

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
1 PM *SESSHIN* LECTURE
Friday, July 30, 1965
San Francisco

Tape Operator: This is the beginning of the 1 pm lecture, Friday.

Suzuki-rōshi: If you have a question, please give me. I want to answer about what I told you during *sesshin*.

Student A: Sensei? I'd like to refer to a question someone else asked a couple of mornings ago, about helping other people. At that time you said that unless a person were enlightened, it wouldn't do much good to help other people. It seems to me that that would mean that probably most people in this room should not do anything for anyone else. I doubt we're all enlightened in this room, and since I have been thinking of [it], I wonder if you could expand on this idea?

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. "Enlightened" means, maybe, many things. And in the word "enlightenment" is very wide. So "enlightenment" does not mean to attain perfection, you know. Bodhisattva—for bodhisattva—bodhisattva's way is to help others, even before he save himself. That is bodhisattva's way. So the point is how to help others, you know. Enlightenment—enlightenment, or bodhisattva's mind—I have to go back to my talk about bodhisattva or bodhisattva-mind.

Bodhisattva-mind is, in your philosophy, it is "normative consciousness,"¹ you know. To—to—to do something, to seek for—pursue for good or pursue for truth or pursue for beauty. Those are "bodhisattva's mind" in narrow sense. And—but that was not satisfactory conclusion for the—your philosophers. So at last they—they refer to religion. Of course, here they mean mostly Christian type of religion.

And they refer to holiness. The holiness is when three kinds of pursue—good and truth and good and beauty—get together and work for one thing, that is holy function of our mind. Still they insist [it is] their mind, not [laughs] God—God's mind. But whatever they say, the actual meaning is the same. The word is different. They call it "human holy function" [laughs], but that is actually holy function of God. But they call it "God's function."

So here, even so, it is just entrance of the idea of Eastern—Eastern idea of religious life. In East, it was maybe about two thousand years ago, they—they have same—exactly the same philosophy. And oneness of the three functions is the—they acknowledge those three function. If those three function work together, that is buddha—buddha's mind. But that

¹ Possibly: consciousness as "ordinary awareness" (per philosopher Lyle).

was two—about two thousand years ago. And after that [laughs], in East and West, many progress was made.

And in Zen, at least, "to help others" means, you know, we do not take it in dualistic sense. "To help others" means to—to think [of] others as a part of you. Not "others"—not—"you, yourself." You think to help others is to help someone—some imperfect person helps people. But when we say, "to help others" in our sense, it means to consider people a part of you or a part—it is like your hands or your body.

So in this sense we help others, you know. Not to help someone else—when you think—understand "to help others" in that way, there is big misunderstanding. And there will be big confusion between worldly activity of helping others—social work—and religious help.

There is some—there is clear distinction between social work and religious work. Do you understand? The social work is based on science and sociology. And sociology is good, you know. Of course it is good. And it—there should be—we should have sociology. And we have full understanding of sociology. But to help others in religious sense is quite different from social work.

So what I mean is, if you want to help others, you know, you may—to work at hospital is, you know, to help others. If he is religious person, to work at hospital is our practice, without changing anything. For us, sociology is—those who understand religious way—for those who understand religious way, there is no sociology. Sociology [laughs] is itself, you know—without changing anything, that is religious activity for a man who knows how to help others. But [for] those who do not understand religious life, sociology [is] just sociology. And he will ignore religious life. So it will not work properly. Some confusion will be created. So that is why we—all of us should believe in—or all of us should have religious life.

But to seek for—but we have various science. We have—we should have science.

Student A: But then for a religious person there's really no such thing as help. Simply any religious person acts in each situation, reacts with each person in a way that's appropriate to that situation. There's no idea of "I am helping you." But it's simply, "This is what is to do now."

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student A: And so there's no—no idea of "I am helping another person."

