

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
September 1967
Zen Mountain Center
Tassajara

Student: Please come up front if you'd like.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, please come nearer.

Student: Those in the back come up to the front, please.

Suzuki-rōshi: Tonight my talk will be quite informal. You are, of course, interested in Zen. But Zen is also Buddhism, you know. So it is necessary for you to understand Buddhism in general. Although it will not help you—my talk will not help you immediately, but it is necessary for you to have some understanding of original teaching of Buddha, and, at the same time, various understanding of original teaching of Buddha or else, I am afraid, you will miss the point.

Tonight I want to talk about the three-fold body of Buddha. The other day, Bishop Sumi¹ explained about what is the various understanding of Buddha, like historical Buddha, buddha as a—as the truth, and buddha as a teaching or dharma. This concept originated from, of course, historical Buddha, who is so great. And he was so great that Hīnayāna Buddhism—Buddhist or [are?] direct disciple of Buddha, had a kind of supernatural nature of form—some—some supernatural being—idea of supernatural being like Buddha who had the 32 marks² or eighty holy figures. Those concept already—already formed some Buddha as a embodiment of the truth—of Buddha who attained buddhahood after unusual practice. So in Mahāyāna school—Hīnayāna Buddhist had no such elaborate aspects of Buddha, but Mahāyāna Buddhist started—had the three aspects of Buddha. And this three aspect forms a trinity, like three [pre-?] Buddhistic religion.

The three form is Buddha as a historical being who has his own body. But Buddha, who—the teaching which was told by historical Buddha was the truth itself. So here we have the idea of truth and idea of teaching. The idea of teaching and idea of truth forms—form idea of Dharmakāya Buddha. And the Buddha who had an image of character forms the idea of Sambhogakāya Buddha. Here—so we have Buddha as a embodiment of the truth, and Buddha as a truth, and—and Buddha who attained buddhahood after his long practice. Here we have the three aspects of Buddha.

And this three aspects of Buddha was necessary for Mahāyāna Buddhist to

¹ Sumi Togen, who succeeded Yamada Reirin as head (bishop) of the Sōtō Zen School in America in 1965. He was formerly an instructor of monks at Sōji-ji.

² The *Lotus Sūtra*, for example, refers to the "thirty-two marks and eighty subsidiary characteristics" by which a buddha is traditionally recognized.

become buddha or possibility of attaining buddhahood. For Hīnayāna Buddhists, it was not possible to attain buddhahood because Buddha was so great that they didn't think—they did not imagine—even imagine the possibility of being Buddha.

But Mahāyāna Buddhists put emphasis on the buddhahood which is possible for them to attain. Here Buddhism—Buddha became more religious. The Buddha for Hīnayāna Buddhist is some unusual person, something quite different from human being. But Buddha for Mahāyāna Buddhist is someone who is like every one of us. So they put emphasis on buddha-nature. So Dharmakāya Buddha actually—the express the essential nature of every one of us. That is Dharmakāya Buddha. Because we have potentiality, after long practice it is possible for us to attain buddhahood. And every one of us is nothing but the embodiment of the Buddha. Here Buddhism becomes more popular or more reli- [partial word]—took a form of religion rather than some special teaching.

This was—this development was very important for Buddhism—or for the development [?] of Buddhism because Hīnayāna Buddhism become—became more and more formal, and their teaching became more and more philosophical or verbal. They had a strict distinction between laymen and priesthood. But in Mahāyāna Buddhism, there was not much difference between Buddhism in—for laymen and Buddhism for priests or monks because the potentiality for—to be buddha for everyone was emphasized. So whether they are man or woman, whether they are priest or layman, they get together in Buddha's pagoda, and recite sūtras, and practiced various formal practice.

As you know, Buddha—although Buddha's body or ash was divided in six [eight?] and enshrined [in] various place—places, but they did not worship Buddha's ash. It was a time when Mahāyāna Buddhism became more and more powerful. But we started to enshrine Buddha's relics, building pagoda, and various religious activity were observed by people. So they have to have this kind of definition or aspects or understanding of Buddha: buddha as a truth, buddha as a—our true nature or buddha as in every one of us, or buddha as a historical Buddha. So they had already clear distinction between buddha as a—our own nature and historical Buddha. And yet, those understand- [partial word]—those three bodies of Buddha is one. One include the other.

Although Buddhism became very common, but philosophically Buddhism became more and more deeper. In this way, Buddhism was developed as a religion and as a philosophy too. This is how Buddhism developed, and why we have the three aspects of Buddha.

