

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**Monday, July 28, 1969**  
**Tassajara**

<sup>1</sup>... mind. That is the purpose of counting. Not just count, you know.

**Student A:** But, like, in daily life, are we to count when we are walking, or would you just walk?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** In daily life if you walk as a practice of Zen, you know, you, you know, you steady [steadily] walk step-by-step like you count your breathing. *Hai.*

**Student B:** Rōshi, I found in the past three months at Tassajara that I've uncovered tremendous anger in myself from time to time—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Uh-huh.

**Student B:** —with no fixed object, just great force of anger.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Uh-huh.

**Student B:** Can you tell me what the root of that is and how to deal with it—that anger?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Maybe your confidence is not strong enough. That is why you become angry. You see, you have, you know—I think most people, you know, try to solve psychological—special conditions by psychology, you know, by knowing why, you know, and by knowing how to treat it, you know, like a mother treat their children, you know. But our way is a little bit different from that. Actually, you know, for an instance, I am very impatient, you know. But sometime I sh- [partial word]—I may—I shall be most patient person. Why is it? [Laughs] Same person, you know, sometime became—become very patient, and sometime very impatient. When I think I should not be angry, I am never angry. [Laughs.]

That is possible, and that will not create any trouble—psychological trouble to you. If—if you have a kind of wisdom, you know, you do not—I—I'm not trying to control my anger, you know. But I know, you know, I shouldn't be angry, you know. My wisdom tell me, you know, you shouldn't be angry for one year or two years [laughs]. And it may be foolish to be angry. Then I don't be angry. And when you say it is difficult to control, to me it sounds like you—you want some help, you know [laughs]—help of psychology or psychiatrist or teacher. But he—they will not help you. Buddhism will not help you [laughs]. You must help yourself. *Hai.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Opening words were not recorded on tape.

**Student C:** You spoke a minute ago about direct experience—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Uh-huh.

**Student C:** —of truth—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah.

**Student C:** —through practice.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Uh-huh.

**Student C:** It seems like most of us today don't believe in absolutes—in absolute truths—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Uh-huh.

**Student C:** —or in absolute truth. And you said also that, like, this truth cannot be apprehended, you know, through understanding.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm.

**Student C:** It must be direct experience.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm.

**Student C:** I mean, this is a standard thing we hear that now, I think, anyway—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah.

**Student C:** —that there are no absolutes. Everything is, you know, must be seen in the context of the time—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm.

**Student C:** —and the place and the situation—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah, yeah.

**Student C:** —and that sort of thing.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm.

**Student C:** And this makes me wonder whether this may be connected to what you said earlier about our seeking meaning, because if we firmly believe that there are no—you know, nothing is absolutely true or right—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm.

**Student C:** —or good—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm.

**Student C:** —then what, you know, I—then what is the meaning of—of a—of—of this? And so you—I'm just sort of thinking this out loud.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah. That's a good question. And that is the point. You should make effort. Usually absolute truth, you know, means something you cannot change. That is absolute truth. But we don't think there is such a thing like you say "absolute truth." When I say "absolute truth" means, you know—the meaning is quite different. Absolute truth is the truth which reveal itself on various form and color. That much, I think, everyone will understand it.

**Student C:** I don't understand, because all—if all I see are the changing forms and colors—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**Student C:** —always changing and all. And—and I can't see the absolute truth that—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah, you cannot see [laughs], so still you are seeking for, you know—

**Student C:** To see, yeah.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** —something you can understand.

**Student C:** Yeah, right, right.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah, that is not the way to understand the absolute we mean. So, you know, maybe only way is to know nothing is permanent. Nothing is completely right [?] or [?] good [?]. We should know this fact completely. And you should not, you know, try to seek for something absolutely right. And you shouldn't try to depend on something. Then, you know, you—what you will do is, you know, to appreciate things you see or you have now, right now. If so, the thing you have has the absolute, you know, meaning to you whether it is beautiful or ugly doesn't matter. You don't compare one thing to the other. If you—when you compare something to some other thing you have, you must have some standard or measurement. That measurement is not completely right, you know. This is just tentative, you know, measurement to help your ego-centered purpose [laughs].

So you cannot, in its true sense, you cannot compare one thing to the other. When you ignore the meaning of—various meaning of something, you know, you can—the things will have comparative value, you know. You can exchange diamond, you know, for some big property [laughs], you know. But actually you cannot do that. When you limit the value of diamond or property to serve your purpose, you know, you can exchange it. But originally diamond is diamond, and piece of land is piece of land.

So in this way, you will find out what do we mean by absolute. So when you give up your thinking and when you, you know, without thinking you hear something—you will hear the true voice of a bird or flowing water. That is what I mean.