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student A: Then you just do the right thing at the right time.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, yeah. [Laughs.] That is so. And, you know, he—now, you know in Western philosophy, they—they had to—normative consciousness, you know, in realm of ethics they had. Ethics is normative science. And religion is, you know, nearly—in Western philosophy it is nearly the same, you know. It is based on normative consciousness. And consciousness, you know—later when impressionism become popular, especially—consciousness itself comes from our experience [laughing]. Then there is no place for God, you know. Even the voice of conscience is result of our everyday experience, and then there is no seat for God.

So in this way, more and more, our life become far away from religion. Actually, you believe in Christianity. Many people believe in Christianity. But actually they are far from religion.

Student B: What is there about Buddhism which we don't know but which is always there?

Suzuki-rōshi: Why we say "don't know"—"don't know" means [laughs] "beyond science or philosophy." Philosophy is science, but—beyond science. Science is study of act- [partial word]—shadow of actual life [laughs]—study of dead corpse of human being [laughs, laughter]. So we say "beyond." But it is evident—what do you call it in English?—"ultimate truth"—"ultimate," not "truth," but "ultimate," you know, something—some—something which does not want any explanation [laughs]. Right there. That you suffer is, you know—no one can doubt that you have suffering now. As long as there is suffering, "you" is here.

Student B: What is Buddha?

Suzuki-rōshi: Buddha?

Student B: Yes.

Suzuki-rōshi: Buddha—"buddha" has many meanings, you know. Historical Buddha is—Buddha who attained enlightenment is Buddha. But in this case, to attain enlightenment—it does not mean who has—he did not² have buddha-nature before he attained enlightenment. He found out what he had. That is enlightenment. And he—this kind of person is enlightened person.

So—and when we do not—when we are confined in scientific world, we have no chance to find out the actual reality. So they are not buddha because they don't know it [laughs]. But when he is—he become aware

² Double negative: "It does not mean he did not have buddha-nature"

of true reality beyond science—more actual reality than science, or the man who found out science will not—do not satisfy him, he is buddha. That is enough, you know.

So—so in East—West that was called "normative consciousness." But if you say "normative consciousness," it—it—nearly—it is nearly the same as ethics. So maybe for Christianity [laughs] there is no difference between religion and ethics. I don't know. I must [laughs] say I don't know. But it looks like maybe so, you know. As long as they have absolute dogma, you know, that is: "You should not do so. If you do so, you will be," you know, "punished." This is nearly the same as ethics. As long as when you want to study, you know, you cannot go further. But Buddhism allow to discuss further more. You can criticize more. There is no barrier.

So that is why people are interested in Buddhism, because we have no, you know, borderline for religion.

Student C: Is it ever permissible to help others by killing?

Suzuki-rōshi: By killing?

Student C: I mean, would it be possible for a bodhisattva to be a soldier?

Suzuki-rōshi: No, I don't think so. Because human life is absolute—has absolute value.

Here there is contradiction between science and bodhisattva-mind. But here you have to deny the—the idea of utility or science. This is very subtle and very interesting. You know, someone asked me—it was last—was it last night?—if you—our law should punish people—a man who—who committed suicide [laughs, laughter]—along with a man [?] who killed—who killed someone else? That is true, you know. To—it is same—crime is the same as, and more serious to kill a person—to kill he himself than to kill some other person. He should protect his [laughs] buddha-nature. To protect his own buddha-nature is to protect others' buddha-nature, because others are a part of you.

So forgetting all about protecting himself [laughs], to protect others means just, you know, just dead rules. Just rules, you know. It means nothing for you—to you. When you want to help others or protect others, you can help others. There is no reason why you protect others. It is same thing to help yourself, you know—to, you know, to protect yourself from danger. That is pure bodhisattva's way.

So forgetting all about [laughs] helping himself, to try to help others is just moral rule—dead rules. And you are bound by the rules because

everyone say so because you will be punished by it. So you do it. That's all. You—so you don't kill others. So that is the—and if you kill others you are not human being any more [laughs]. That's the limit.

Student C: What is that person which is not a human being?

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student C: What is that person which is not a human being?

Suzuki-rōshi: You lose the meaning of "human being."

Student C: [Question mostly obscured by traffic noise.] But you would not live [3-4 words] what is it that changed? I mean, he doesn't physically go though being changed. But if I were to take out a revolver and put a bullet in your head, for example, would that make—it would make me less of a human being?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. You are animal.

