

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Sesshin Lecture: SHUSHŌGI, Section 1
Sunday, March 13, 1966¹
Lecture B
Soko-ji, San Francisco

Tape operator: Recorded March—March 13, 1966, Soko-ji Zen Temple, a lecture by Reverend Suzuki on the *Shoshōji* [sic]. Huh?

Second voice: *Shushōgi*.

Tape operator: Is it? A lecture on the *Shushōgi*. [Laughter.]

Suzuki-rōshi: We started to recite *Lotus Sūtra—Shushōgi*. *Shushōgi* is the—consist of various teachings from *Shōbōgenzō* written by Dōgen-zenji. From 95 fascicle of his work, we compiled various teaching in a handy way so that you can recite it. This is *Shushōgi*.

I want to explain *Shushōgi*—the meaning of *Shushōgi* little by little. *Shushōgi*. This is translate—translation by Doctor [Reihō] Masunaga, Page 48.²

To arrive at thorough understanding of birth and death—this is a crucial problem for all Buddhists. If the Buddha dwells in birth and death, birth and death disappear. Understand only that birth-and-death is itself nirvāna; there is nothing to avoid as birth-death and nothing to seek as nirvāna. You then slough off the chain that bind you to birth-death. This—the supreme problem in Buddhism—must be thoroughly penetrated.

The problem of birth and death—this is actually the big problem. The problem of—when we say problem of birth and death, we mean suffering of this world—birth and death. You may say birth is not suffering, but birth is suffering, and death is suffering too [2 words unclear]. When we say birth and death, we mean birth and death, not just physical pain or fear of—mental fear of death or birth. But this problem is vital problem for human being—not just physical or mental problem. Because of this suffering, we can live in this world. And because of this suffering, we have to study more. And because of this suffering—result of this suffering, sometime we fight [laughs]. This is

¹ This date is probably incorrect. On Sunday, 19 June 1966 (Lecture A), Suzuki-rōshi mentioned that he would be lecturing on *Shushōgi* on Wednesday. If the date of that lecture is correct, then the date of the present lecture would be 22 June 1966.

² Reihō Masunaga, trans., "Shushōgi: True Meaning of Training and Enlightenment," in *Zen for Daily Living*. Tōkyō: Shunjū-sha Publishing Co., Nov. 1964, pp. 43-55. Suzuki-rōshi is reading Section 1.

fundamental problem of human life. So this suffering is not just suffering of human being—mental or physical suffering.

Mental suffering or physical suffering is—we say one of the—we say *ju*³—one of the five *skandhas*. But this suffering is not suffering. This suffering include all human suffering, including mental and physical suffering. The Sanskrit—in Sanskrit, we say *duhkha*. *Duhkha* means it—it wouldn't go—it doesn't go away. Why our life does not go away, or why human being has various problem is because of this suffering. And why we suffer is because we have attachment or love. But [by] "love" here we mean some attachment. We always attach to something. Because of this attachment, we fight. Because of this attachment, we find this world very disagreeable—because we feel some restriction. We want to do something, but there is many restriction. Because we attach to freedom too much, so we cannot act as we want. We cannot live exactly [as] we want. This is fundamental cause of suffering.

So we say "thirsty love." Thirsty love is to, you know, to crave for something and to attach to something. And we feel as if we cannot live without some attachment to some special thing. Sometime you may say it's much better to die if I lose this valuable thing. That is suffering. This suffering is more than—more deeper than problem of just physical or mental death—birth or—and death. But people do not know why we have so much trouble in this world. And instead of reflecting on our life, we want to—to establish some perfect world where there is no suffering—perfect world. This is also, you know, from Buddhist viewpoint, wrong—wrong way. It is because there is no perfection in this world. This is just attachment to the idea of perfection, and this is actually the cause of suffering—cause of world [word?]. And you may feel very pessimistic or sad, as I felt when I was young, when you hear this world is not constant.