So we say everyone is self-supported, you know, or everyone is full-fledged, you know. Everyone is grown-up person. We don't want anything from others. Each—each one of us has his own value and meaning which you cannot ex- [partial word]—no one—which no one can take your place. That is "absolute."

**Student C:** Then you are using absolute or truth in a different way. Wouldn't it be better—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Completely different way!

**Student C:** —wouldn't it be better not to—not—not to use that word, then, or—or I guess it—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** We have to use it.

**Student C:** Why?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Why?

**Student C:** Yeah, why—why can't we use some other—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Comparat- [partial word]—to destroy the—to exchange, you know, to make your relative understanding clear, you know? The absolute you use, is—to me is relative, you know. So—and you stick to the relative as absolute, you know, as if you—we stick to something real—really absolute [laughs]. So we have to use it. So actually I am giving you some completely new words. If you want to suffer forever, you don't need it [laughs]. Some other question?

**Student D (Bill Shurtleff):** Some ways of practice emphasize the body energies, such as the Buddhism of Tibet and yoga, and they try to awaken these energies in the body and then somehow direct them or control them toward the same end I feel that Zen does. However, Zen seems to neglect this or not to mention this.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Physical—physical what? Neglect what?

**Bill:** This—awakening the energies of the body and deliberately controlling those energies in the body toward understanding our true nature with, as a means—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm.

**Bill:** —for an understanding of true [?] nature. Why is it that Zen simply doesn't mention these things? For example, Buddhism of Tibet talks about the *chakras* in the body, and use of breathing, and awakening the energy at the base of the spine and rising it up the spine. It seems to talk a lot about this and practice it a lot. Why is it that Zen makes no mention of this?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** That is also more—we—it is possible—it is—you can use various way, you know, but in that direction you cannot find out complete composure, you know. The direction is wrong. The way may be help—may be helpful. But if you use those thing—those practice for, you know, another direction or opposite direction, you will not find out complete composure. Do you understand? This is nearly the same question, you know.

We—as Sōtō Zen we do not say to practice zazen to attain enlightenment. Even to attain enlightenment, you know, is not our way because direction is opposite. Did you understand? We are, you know, aiming at emptiness [laughs]. You are aiming at somethingness, you know. But both is necessary, of course, but when you aim at something, you should know that, you know, that is in that direction, you know. It may be helpful, if you know that, but if you attach to it, you know, if you [are] bound by it, you will have another burden on your shoulder which you didn't have.

So, you know, because almost all of us is, you know, practicing our way, facing, you know, the other direction, so we always talk about to face this way, this way, this way. But, you know, both is necessary, of course. One more question, please.

**Student E:** Rōshi?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** *Hai.*

**Student E:** You said before that we should look at our experience absolutely and not relatively, not compare ourselves with—compare our experiences or compare ourselves with others. But to me, when I see you, I say, "Oh, Rōshi. He's good." And I say, "Oh, I'm not so good." And by saying that to myself, it—it seems to stimulate my effort. It wakens my way-seeking-mind.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah.

**Student E:** Should we—what—what would you say about that?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah. Right now I explained there is two ways of understanding of reality or emptiness or enlightenment, you know. Enlightenment is sometime is goal of practice, and sometime enlightenment is not goal of practice. It is something which we have already. And in this sense, whatever you do, there is some reason, you know. Because there is some reason, we cannot say that is bad. But if the goal of practice [is] to—to attain some attainment where we have complete freedom from things, you know, for human beings there must be some way, but for animal or a baby, you know, there is no need to follow this kind of steps or way. Do you understand? There is two ways, you know, of—when—even though we say "enlightenment," but the meaning—sometime is original enlightenment. And sometime it is goal of practice for usual person who stick to something.

**Student E:** Should we—are—are there different paths for different people?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** No, no. Original—for original attainment there is no teacher or no disciple. It is—

**Student E:** There's no goal—there is no goal of enlightenment, then.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Goal, you know—same—we—sometime we talk about, you know, like philosophy or, you know, like a drama, you know—talk about like *Lotus Sūtra*, you know. We talk about enlightenment in various way. That is the description of original enlightenment which isn't—I cannot say "nothing to do," but "something to do," but not much to do with attainment for human being. Truth is truth whether, you know, we reach to the moon or not.<sup>2</sup> Truth is truth. But for human being, there must be some way to go, you know. We enjoy the trip [laughs, laughter]. Whether we enjoy our trip or not, moon is there. [Laughter.] So there is two ways of talking about the moon. That is what I meant.

Thank you very much.

---

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Sara Hunsaker. Checked by Bill Redican (2/23/01).

---

<sup>2</sup> Apollo 11 landed on the moon just over a week before this lecture, on July 20, 1969.