Student C: An animal.

Suzuki-rōshi: An animal [laughing].

Student C: Ah.

Suzuki-rōshi: It is true. But you cannot be an animal [laughs]. But if you can [shoot me?], you are an—you are animal. There is no bottom in heaven and hell. Maybe if we do not—if we cannot be a human being, we may be the worst animal [laughs]. Cats and dogs much better than human animal. There is no bottom. The being having four—working with two legs, using two hands, and thinking something—"good and bad, half and half" [laughs]—if that will protect you as a human—you will be protected as a human being, that is big, big mistake. That is abuse of human body—human being. He abuse human being. He treat human being as a lowest enemy or creature. That's awful.

Student D: Was there enlightenment before the original—I mean, the historical Buddha?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, according to Buddha, there were—there were [laughs, laughter]. He was the seventh patriarch or buddha. Before he himself there were six buddhas.

Student D: How about before the first? Was there enlightenment before him?

Suzuki-rōshi: Before him? I—I—I don't know. [Laughs, laughter.] He counts many and many millions of years, but it means he is not only the [not the only] person who will attain enlightenment. Everyone—this is everyone's consciousness. So he—he is not only buddha. There are many—

Student D: So "the first" does not have the numerical meaning of being first? Is it just sort of all-pervading? "The first" or "the sixth" doesn't have much meaning?

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. First and sixth—it is rather, you know—it—it—he—it was—this kind of story was told by Buddha so that people may not make any mistake about—about him. You know, if he said, "I am the first one," people [laughs] will make big mistake [laughs, laughter]. So he said, "I am not the first one." But at the same time, he said, "This is not the first time for me to attained enlightenment. I attained enlightenment many and many times." It means, you know, his enlightenment is for everyone. Everyone has his enlightenment.

Student E: Why is fair to say [2-3 words] us to be enlightenment? Why—why are so few people enlightened?

Suzuki-rōshi: It m- [partial word]—why so few people?

Student E: Or are there lots of people? I mean, it's just—I didn't realize that there were a lot of people who were enlightened. Maybe there are.

Suzuki-rōshi: But that is want of right understanding of enlightenment. If you understand enlightenment is something which is difficult to attain, that is wrong understanding. [Laughs.] Did you understand what I said now? In—during *sesshin*?

Student E: In what?

Suzuki-rōshi: No? Did you—did you understand what I said, and do you agree with what I say—what I am saying? Then you are enlightened [laughs, laughter]. I think you are still, you know, thinking [laughs, laughter] or wondering—

Student E: I—I don't think I do understand. I mean, I'm trying to understand.

Suzuki-rōshi: You don't understand me [laughs]. Yeah, maybe so.

Student F: In this—in this way of helping each other [4-6 words] with words, and trying to convey meaning is very difficult. And it seems to me the—to be very important to—to be able to communicate with

another person. And I'd like to know—I say to myself, "What is preventing the lack of understanding when the words are being correctly used?" What is preventing, what is not listening, or what is the disturbance? What is preventing the penetration of this meaning?

Suzuki-rōshi: You yourself prevent it [laughs].

Student F: Obviously, but what can be done to help—how do you get through if there's no understanding—say, right now?

Suzuki-rōshi: If you—if you are confronting the problem you have, you will understand it.

Student F: But for the other person, how will he understand [1-2 words]?

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student F: How will the other person understand?

Suzuki-rōshi: Other person doesn't matter [laughs]. You. [Laughter.]

Student G: But when it does matter—when you have to [1 word]—

Suzuki-rōshi: No, no.

Student G: —or feel his innermost need [2-4 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: It doesn't matter.

Student G: Does it matter when you want to communicate, when you want to try to help the other person who is obviously [1-2 words]?

Suzuki-rōshi: It is—it—most important thing is to understand you yourself is most important thing.

Student F: Fine. And after that?

Suzuki-rōshi: After that? After that I don't know! [Laughs, laughter.] You know after that—you will know after that.