And in Hīnayāna Buddhism, their—the sūtra was—were not so philosophical—the teaching was not so diffic- [partial word]—philosophical. But in

Mahāyāna Buddhism we have three—we call it "three baskets"³ of [laughs] —not "baskets," but—three kinds of scriptures: philosophical one,⁴ and something told by Buddha as a teaching,⁵ and scriptures about precepts—precepts observation.⁶ And philosophy—philosophical aspects of understanding of teaching developed in Mahāyāna school or Mahāyāna Buddhism.

There are many "three," you know, number in our teaching: three kinds of scriptures, three-fold body, or three fields [?] of the teaching. Those are—as a Buddhist, we should know those—we must have this kind of knowledge, just as a knowledge. Those teaching or those understand- [partial word]—aspects of our teaching were the background of Zen. So it is necessary for us to have those understanding or background of Zen, as well as our practice.

If you have some question, please ask. As we have not much *dokusan*, so if you have some question, please—any question, you are welcome. Please ask question.

Student A: Is Mahāyāna Buddhism also known as the second way?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mahāyāna Buddhism?

Student A: Is it known as the second way?

Suzuki-rōshi: Second way?

Student A: Yes.

Suzuki-rōshi: Second way. Oh, excuse me. What do you mean—the sec- [partial word]?

Student A: I was reading someplace about the second way as being the way of total annihilation [?] of life as a goal, rather than going into life.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mahāyāna Buddhism? No. We say "Mahāyāna Buddhism," but there are many, you know, teachings in Mahāyāna Buddhism. And the Kegon school, you know, classifies our teaching in three, you know. Or we —Kegon school—not class- [partial word]—yes, classified—has three aspects in understanding of teaching. So if the understanding is poor, that is, you know, the second way—not perfect understanding. And if the

³ The *Tripitaka*, the Buddhist canon. In present usage, "baskets" is quite common.

⁴ The *Abhidharma-pitaka*: Buddhist psychology and philosophy.

⁵ The *Sūtra-pitaka*: The discourses of Shākyamuni Buddha.

⁶ The *Vinaya-pitaka*: Monastic regulations as well as a history of the Buddhist *sangha*.

understanding is good, that is perfect understanding. And that perfect understanding cannot be attained by just intellectual understanding. That is the Tendai's canon. You see? And this is the, you know—of course this is true with Zen too. This is another—maybe I will—I must explain some other time, you know, the three aspects of—understanding from three aspects.

If you—if you study the various canon of various school, you will understand why it is necessary to practice zazen, you know [laughs]. The various schools suggest us to practice zazen. That is why we practice zazen [laughs]. Do you understand? So our practice is based on the canon of various school, you know. So Zen include, or Zen is based on all the Buddhism, all the schools of—all the teaching of many schools. Or Zen is the result of many—result of effort of many scholars of many schools. Do you understand? Zen is not something special. In other word, Zen is not one of thirteen schools, you know. Zen include the thirteen schools of Buddhism. If you understand Zen, you will understand other schools. The gist of the teaching is Zen, but not teaching—but, you know, you can say "teaching" in its wide sense. *Hai*.

Student B: Now that the weather is cold, how can we concentrate when we're, like, chilled in the morning?

Suzuki-rōshi: Chilled? Oh—

Student B: Like, when we're really cold, like, not from the outside but we're cold—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student B: —and it's sort of inside our clothes.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student B: How can we get our meditation back and our concentration through the tenseness of being cold?

Suzuki-rōshi: [Laughing.] I understand how you feel [laughter], but nevertheless, you know, you shouldn't—we say, "Sick or cold will not kill you, but wrong practice will kill you." [Laughter.] Even though it is cold, you know, you should do that. You see, it will be the chance or occasion to realize the truth. The cold weather or some difficulty in your practice will give you some chance to attain enlightenment or to practice real practice. When it is cold, it—you should practice it because it is a good chance to practice. Then—this is rather, I think, traditional way of realizing our true nature.

We have various desires, you know. But by stopping it, by taking negative

attitude towards your desire, you will realize your true nature, more than—rather than to have positive, you know, attitude towards your desires. It does not mean to annihilate your desires, but by stopping it—to take negative attitude towards your desire.

That negative attitude result [in] the true understanding of the desire itself, or human nature itself, or buddha-nature itself. So if it is cold, you shouldn't wear too much [laughs]. I think you wear too—when you sit you [wear] too warm clothing. It is not—not that cold, so it's much better not to wear too many, you know, clothing.

Some other question?

Student C: Around here it's very easy not to get too attached to food and sit around thinking about well, when's it time to eat and all this sort of thing, because your mind just isn't going in that direction. But say, like, at home, if you are in the kitchen a lot and the kitchen is a combination kitchen and family room, and all the life centers around the kitchen, and you're in kitchen all day, now what do you do if you have this problem: Like, since I've been sitting, all my senses have gotten sharp, and food tastes better now. So what do I do, you know, like, if I—if I just have something to eat that ordinarily I wouldn't even care about—it tastes—that simple thing tastes so marvelous now, that I'm looking for some more where that came from [laughter], you know. Well then—you know what I mean?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah [laughter].