In Japan, when I was young, they were striving for—to their descendant to save some money to build some beautiful, strong house for their descendant. But if they are fortunate—if they are lucky, they will be successful in building beautiful house, having big property, and a lot of money. But this fortune he build up will not last long. We say "third generation." They will put notice on their house—house to [laughs] sell or rent. "House to rent" for third generation [laughs]. "House to rent" for third generation. And my member⁴ used to say to me that, "You are third generation from [laughs]—from your master.

³ *ju* (Jap.): Perception arising as a result of contact with an external object. One of the five *skandhas* (San. *pañca-skandha*; Jap. *goun*) or aggregates that constitute the elements of the phenomenal world.

⁴ Possibly a member of the Rinso-in temple congregation or *danka*. "Third generation" may refer to his father Butsumon Sogaku Suzuki, his master Gyokujun So-on Suzuki, and himself.

So you have to be careful." [Laughs.]

And their warning at last came to true [laughs], and I came to America [laughs, laughter]. My temple is now house to—temple to rent [laughs, laughter]. And my boy is striving for to take over [laughs] notice "House to rent." This is our life, but when you are young, this is not so, you know, so critical or some cold observation of the—our life.

So in this truth there is no exception—no exception [laughs]. We should know that. No exception. All of us—all of human being should be prepared for this truth. All the cultures—all the human cultures must suffer this suffering without exception. So from this point of view, our human history is the succession of suffering—human suffering. How we suffered—we have had suffered is our human history. Do you say Rome—Rome is not—do not last long? We—that is true. For everything that is true. If you ignore this point and attach or seize the prosperity you have, you will make big mistake. And you should be always prepared for next act or next stage.

When you are prepared for next step, then your culture is quite sound and strong. But when you just attach to the prosperity you have, this is very dangerous stage. It is not matter of—of power or wealth. There is strict controlling power—strict truth to everything. That is powerful enough to deny all the human power and wealth. No spiritual power doesn't work on this point. This is Buddha's teaching. And how we live in this world is Buddha's teaching.

This kind of suffering we mean is very deep and has been very critical to—to the people who has too much self-centered idea. So to appear means to disappear. That something disappear—only something that disappears is true existence. Something which does not disappear is illusion. Don't you think so? It is illusion because everything disappears [laughs] without any exception. So if you say this one—this flower does not disappear or die, that is illusion. When you think this flower will die pretty soon, that is real flower.

So something which does not disappear from this world is illusion for ourselves. So if you want to live—if you want to enjoy your prosperity, you should be prepared for the next step. If something you attach [to] disappear, what you will do next is a problem [laughs]. You should be prepared for next step. Something which is going should go [laughs], and we should work on something new. It is foolish to, you know, to try to bring back something which is going. This is very silly way of life. Something which comes should be welcome. As soon as it come, it will go [laughs, laughter].

So we have to be prepared for this situation—this kind of situation. And to have to face—to be prepared to face this kind of situation is our

spirit, and to have this spirit is true spirit to live in this world. So to know [that] this world is world of suffering is wisdom. And to accept this kind of suffering is our true nature. If so, our history of human being from Buddha to us—the history of unfolding of true nature—true nature revealing—revealed itself through our human life. This strict truth and strict way of earth [?] unfolded itself from Buddha to us. This is another, you know, interpretation of human history. So our history of human being is history of suffering. And for Buddhist, it is history of true spirit—unfolding of true spirit.

So here we have the perfect understanding of birth and death. If so, this true understanding of birth and death—in other word, true understanding of suffering is nirvāna itself—the unfolding of nirvāna or unfolding of buddha-nature.

I don't want to be too—too critical [laughs] to our civilization, but most of you—most of us are already pretty critical to our civilization, and this is the time where we should let our civilization go [laughs] and try to establish new civilization. Something which is going should go [laughs]. There is no way to take them back. The sun is going there, so how can you pull the sun back to east again? The sun is just going; no one is responsible for that. No particular person is not responsible for that. It is just going, by nature [laughs].