Student G: Your answer to that is still confusion in other people, and it is the reason why—

Suzuki-rōshi: You are still, you know, thinking. And you are not serious enough.

Student G: Now?

Suzuki-rōshi: You are not serious enough.

Student G: Now?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student G: Maybe not, but [?]-

Suzuki-rōshi: That is—that is, you know, trouble. No other [?] trouble [laughs].

Student G: I wonder if my question is understood.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student G: Huh?

Suzuki-rōshi: I understand.

Student G: Ah.

Suzuki-rōshi: Maybe [laughs, laughter] I understand your question more than you [laughter].

Student G: Obviously.

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughing.] Suffer a little bit more. Then you will understand.

Student H: Can you explain the connection between death or fear of death and zazen?

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. Yeah. That's very good question. Fear of death, you know, fear of death is in religious—for religious mind there is no fear of death. The fear of death exist in realm of thinking or emotional realm. When you, you know, attach to something, for an instance, you will have—that is the beginning of the fear of death. When you attach to your body, that is fear of death. And when you don't know what you will become of—what will become of you, you will, you know, become very uneasy. That is fear of death.

But for a man who has—who become aware of his inmost request or his inmost nature or his absolute nature, that is more important thing than your physical body. It is so. When you are not serious enough, you know, you—you have fear of death. But when you become very serious about you yourself, you will, you know, you will not afraid of—you will

not be afraid of to lose your body. That is what I am [laughs] telling him, you know.

Student I: What relationship does anyone who has studied Buddhism have to organizations that work against killing such as peace organizations or civil rights organizations?

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. Peace organization or—

Student I: Civil rights—civil rights organizations.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student I: Should one who is studying Buddhism have a relation to the world?

Suzuki-rōshi: I think Buddhist should have deep concern about those movement. Buddhist should concern if it is, you know, right. But we should not be mixed up, you know, just—organization itself and our true desire to help others. And the best way may be to allow true spirit of a peace movement for people is the best way, I think—

Student I: How do you—

Suzuki-rōshi: —in its true sense. So the most important things is to spread Buddhism—to make them known what is Buddhism is the best way. We cannot do it by number. We cannot use everyone's right—we cannot abuse everyone's right by number.³ This is very delicate question, I think.

But the most important thing is to realize the oneness of the human being. This problem should not be cut off from other problem. Sometime, you know, people do two opposite things. Some- [partial word]—in one hand [laughing], they work for civil rights, and on the other hand, they are doing something opposite. This kind of mistake is pretty common. So even something good should not be cut off from our life as a whole.

Even enlightenment should not be cut off from "me," you know. "Ten years ago I attained enlightenment. [Laughing, laughter.] But it doesn't work today." It is enlightenment ten years ago. It is impossible to cut off the enlightenment from my life and present the enlightenment to someone else. "This is my enlightenment." This is impossible. Enlightenment should be here, you know, now, in this moment.

So even though some movement is good [laughs], it shouldn't—should not be cut off from our everyday life. As a part of everyday life, we

³ By force of numbers?

should participate [in] the movement. Then movement will be successful. Only Sunday or [laughing] Saturday to join the movement—to make procession—that's not so good way, I think.

Student J: I'm very curious, Sensei—I mean, the purpose of these questions and the result of these concepts [?], and not that would appear to [4-5 words]. What does it mean to be serious? I mean, not—not just about something, but just to be serious? Is it something that—that we can say that we're familiar with? Or is it something that—

Suzuki-rōshi: When you are compelled to do something, that is serious.

Student J: Again, please?

Suzuki-rōshi: When you are compelled to do something, so that you will become very serious.

Student K: How could we understand our own discipline? That is, how can we—what attitude can we take towards discipline ourselves?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's very good question. And it is difficult to know by yourself, actually. So that is why it is better to practice with people. If there is some, you know, some set-up rules or, you know, explanation, it may be easier. But unfortunately, we are not same, you know. So the practice is for you, and you are practicing. So strictly speaking, there is no set-up hope [?] of practice. And there is no rule, strictly speaking, or no standard to say this is good or bad, or right or wrong. That is why we emphasize the buddha-nature. Unless—if you do not have the idea of buddha-nature or inmost request, you have to be concerned [with] some visible rules, and you have to be attached to something. And that will not work so good, you know. So the best thing is to confront with your problem. That is the best way. And to suffer and to struggle [laughs] is the best way. Then you will have more and more—your—you will have deeper and deeper religious experience.