Student C: Pretty soon I'm sitting in the kitchen, and eating and eating and eating, you know? Well what do you do?

Suzuki-rōshi: Ohhh. [Laughter.] You soon will realize your nature by negative practice. For all religion, negative, you know, practice is necessary. We sh- [partial word]—you know, we should not always pick positive attitude only. Positive and negative—both attitude is necessary, but negative one is the most important practice. This is very true.

Student D: I'm a little confused. What is a negative attitude?

Suzuki-rōshi: Negative attitude? Negative attitude is to—to eat [?] your —our food and to practice in—under some difficult circumstances, and to refrain from some various, you know, activity—various, you know, like sexual activity, or negative attitude towards various desires [laughs] [1 word unclear] [laughs] which something aroused, you know. We have to think more on this point, at least. *Hai*.

Student E: You don't mean "suppress" desires, do you, by "thinking negative" about them.

Suzuki-rōshi: Hm?

Student E: You don't mean "suppressed," do you?

Suzuki-rōshi: Suppress?

Student E: Yes.

Suzuki-rōshi: Suppress.

Student: [Aside.] Confine.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student E: You don't mean "feel guilty about it," do you, Sensei, or—? [Laughs, laughter.] Or say that it's bad, or something like that, or do you mean just not to do it?

Suzuki-rōshi: If you feel guilty about it, it will help you [laughs, laughter]. "Don't feel guilty." If I say, "Don't feel guilty," it looks like I'm [laughs], you know—I'm making some excuse for something. That is not—that is not matter of discussion, you know. It is rather—it is matter of practice or experience. You should not be blind, you know, in what you do, even though it is fundamental instinct. You sh- [partial word]—you must have—you must open your eyes to those activities. You should not ignore it, you know. At least you should have positive and negative [attitude?]. And it is—as it is difficult to have negative attitude, we should try to be negative.

Student F: The word "negative" has a very—it leaves a very bad taste in my mouth. It has very bad associations with me, and I think it does with a lot of people.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student F: I don't really quite understand what you mean when you say "negative."

Suzuki-rōshi: If it is—if the word "negative" create bad feeling, it's all the better [laughs, laughter]. It is, you know, [not?] the matter of you like it or not, you know—like the teaching or not. But what I mean is actual experience, you know. It is not matter of you like our teaching or not. So it is necessary for you to, you know, to open your mind to your true nature. You see, as long as you are, you know, trying to ignore one side, I don't think you can understand our true nature. What will happen if you die? That is the most negative experience [laughs]. But whether you like it or not, you will die someday [laughs]. Remember—just remember what I said, you know, and open your eyes, [be] more and more careful or more

alert. And more careful with ... [*Sentence not finished. Gap in tape of unknown interval.*]

... feel your desire more, and you will attain the freedom from various desires, and you can change one desire to the other. It is like a blind man can hear better than, you know—better than usual person.

Student F: What you're saying is that you should put the snake in the small can.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh. Put the snake in straight [laughter]—Nāgārjuna said, you know, "How will you put a snake straight in?" He asked, you know, someone, "How can you make a snake straight?" [Laughs.] As no one, you know, couldn't answer, he said, "Put it in straight bamboo or a pipe" [laughs]. That is a way to—to make a snake straight, and snake will know what is his nature. If he is like this [presumably making a waving gesture], you know, he doesn't know his own nature.

Negative and positive is very important, like a rope, you know. If you twist two, you know, rope in two, like this [gestures], that is negative and positive. One rope cannot make—by one—just one rope—just one material we cannot make a rope, we say.

Student G: Sensei, didn't Buddha do that? Didn't he get down to one grain of rice a day? Didn't he deny himself a whole bunch of things when he talked about the middle way?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. That is not too [to?], you know—his practice—difference between asceticism and Buddha's way was, his way—asceticism, you know, practiced that way—in that way, limiting their food or sleep to attain something, or to be born in some heaven, or something like that. He had—they had some—some purpose—they practiced it for some purpose. But Buddha found the truth in that practice. The practice itself is the goal. This is very, I think—

Student H: Do you think fasting is good practice?

Suzuki-rōshi: Fasting?

Student H: Yes.

Suzuki-rōshi: Good practice for what [laughs]? That is, you know—

Student H: For mastering desire or thinking negatively about desire, whatever is troubling the spirit.

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. If so, you know, there will be no need to fast, you know, for many days, for an instance. That is a kind of practice, but that is

not our practice. Even though you do not fast, you can practice it, you know, in the most usual way.

