

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Wednesday Evening, July 21, 1971
Tassajara

We discussed already last night [SR-71-07-20] about what is something which we can experience or which we can understand, and what is something which we cannot understand. I was trying to explain the difference between something which you can understand and something which you cannot understand, and how you have an approach to something which you cannot understand is by practice.

But it is necessary for us at the same time to have understanding of Buddhism. It is necessary to read, and it is necessary to listen to lecture, and it is necessary to think about what is Buddhism. That is also important.

And most important thing will be to have actual difficulties in our human life. That is very important.

But as I told you, the problem—you have enough problem already [laughs, laughter]. So don't make home-made problems—cookies. That was what I told you last night. We are practicing zazen, so it is a great help. And those things—those points are very difficult and very important for our perfect understanding of Buddhism. If you mix up those points, you will never understand what I am saying.

Tonight, again, I want to discuss this point a little bit more. And this side [laughs]—this side is the world of experience, world of study, and world of human problems. And the other side is—this side is [laughs] world of Buddhist practice to have approach to the reality, and let's discuss more about those points.

But to make your understanding clear before I start next talk, I want you to give me some question. The people who are sitting this side [laughs] give me some question about our practice. And people who are sitting this side, give me some actual problem you have. Do you give me some question? And if you—by mistake—if you give me [laughs] wrong question, you have to come to this side. [Laughs, laughter.] Okay? All right.

Student A: Buddha spent six years sitting under the Bodhi tree. Bodhidharma spent nine years in front of the wall. Huineng spent fifteen. Is that a necessary part of the process to spend some period of tremendously concentrated zazen for a very deep understanding? [Bodhidharma: c. 470-543. First Chinese Zen Patriarch] [Daijan Huineng (Daikan Enō): 638-713. Sixth Chinese Zen Patriarch]

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Yeah. [Laughs.] You can stay this side. [Laughter.] Her question is—she belongs to this part, and she is practicing zazen to have a good approach to the reality. And is it necessary for all the students who are sitting this side to sit nine years or fifteen years? Is that necessary? Buddha sit for six year. Bodhidharma sit for nine year. Is that necessary? Why is it necessary? That is her question. That is a very good question. Do you have some more question? [Laughter.] I will answer [laughs]. I want to save her point, that's all. I don't want to say same thing twice, so that is why I am asking for another question. Do you have some question? No? [Laughs.] Okay.

This side is, strictly speaking, people who are sitting even though you have buddha-nature. Buddha-nature you have. People who are sitting this side also have buddha-nature, but they think it is possible to—people who are sitting this side thinks if you read and if you listen to my lecture, you will understand what is Buddhism. And you study Buddhism because you have various problem. So you think if you ask me some question, I can help your problem even though you do not actually approach to reality, it is possible.

Or the people who have no time to practice zazen. That is most people is like that. Even though people who are sitting here thinks if you ask me some question, I will give you some good answer. Maybe I can help you [laughs], but if you do not have good practice and good approach to the reality, you cannot attain enlightenment, even though you have buddha-nature.

Right now the question is why then is it necessary for you who are sitting this side necessary to practice zazen. And this question could be good question for the people who are sitting this side too. Even though we have buddha-nature, what does it mean to have buddha-nature? Even though you don't know what is buddha-nature, actually you have it. Actually you have it. But if you do not realize that you have it, it doesn't make any sense. Maybe that is why the people this side is practicing zazen. Even though you are practicing zazen, if you think, "If I practice zazen, I will have some special experience, then that is enlightenment and that is purpose of zazen." If you think in that way, you have to come this side [laughs], because you—he has same idea. Even though you [think] "If I practice zazen and attain enlightenment," that will help you.

But enlightenment is not something like that. Enlightenment is something whether you realize it or not, you have it. Whether you realize it or not you have it. But it is necessary for you to realize it, or else you don't know what you are doing. That's all. If you really know the meaning of zazen, that is enlightenment. When you know the

meaning of zazen, you will know the meaning of our human life. That is enlightenment.

Enlightenment—even though you attain enlightenment, you have same trouble [laughs]. You cannot flee from your difficulties. The difficulty you have—if you know the meaning of the difficulty for you, the difficulty will help you. If you do not know the meaning of difficulty, it doesn't help. Same thing with zazen. If you do not know the meaning of everyday practice, even though you do not attain enlightenment, that zazen will not help you.

Once a disciple of Baso—Baso, when he was asked, "When wind is all over, air is all over, why do you use fan?" [Laughs.] "When wind is all over, air is all over, then why do you use your fan?" American people do not use fan, but Japanese—Japanese does, especially when it is so warm. "Why do you use fan?" he was asked by someone. [Jiangxi Mazu Daoyi (Baso Dōitsu): 709-788. Chan master of the Tang period.] [The disciple fanning himself was Magu Baoche (Mayoku Hōtetsu)—n.d.—dharma successor of Mazu Daoyi. This exchange between an unnamed monk and Magu is recounted at the end of the *Genjō Kōan*.]