Student L: Was there some distinction between having an idea of buddha-nature, or the word buddha-nature is [?]-and buddha-nature?

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. Bud- [partial word]-idea of buddha-nature. There is no idea of buddha-nature, you know.

Student L: Well, I seem to [2-3 words]. Until you have an idea of what buddha-nature is—

Suzuki-rōshi: There is no idea of buddha-nature or for buddha-nature. But there is many idea of many things. Se we count, or we qualify

various idea one by one. Then you will—something which is left [laughs] is idea of buddha-nature.

Student L: Yeah, well, when—when—when you have systematically [3-5 words] and gotten closer to the—you've eliminated all the wrong answers and the wrong ideas—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student L: —and are left with—with few possibilities and can—and narrowed the buddha-nature down to—to a smaller area, well then where do you go from there to buddha-nature? I mean—

Suzuki-rōshi: So already—concept—in your concept, you know, you will —your concept will be limit- [partial word]—of buddha-nature will be—will become smaller and smaller and smaller, you know. Not smaller, but like this [probably gestures] rather than like this.

Student L: Then it disappears?

Suzuki-rōshi: No. [Laughs, laughter.]

Student L: I mean [1-2 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: If it disappear, it's wonderful [laughs, laughter]. You know, there—you [the West?] tried for a long, long time to [laughs] take off the idea of holiness, you know, and establish human authority in intellectual realm. And they thought it will disappear [laughs], but fortunately or unfortunately it didn't [laughs]. So the idea of holiness itself still in—not question, but they found out it is impossible to, you know, to give some interpretation to it. It is like this so no way to catch it. If it is on the—some surface, it is easy—may be easy to pick up. But it is like this [probably gestures], so bottomless. And it is too deep to reach. But still we know [laughs, laughter]. We should acknowledge it, but it is impossible to take it up.

In—in that center we exist, you know. So if you try to understand you yourself, there is no way to reach you yourself. Even though you suffer and struggle for—if—even though you spent whole life to reach to yourself, it is impossible. It—so I think someone who attain perfect enlightenment—someone who say—who thinks he attained perfect enlightenment may be crazy [laughs]. The enlightenment is not such a psychological state of mind. Because of his poor understanding of our true nature, he can make such a hasty statement.

Student M: Isn't it true, Sensei, that any idea of the thought of enlightenment is an obstacle? You said about thinking [6-8 words]?

Suzuki-rōshi: If there is some obstacle, it may be easy to take it away, but [laughs] actually there is no obstacle. The o- [partial word]—the only obstacle which exist is the obstacle which do not exist.

Student M: All right. Fine. But still, but isn't it so that this—that this concern about the self—about enlightenment—whatever that is—and all that other stuff—isn't it—isn't that an obstacle?

Suzuki-rōshi: No, no. It does not—you cannot compare with the enlightenment with some other stuff.

Student M: Well, [1-2 words] it is true, I just object that—that—I meant to say that I think that quite possibly the idea of preconception is a hindrance or is an obstacle to [1-2 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. Obstacle—by "obstacle" I don't mean a pre- [partial word]—just preconception, or idea, or, you know—I mean the way—wrong way to try to reach it. The way is not right.

Student M: This is an obstacle, no?

Suzuki-rōshi: The—not—not obstacle, but way to reach is not right way. You are finding, you know, a fish on the tree [laughs]. That is obstacle.

Student N: Why—why do we keep dreaming—the dream of the self—why—of the small self? Why do we cling to it and not see it, or why else there would be [1-2 words] selfishness? Why does it seem so important that we can't see past it?

Suzuki-rōshi: Dream. I am sorry—I—I have very little knowledge about psychology.