This is very important point. We have to think more about this point. I think you already have some, you know, some doubt or—not "doubt," but you are wondering—you may wonder why I say this kind of—why I talk about negative or positive attitude towards our desires. But I myself have no answer to it.

Student I: Is there a difference between negative desires and positive desires?

Suzuki-rōshi: No, that is one.

Student I: It's the same thing to kill someone and to love someone?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Two aspects or two kinds of attitude we take.

Student I: Does that mean that we should suppress both?

Suzuki-rōshi: Excuse me—two?

Student I: Does that mean that we should—that we should—

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student I: —suppress these desires, to love and to hate?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, sometimes it is necessary. And it is necessary, and you are doing it [laughs].

Student J: Well, what about sincerity, okay?

Suzuki-rōshi: Sincerity?

Student J: That's a very positive thing.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Sincerity—

Student J: If you suppress it, what do you have?

Suzuki-rōshi: Not—that is not sincerity, do you think?

Student J: I don't know. I get confused on things like sincerity and, you know, compassion.

Suzuki-rōshi: Sincerity or compassion—if I say "sincerity" or "compassion," you—you may think that is very positive statement, but it is

not actually so. Sincerity—just positive sincerity or, you know, positive compassion is not true compassion. You know, when you want to say to someone—sometime you will hate it if you are sincere. If you know what will it mean—what does it mean by some statement, you will be very careful. That is already negative. Even though you want—you want to eat more, sometime you—you will hesitate to eat, you know, as much as you want. Without this kind of attitude, you cannot live.

Positive one is not always positive in its true sense, you know. Which is stronger—stronger person: a man who beat you or a man who is beating—no—who is beat—beat—beat [laughs, laughter] [having trouble finding the correct word]—

Students: Beaten.

Suzuki-rōshi: —beaten. Or beat.

Students: Being beaten.

Suzuki-rōshi: Being beaten, yeah. Which is stronger? You should be—it is easy to beat someone, but it is not so easy to be beaten without any, you know—not much difficulty, or to bear from being—to be patient in being beaten [by] someone. *Hai*.

Student K: Is it ever all right to be positive? I mean, is it ever all right to say yes to your desires?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes? To say yes or—

Student K: Yeah.

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student K: Is it all the same—no one is supposed to have for, you know—supposed to [1 word unclear], or—I don't know.

Suzuki-rōshi: No, I don't think so [laughs, laughter]. Those are, you know—actual experience will tell you, you know. But if we say "religion," you know, we—you think—will think religion will give you some, you know, advantage in taking some pleasure, or in having some excuse in doing some positive things always, that is not true.

Student K: It seems to me, though, that it is nothing wrong with enjoying eating or sex or sleeping—just in being attached—

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Student K: —and—and in wanting [it] when it's not there. So—so—I

don't, you know—like—like if there's some way so that you can, you know, just really enjoy eating as long as the food is in front of you, and then—and then it's gone—not think about it?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student K: And then is it all right to say yes and eat?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yes, if it is so, it is all right. Nothing wrong with it. But it is not always so [laughs, laughter].

Student L: This teaching sounds as if we're supposed to fight with ourselves, from the time we're born to the time we die. I would like to get to the point where I wouldn't be continually fighting with myself.

Suzuki-rōshi: Fighting. [Laughs.] That is your understanding—

Student L: Yes.

Suzuki-rōshi: —of your life, you know. That act- [partial word]—that is not actually fighting, you know—[rather, it is] developing your desires—how to develop your desires, you know. The understanding—different understanding of one practice. If you say you are fighting with your desires, it may be so [laughs]. I cannot deny the statement, "I am fighting with myself." But that is not, you know, perfect expression of our way.

Oh [probably sees the time]. [Laughs.] Let's, you know [laughs], study more about this. I—I am so glad if you are that you [are] concerned [about] my talk [laughs, laughter] so much. That is not my problem [laughs]—your problems are to be study more—not to, you know—problem of Buddhism or [laughs] buddhas or Zen.

Actually there is no rule, you know. There is rules, but the rules is not always observed in the same way [laughs]. Your practice mostly will be right when the practice is forced on you—mostly it is pure. But if you practice by your own choice, there are many danger of having some wrong element in it—in your motivation—motives. "I have to do it," you know, "because someone told me. As long as I am here in this monastery, I have to observe in this way. So I do it." This kind of practice will result in more—more, rather than you practice it by your own choice. This is very true. If you become more sincere about your practice, and if you become more conscientious about your practice, you will find it very true.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript originally transcribed by Brian Fikes and checked by Mel Weitsman. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked

against tape and made verbatim by Adam Tinkham and Bill Redican (4/6/01).