And what he said—the answer was: "You know that wind is everywhere, but you don't know what is the function of the wind." Wind means buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is everywhere. We have—all of us has buddha-nature. But if so, why is it necessary to use fan? Why is it necessary to practice zazen? That was the question. The answer was—you looks like know that everyone has buddha-nature, but you don't know that it is necessary to practice zazen or to know—to realize the meaning of practice and meaning of enlightenment. So it means that even though you think you know everyone has buddha-nature, but actually you don't know what is buddha-nature even. That was his answer.

And disciple asked again: "Then what is actual practice?" he asked. And he just used his fan like this [laughs]. That was answer. "Oh, it is very hot." [Laughs.] He used the fan. That was the answer. Do you understand? That was answer. Just to—without any idea that we have buddha-nature, why do we practice zazen? And just—when you just sit, then there is actually buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is there, if you really understand what is zazen. That was answer.

So until [laughs] you realize—you feel it is necessary for you to sit, and I cannot help sitting everyday. If you don't sit you feel funny. If you feel I have to sit anyway—until you feel in that way, you should continue and it may take—for Buddha—it took for Buddha six years. And after Bodhidharma attained enlightenment, he sat nine years. Buddha who attained enlightenment—who was supposed to have enlightenment when he was born—Buddha, who came to this world

after attaining enlightenment, needed six years practice. We should know this point. Those who attained enlightenment, it is necessary to continue our practice. Those who do not know what is our practice also necessary to sit. For someone it may take very long time, but for someone [else] it may not take so long time. But that is not problem. Whether it takes one year or six year is not problem. Anyway, we have to continue our practice even though we have buddha-nature.

When we say, "everyone has buddha-nature," that is so-called-it "granting way" or "giving way." And when we say: "You do not have—you do not know what is Zen, what is buddha-nature, you do not know anything about Buddhism." It is convenient—best world.

One is positive way and one is negative way. Positive way is to admit you to have buddha-nature. The negative way is you do not have buddha-nature. You are deluded person. Because of your topsy-turvy [laughs] idea, you do not have buddha-nature. That is negative way of expressing the truth.

But negative way or positive way is based on the same truth—that everyone has buddha-nature. And real Buddhism doesn't stick to negative way or positive way. We are free from negative way and positive way.

Then I must take off this partition [of the zendō]. This people who are sitting this side is treated by my negative way. You don't know what is Buddhism. You looks like you know what is Buddhism. You have a lot of knowledge about Buddhism. But you do not practice zazen, so you don't have buddha-nature in its strict sense. That is negative way. Even though I say so, I know that you have buddha-nature. And because you stick to some idea, you feel as if you have no buddha-nature and you have problem. That is negative way and taking negative way to you.

The positive way is encouraging way, to encourage people, or any way if you sit you will attain enlightenment. That is positive way. But even though you have buddha-nature, I say you should sit fifteen years, nine years, or six years.

People who are sitting this side of the zendō, what I will say—your reading or discussion about Buddhism will not actually help you. You must sit, and you must have enlightenment. You should be enlightened. You should know the real meaning of practice. Because you don't know what is the meaning of difficulties. And practice—difficulty itself is practice. So that is why you suffer. That is what I will say to the students who are sitting on this side of the zendō.

Anyway it means that you have to sit [laughs]. Then you will understand the meaning of difficulties and meaning of life and meaning of—real meaning of what you have studied by reading. That is our answer for that kind of question.

So Dōgen says Buddhism is free from—true Buddhism is not just negative way or positive way. True Buddhism is free from—should be free from negative and positive way.

So flowers—"Even though you want flower to last longer, flower will fall. And even though you do not care for weeds, weeds will grow," [laughs] he says. The problem we have is same. So after attaining enlightenment—after sitting for a long, long time, you cannot be different from each one of us. A is A, B is B, a man is a man and a woman is a woman. It doesn't change. Same thing, same old [laughs] person, even though you attain enlightenment. And if you are satisfied with the same old person, that is enlightenment. And when you feel in that way, you will feel how important it is to practice zazen. That is, maybe, the answer for your question. Do you have some other question?

