek for something good, completely indifferent to something bad, it is not possible to have it. Most of the time you will arrive at Monterey without having an accident, but no one knows, when you are driving, whether you will have an accident or not. You maybe one case out of a thousand--no one knows. But you still seek for something good. That is altogether the wrong way of getting rid of uneasiness from your life. When you know what you are doing exactly, there you have a chance to practice our way quite seriously, to have a more positive way in your life. To have a positive way in your life, instead of pushing yourself, you should forget yourself, you should get rid of the root of the trouble, the idea of "you." That is the root of the problem. Because you stick to the idea of you, you have to seek something which is impossible to have.

So far various religions have been helping us. But if we come to this point, not many religions can help. Most religions will encourage your idea of self. Christianity doesn't. They say you cannot add one more foot over your head, or something like that. But most religions encourage you to make your hands one foot longer to reach something or to make yourself one foot higher to reach for something. If you believe in something, you will have more power or more ability, so you believe in the teaching they give you. But that will not help. That will encourage your problems.

The only way is to get rid of the idea of self. And here, you know, I am sure you will say, "That is not possible." But it is possible. Someone may say, "If you get rid of your idea of self, what will happen to you? You will be very lonely without any idea of self. If the purpose of practice is to get rid of the idea of self, what will happen after you attain enlightenment? If all the people attain enlightenment, it maybe okay, but I don't want to attain enlightenment, giving up myself to make other people happy. "Oh no," you may say. But you know it is not so. Buddha had a difficult time providing some way for people to get rid of this kind of idea.

Do you have some answer for that question? That is our way then. How you get rid of

the idea of self is the point. Of course you cannot do it all at once. But there is a way to get rid of the idea of self. If I start to talk about it, I don't feel so good. Before I tell you to have a cup of water, it is very good. I feel I have some secret. If I tell you, you may think, "Oh, that is what Roshi was saying all the time," and you maybe discouraged. So maybe it is better not to tell you. I am selling you snake-oil now! Do you have some questions? Yes, please ask some questions.

Question: I have an answer to the question of how to get out of the self, and I think it is concentration on truth and love. Those two things will get you out of your self. In other words, any time you do anything you think isn't perfectly in agreement with how you yourself have thought about it, then you say what you think. You don't care what they think about you because you are speaking the truth. And love. I think concentration on those two things will get you out of yourself.

Suzuki-roshi: Yeah, after you have good practice! The other side of the answer is how you have good practice. When you are well concentrated on what you do and what is happening here, not you or me, but what is happening in the realm of possibility, when you take care of things in the realm of possibility, that is only one way. Small I is not there, and its object is not there. What exists there is something on the mirror, but it is not the mirror or you. You are in the mirror, actually. You are watching yourself in the mirror, but that you is not you, and it is not the mirror. What is it? That is true reality. That is something which I talked about the other day, you know. You reflected in the river: Tozan saw himself reflected in the water. That is something real--not himself, not water, but this real self. If something bad happens to you, you should know the other side of it is good. You say this is good or bad, but things themselves are not good or bad. So you shouldn't be bothered by something bad happening--it is okay. It appears in that way. The way you have this kind of understanding, actual understanding of life, is the way you practice zazen. In your practice you don't hear, but sound comes to your ear, and your ear and the sound create something new. To understand in that way is to go beyond you and things. That is the real realm. But when you carelessly say, "Love others," there maybe some danger, because you feel you love others. In real love there is no idea or feeling of loving anyone else...(TAPE TURNED) and you cannot take hold of it. You cannot even know yourself, but real you is there.

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

Suzuki-roshi: Actually, there is no mistake in our life. Whatever you do is not a mistake. But when I say there is no such thing as a mistake, I am saying it from the viewpoint of our real practice. So in the usual sense of the word there are, of course, mistakes. But even though you make a mistake, you don't have to worry about it too much. You must be free from it, and instead of being worried by it you should work on the result of your mistake, which is present right here.