So in this sense to live in this world is actually the suffering itself. But this suffering—if you prepare to accept the suffering and create it enough—vigorous enough to create new civilization, then you are following the truth. If you reflect on ourselves, what kind of effort we are making, you will find out how Buddhism is necessary for us to believe in.

This century, especially from Second World War or even before the Second World War, we came—our civilization reached some point where we have to think more. And if you—if people still making the same effort, you have to be [laughs] rather critical to [laughs]—to their effort, because you know what kind of effort they are making—the useless effort.

We cannot be—we cannot help being critical. It is the effort some people are making is too ridiculous. But at the same time, we should be—we should not forget this point, what we make—what makes us critical? On what ground you become critical is—should be at the same time reflected—to be reflected. Some people become critical and their criticism is based on some—also some perfection—to, you know, to favor [?] some perfect social framework. This is also mistake. They will repeat same error because of their perfectionism. There is nothing perfect in this world. Where we live, nothing perfect. And we—we have nothing to worthwhile to attach because there is

nothing perfect.

So even though it is not perfect, something—some effort should be done. Even though it is not perfect, something new must be welcome. But it does not mean that is perfect [laughs]. So at the same time we have no excuse to force your way. You may call it collectivism—collectivism: to do something by group. This is not [laughs]—that is forcing your way on someone else. For an instance, Communistic way may be good, but the big mistake is the idea of the perfect, last framework of society. There is no last framework of society in this world. The—our social framework should be renewed and renewed and renewed. Their idea is not perfect at all. So here they have big mistake. What they are thinking is maybe good, but when they try to force their way to others by number, by strength, by material, or political power, that is big mistake.

So in short, we have our spiritual kingdom within ourselves. No one can invade into our spiritual kingdom. Our spiritual effort will provide better—better framework for our society, and this effort should be continued forever as long as human being exist. There is no time where—there is no—there is not necessary to make any effort, relying on some social structure. So everyone should have spiritual kingdom within ourselves. If this point is ignored, there is no human being in this world. We will become good pet [laughs]—pet of some social pet in or animal in the zoo [laughs]. Even though we may have good—something good to eat [laughs], temperature of the—our room may be perfect [laughs] for us. But we cannot—as long as we are human being, we will not be satisfied with perfect zoo. This point is very important for us. So some suffering is indispensable element for human being. Because we have some problem, to work on it we are human being. If there is no problem to work on it, we become animal in the zoo [laughs].

So to realize that we are in the world of suffering is to realize that we are in nirvāna. That is oneness of birth and death and nirvāna.

[Aside in Japanese.]

So we want to repeat his translation again:

To arrive at a subtle understanding of birth and death is—birth and death—this is the crucial problem for all Buddhist. If Buddha dwells in birth and death, birth and death disappear.

"To arrive at subtle understanding of birth and death." Birth and death is suffering, you may say. We count four suffering: birth, death, and old age, and illness. Birth and death is actually suffering. So, "to arrive at subtle understanding of birth and death," which is

suffering, "this is a crucial problem for all Buddhist. If the Buddha dwells in birth and death, birth and death disappear." Buddha's spirit and birth and death is one thing—actually one. So when we say Buddha, there is no birth and death. When we say birth and death, Buddha will be [1 word], because suffering itself nirvāna and Buddha.

So:

If Buddha dwells in birth and death, birth and death disappear because it is one. Understand only that birth-and-death is itself nirvāna.

So you will understand, as I said, birth and death is one.

There is nothing to avoid as birth and death.

So there is nothing about—we should welcome our problem, and we should always work on our problem. We should not attach to anything. We should work on new problem.

There is nothing to avoid as birth and death. Nothing to seek as nirvāna. You will then slough off the great chains that you—that bind you to birth and death.

You are always confined in the problem and you are always making vain effort. But if you realize this point, there is no more chain to bind you.

This, the supreme problem in Buddhism must be thoroughly penetrated.

Must be thoroughly understood.

Thank you very much.

If you want those texts, we have about forty of them now. And price is one dollar fifty.

Source: Original City Center tape. Verbatim transcript by Adam Tinkham and Bill Redican (4/24/01).