Student B: [*Question is barely audible.*] If I want to learn Buddhism and I live in a world that is very busy and stressed, and it doesn't permit me to have like a Buddhist nature—a true Buddhist nature, yet I would like to apply some of the principles of serenity and orderliness—harmony and orderliness to my living, yet I still really don't have that much time everyday to sit zazen in the middle of the street. I wonder if there is any way in the process of living, if you could meditate while you're on your way some place without turning your eyes from the car? [Laughter.] No, I am curious. I mean, meditation can be done while in action, if you are in a place where you could be serene—maybe waiting for the doctor? Is that at all—[laughter]. Well seriously!

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, good—good question. Yeah, very serious question. I am thinking about it a lot. So—for us it is good question. If we sit—if we think we are good students because we are sitting right here, and people are not so good because they are involved in money-making [laughs] busy life, if you think in that way that is big mistake. I don't know which is good student.

Even though you are in city life, having a lot of problem, involved in—really involved in busy life, if the point you work on is not to seek for some teaching from us, from Buddhism, but if you forget the idea of what is good and what is bad. Usually we stick to some idea only, or we are going down a one-way road [laughs]. We don't know the ways. There is another one-way road from different direction. Those who live in one street, they think this is the way car goes [laughs].

They are doing same thing over and over, sticking to one-way road. That is the problem.

So, if you free your mind from that kind of right or wrong, and think about what you are doing more, then you have to find out—you have to try to know what you are doing and you will feel you are lost. Why you feel you are doing something good? I think because you think you are doing something good, you are doing same thing over and over with same idea. But if you think about your life more, you will realize that that is not actually what your way should be. That is necessary. If you realize that point, you will find out time to sit every day for 20 minutes or 30 minutes to think—to forget all about your old style of life. That is very [laughs] important. Even for Buddhist that is important. We Buddhists have some certain way—our rituals. If we think—if we know that it is okay, then he is walking—I am walking one-way street always.

If we get caught by our way of life too much, and if we think as long as we are observing this way—I am good Buddhist [laughs], that is big mistake. So there is [not] any concrete way for anyone. What we should do is—moment after moment, we must have very calm, clear mind to know what we are doing. Then, naturally you will know how important it is to have very calm mind. For an instance, you may have [laughs] young boys and girls, maybe, and if what you think is always right, it doesn't work. You should think with them. You should listen to them sometime with very calm—calmness of your mind. Then, if you listen to them, they will listen to you. That is actual practice we must have. There is no absolute way for anyone.

So wherever you go, if you come to [laughs] Tassajara, you should observe our way. If I go to visit your home, I must observe your way of life. That is what we should do. How is it possible to do so is to have calmness of mind, and emotionally we should be always calm. That is the main point of practice. So even though—because we are busy, you have to sit [laughs]. That—it is very helpful. Some more question? *Hai*.

Student C: How is our life to be lived in the face of nothing? Do you seek guideposts or absolute authorities—authorities such as a Christian would think of their Bible, and when you realize nothing is the ultimate reality, and you wished you were living within that nothingness, how do you do it? How do you live with no guideposts?

Suzuki-rōshi: That is very good question. And that is a problem. It is difficult to explain, and it is difficult to understand. But anyway, I think it is good question [laughter] and I want to spend maybe rest of time for that.

Until what time?

Student: Quarter to ten?

Suzuki-rōshi: Quarter to ten? Okay. There is, as we discussed, there is no good or bad in things itself. Good or bad is something which we create. That is already understood. Then why is it necessary [laughs], why is it possible—that is your question—why is it possible to know which way we should take when there is two ways or more than two ways. Is that something like that—your question?

Student C: Something like that, although it is not a choice—an alternative. I think the alternatives are infinite—as alternatives as nothingness is endless. Yet somehow we all must live day to day, and we all have to find a life style. But unless we make an appeal to discover it—to say that, "Well, I choose my way of life because this is what this other man in this book says." But there comes a time, I think, in some lives that you realize that there is no real authority except yourself, and that there exists nothing at the core of your own being, and when you look within yourself for an answer and you find that there is just nothing.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Yourself—you know that you cannot depend on authority. Is it clear to you?

Student C: Yes.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. I think that is very true. And you really think you shouldn't depend on authority. That is very important point for us, especially for the people who are sitting this side [laughs]. This is very important. Why you should sit on this side is because you depend on authority. When you do not depend on any authority and even care for something good, or even care for enlightenment, then you have—you yourself has authority. Your life will be more stable, and your eyes will be open, and our mind will be clear. Because of this kind of authority, because of your lazy practice to depend on authority ... *[Sentence probably not finished. Tape turned.]*

... to be thinking the other way because of the authority you have in your mind. And when you think you want to go this way, if you go this way, you feel as if you are doing something wrong. So you always are afraid of authority. That is very big problem for us. First of all, we should try to be free from authority or free from preconceived idea. Then you must be very calm and sincere, or else you feel you cannot survive. Then, more and more, you will have power to go your own way without any trouble. That is actual practice, which will go on forever. That is the kind of practice we are actually doing.