Question: I don't think you should even call it a mistake, because it is a step up the evolutionary ladder and you learn something, so it is pretty good. You don't have to worry

about good and bad: the way I look at it is as a test for you. So instead of saying, "Oh, that is a terrible thing that happened to me," you can see it as a testing situation to see how you will come out of it.

Suzuki-roshi: Testing. Yeah, maybe. To live on this moment is, anyhow, important. Or else somehow you will create some confusion and distress. Hai.

Question: I feel like I am controlled by my thinking mind. Sometimes it begins to lose control, and I just feel myself sitting, just breathing and sitting, and that is all that is happening for half a second. But the minute that that begins to happen I begin to think about it and watch it again, and I am no longer sitting. It seems like my thinking mind is so strong. I am afraid of it, and I am no longer sitting. It seems like my thinking mind is so strong. I am afraid of it, and I hold on to it.

Suzuki-roshi: I am not saying to stop your thinking. To think is okay.

Question: I don't mean I am trying to stop it.

Suzuki-roshi: Naturally or intuitively you stop it.

Question: I am afraid of stopping, but I continue.

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

Question: Yes, but I really don't want to!

Suzuki-roshi: But it goes. Thinking mind goes even though you don't try to stop it or try to continue it. Is that what you mean? That you go with it is pretty good. You follow it, so thinking mind is going, not you. Thinking mind is stronger than you, I think. Don't you think that is so? Soon I think you will not be afraid of going with it or of stopping it. You will just follow your thinking mind without being afraid of it and without trying to stop it. Then your ego is very weak, and thinking mind is so-called "thinking no -thinking." Dogen says, "think no-thinking." No-thinking is pure thinking.

Question: Without any direction?

Suzuki-roshi: Without any direction--then what is happening there cannot harm you--rather it will help you.

Question: I am afraid of that.

Suzuki-roshi: That is some evidence that you are involved in some usual practice of doing something. Our practice is : just to sit. Let everything happen on you. That looks like a very difficult thing, but there is no other way to get rid of the problem. And how to do it is to take care of yourself, to take care of your breathing and thinking mind. If you do not reject it, if you do not want to stop it with wrong feeling, if you follow it, if you are very kind

with your thinking mind, then there is not much ego. It is as if you were taking care of your friend or children, you see? Thinking mind at that time is like a child running around you. "Ohhhh, be careful!" That is the way. When you practice in that way there is no you anymore. That is the secret of going beyond self-centered practice. It is one o'clock. Maybe one more question. Hai.

Question: Is it possible that it isn't because we are afraid of...but simply because we are not listening to experience (inaudible)...we are absolutely still and.....and we are not used to that...it comes upon you while you are doing zazen...but it doesn't stay with you (most of question inaudible)

Suzuki-roshi: Our practice is not just sitting. The way we eat, the way we walk is our practice too. So if you walk or if you eat the way we eat, then more and more you will have that kind of mind. That is why we practice tea ceremony. (Interruption on tape: story about Rikkyu) His lord was very impatient with him and did not like him so much, but he was his lord, so Rikkyu always had to offer tea to him. With the perfect calmness of his mind, he made tea and offered it to his lord. When he does this, his lord has no chance to kill him. With his complete calmness of mind he is ready for anything which will happen to him. At last he killed himself, but tea ceremony was established by him. If you act like he acted, you will feel his spirit. Not only our zazen practice, but also meal practice or rituals are provided in that way. So if it is difficult for you to practice sitting zazen, you can study tea ceremony. A student who was taking a movie of a tea ceremony invited me and asked me to explain what kind of action is Zen and what kind of action is not Zen. "Tell me!" he said. But from the beginning to the end, what they do is supposed to be Zen practice. Not this part or that part--from beginning to end it should be Zen practice. So whether you know what Zen is or not, if you do it, you will eventually find out what Zen is through action.

Thank you very much.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 71-03-02