Student N: No, no, but you used the word "dream" yesterday, I think, for the "dream of the small self." It-it's just a dream.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. "Dream" is the dream of small self, you know. But big self is—will admit the dreams comes out, you know. Then—so if you have—if you realize the big self—the dream will not bother you. The—you will welcome dreams. "Oh! That's very interesting!" [Laughs.] But if you, you know, if you have just—if you have no capacity or no—no container to—to accept the dream, you will suffer, that's all. Of course, it will have some meaning. But that is habitual—your habits, you know. It is like drinking or smoking or, you know, telling words—some good and bad habits [laughs]. Good and bad habits. Bad habits [laughs] will makes you dream, you know. The habits, I mean—in—in wide sense, if you—because you are too much to—attached to visible

world, you still have vision in your dream. But our visible world is not visible—is not—it—it is important, but—

Beacu- [partial word]—when we have, you know—we live in big invisible—invisible world. Visible world is not so big—big enough to be bothered by it. So, you know, to sit is to live in invisible big world. So sooner or later we may die, and we go to the same place when you sit. That is the place where you will go [laughs]. But for someone just to sit in dark room where there is no sound ...

[Sentence not finished. Tape turned over.]

... fear maybe. That is death. So for people who came out from zazen, there is no fear. For the people who is going to the, you know, zazen state, there is fear of zazen because they don't know exactly what it is.

So if you compare zazen experience and your everyday experience, which is important—which is—you cannot compare, you know, which is big or which is great. There is no parallel [?] even [laughs]. Maybe like this [laughs, probably gestures].

When this world is not yours, it is just a daydream, you know, to talk about math or, you know, cosmic existence, or [laughs] everything which exist. This is big, big statement. You may say, "He is crazy" [laughs], but when it is yours, you know, then no wonder to talk about it. The point is if you had your own mind, you will have your body, and you will have everything else. And wherever you go, that is your home.

But when you have—when you do not have your own mind, and your mind is some subject to study, or subject of psychological study, then you have no "you." You haven't your mind. You haven't your body. You have no home. And you have nowhere to live. That is why you suffer. Still you—you act, you exist. This part of [?] is very, very serious.

So just to have your own mind is the point. Then you will have everything. Then you can help others. Whatever you do, it's all right.

So the point is how do you—how you have your own mind is the purpose of zazen.

If you want to accept your mind, you have to accept everything with your mind [laughs]. It is impossible to accept just your mind [laughs]. Your mind always operates with something else [laughs]. It is impossible to accept just the essence of mind. You translate the *jishō*, or, in Chinese [English?], "essence of mind." But even though it is called "essence of mind," essence of mind cannot be deprived of. It wants always medium. So you have to accept the medium or mean[s]—mean[s] of practice. That is zazen [laughs].

We have to catch a fish with [1 word] [slaps hands together; laughs]—with a net. Without net you cannot catch fish. Our archbishop⁴ always talk about salt. Salt—salt itself is bitter [laughs]. No one likes salt. But if you take it with food, it is delicious [laughs]. If you take it with vegetables, it is delicious. That is how we, you know, appreciate salt and how we appreciate buddha-nature with something.

So if you are not alert enough, you have to suffer [laughs]. Then you will know what is buddha-nature. We are usually very dull and dumb. So we want a lot of suffering, maybe.

We are not like historical Buddha. For him it was not so difficult, even though he was in his court with delicious food and beautiful palace, and many servants, and many waitress. Still he was, you know, sensitive enough to realize the true nature of himself. But for us it is not so easy [laughs].

So I think for—for you American people, it is—it may be pretty difficult to understand—to catch the fish. But if you catch it, it will be a big, big fish [laughs, loud laughter]. By long time you will—long time difficulty, you will catch whale. We shall be very glad if you even catch [?] the tail of the fish or some—what do you call it [laughs]? We don't want the meat—the tiny—what do you call it—scale?—scale of the fish is enough.

Thank you very much.

Source: Transcribed verbatim from original tape by Bill Redican (11/9/00).

⁴ Togen Sumi, who came from Los Angeles for part of the *sesshin: Wind Bell*, 1965, IV (4), p. 1.