So when you feel there is no authority—there is nothing to depend on —there is nothing—no teaching especially for you, then that is the practice—the practice the people who are sitting this side are taking. We say "power of not doing bad"—not doing bad—power of *maku sa maku rikiryō* in Japanese. Not doing: *maku sa maku*. *Rikiryō*: power. [*maku*: stop; *sa*: make; *maku* (*sa* + *aku*): evil]

Whatever you do, when you have this kind of power, you have power of doing something right without depending on something else. The power you have is the power of not doing anything wrong. I said [laughs] "wrong"; I used the word "wrong," but his own intuition, or his own power, or his own wisdom to know which—what kind of life we should have.

So even though we have buddha-nature, even though we are supposed to know intuitively which way to go or what kind of life we should have, but unless we have actual power of doing something right, it doesn't make any sense. Why it doesn't make any sense is because we have always tried to depend on something. We are always making some excuse to do something selfish. That is the trouble.

It looks like we have nothing to depend on, but actually we can depend on ourselves if we stop trying to depend on something else. And that is something which you will realize by actual practice. It is [laughs] not possible to solve that kind of question by thinking or by reading or by even by discussing. It is everyday problem which we will have. And if you see the problem as it is then, and if you are able to see the problem as it is, there is a way to solve the problem.

Maybe my answer does not cover—may not cover the question you gave me, but what I am talking about is what is our practice and what is wrong with us usually. The important point is to forget all about preconceived idea—all track of all the way of life. It does not mean I am ignoring or I am trying to forget all about our condition. It does not mean so, but personally each one of us has very clear, calm mind. That is what I am talking about. If my answer does not cover all the area, please give me more question.

Student D: How can one be certain that he is right even though he listens to himself?

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student D: How can one be certain, even though he listens to himself for an answer, how does he know that what he is doing is right?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. That is the question of self. My answer will be concentrated on what is "you" or what is "I." When you have problem, the underlying problem from our viewpoint is the problem of self, which does not exist really. We say "I" or "mine" [laughs], "my body, my mind, my way of life" [laughs]. But what is my mind? It looks like I have my mind, and that mind sometime looks like real life. But you say, "my mind, my body," but it looks like it is more true to say "This is me." It is, I think, more understandable than to say "my body." What is "me" then? Not this body or not my mind.

We say "my mind," so maybe "I" owns my mind; "I" own my body. What is "I" [laughs]? Actually, maybe more accurate to say "This is me," "my mind is me." Then it looks like more accurate. And what is this physical body? This is the result of taking meal each time, a result of exhaling and inhaling. That is me—my body. "My mind," we say, "My mind is always changing." "My mind" is always related to something else. Then there is no mind or no physical being which has some self-nature. No self-nature in our body or in our mind.

"My" is delusion. It is no such thing like "my." But it looks like [laughs]—we feel like we have "my something" or "me". It is because of this "me" or "mine" we have to know something. The most important thing is to think by clear mind and to keep our physical body strong—strong enough to help others and to be helped by others. So then what you should do is very clear. You will find out what you should do. If you eat too much it will hurt you. If you think same thing over and over, eventually you hurt yourself mentally. So you will know how to take care of yourself and how to help others and how to have good relationship with someone else. Then there is true "me" or "mine." It is not just delusion but more actual reality which is happening around yourself. That is how you figure out what you should do moment after moment, and that is our practice.

So, the important point of Buddhism is to forget all about "me" or "mine," and to see our surrounding more clearly. So, if you realize this point your problem will be solved naturally. Okay? [Laughs.] Does it made some sense?

Student D: Not yet.

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughs.] Who say "Not yet?" [Said in a mock serious tone.] [Laughs.] That is big problem. That problem—only way to solve that problem is practice. If you practice zazen and to some extent you are able to forget self-centered, thinking mind, then your mind is very clear. And what you will say is more adequate. Instead of universality, your words have validity. Actually valid. Something universal doesn't help. Something universal like moral code or teaching of Buddha or Christ—very universal, and their

generation made his words to help people individually—made it universal and forced that universality to all of us who is different from each other. That is the problem we have.

Knowing this point, we are rather interested in validity of the teaching. So unless each one of us after trying to forget self-centered thinking mind, our thinking mind does not work, the direction our thinking mind will go is to have universality—to have authority. That is not our way.

That is the unique authority of Buddhism. I am not arguing with you, but I want to introduce our way to you. That's all.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Joe Galewsky and Bill Redican (3/5/01). Miyagawa Keishi-san kindly provided assistance with the translation of Japanese terms. Lightly edited for readability by Gordon Geist (3/22/09).