

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**Sunday, January 3, 1971**  
**San Francisco**

Last Sunday I remember I talked about our surrounding, which is civilized world and busy world, and world of science and world of technique. Although I couldn't talk about fully about those things, but I tried [laughs] anyway. And I talked about something about practice or why we practice zazen. But I did not talk about self—who practice zazen—who practice zazen.

What is self is a big problem, you know. Unless we don't understand what is self, unless we don't reflect on our self, whether our everyday life is self-centered or a life of selflessness, we cannot, you know, have right practice: the practice to settle oneself, you know, on self. That is, you know, [Dainin] Katagiri-sensei's [laughs] word: "to settle oneself on the self." You cannot understand what does it mean.

So most people, I think, you know, especially the people who are here, are the people who knows who, you know, who has pretty good prospective [perspective] to our surrounding, to our modern life. But, you know, I don't think you understand what is self fully. And those who are more, you know—in Zen Center, I think, there are two kinds [laughs] of students, if I classify, you know. One type of the student is a student who practice a hermit-like practice [laughter], and other is, you know, the other group of people are the people more radical and intellectual.

But—so—and one type of, you know, people seek for self, you know, practice to attain something or to more like individual practice. So instead of going to deep mountain, they come to Zen Center. And, you know, tentatively or—they come to Zen Center because there we can practice, you know. They will be free from busy world—a kind of hermitage, you know, -like practice. And that is, you know, still they don't forget, you know, they don't know how to be free from self. Still their practice is based on gaining idea: to attain some, you know, trance or some attainment. Instead of using LSD [laughs], they practice zazen [laughs]. That kind of practice, you know [laughs]. That is not our practice, actually, but you can practice that kind of practice in Zen Center too. So that is why, I think, you come to Zen Center. But actually this is not our practice. Our practice is quite different from that kind of practice.

Those who work hard, you know, in Zen Center—staying everyday here, watching our everyday activity in Zen Center—I don't think they [laughs] understand fully what is our practice. It is not so easy to understand, unless you have more—it needs more study, and we need

more practice until you understand this kind of practice to settle oneself on oneself.

Of course, zazen practice is a kind of human experience which is quite different from the experience you have in modern life. So we must know, maybe, what kind of life we have in this actual society, in this "civilized world," so-called it "civilized world." To settle oneself on oneself, you know, to settle oneself on oneself, you know—that "oneself" is not universal self. The purpose of our practice is not to settle oneself on universal self. This point is, you know, very important. Modern life is so-called-it "scientific world"—world of science or technique is the world. The science, you know, already based on universal self. The experience you have in scientific world can be repeated over and over again. The truth which is true to someone will be, at the same time, true with, you know, someone else. So this kind of experience is universal experience. So this kind of communication we have between people is communication, you know, on the base of universal self. When one, you know, understands, when one thinks, "that is true," is true to someone else too. So that kind of truth is maybe scientific truth.

But there something is missing still. Universal self will create some natural role, you know. "Natural role," we say, but it is not actually natural role. It is based on universal self. The universal self cannot be at the same time always, you know, individual experience—cannot create individual experience. Actually, something you experience is only true with you only, you know. It cannot be true with someone else. When you think it is true, you know, you think the experience you had is true with someone else, at that time you are forcing your experience to others [laughs] actually. But there is some reason why you, you know, think in that way. The reason why is the universal self make you, you know, make you false—your experience to others. In that way, you know, universal—when we live in universal self, you will lose your actual, you know, self, or big self [laughs].

It is very strange, you know. When you talk about big self, you talk about universal self [laughs]. So, you know, it is opposite to me: Universal self is not true self. It may be scientific truth, which is based on universal self or science, scientific truth. It looks like you can repeat your experience over and over again. So that kind of people, when he has some kind enlightenment, you know, *kenshō*, he wants to repeat it again [laughs]. If you lose it, you feel very, you know, very sorry. But true, you know, enlightenment experience cannot be, you know, repeated again. Only experience—or scientific fact could be repeated over and over again. So the more you emphasize big self, the more you lose the true self. That is actually what we are doing.

We can discuss something, you know, with people. Or we can discuss about Zen Center rules [laughs]. But [laughs], you know, that is just rules, just, you know, picture of our Zen Center life. But actual Zen Center life is not to follow the formality, to follow the rule we set up. So even though you faithfully, you know, obey Zen Center rules, that is not true practice which we mean. Our practice is practice to settle oneself on self, you know, which means to have always new, fresh, you know, experience with your, you know, true self. But it doesn't mean—real practice is—even it is so, as long as you live in Zen Center, you should follow our rules.

And while following our rules, or in its wide sense, you know, living in this actual life of science, how to develop our practice is the point of practice. We know how, you know, we can develop Dōgen's practice in Zen Center, in group practice like this. Our practice is individual practice; at the same time, it is group practice. And our practice is hermit-like practice; and at the same time, our practice can be practiced in this modern world. This is the characteristic of Dōgen's practice. That is true meaning of "to settle oneself on self," you know. Even though you are in this modern society, you should not lose, you know, your fresh experience moment after moment. We should not be caught, or we should know the fresh vitality within ourselves.

Yesterday two teachers [laughs] came to me and talked about their experience, you know. I was very much interested in it. Both of them were good teachers. And what they said was sometime, you know, a student—sometimes they find students, you know, very agitated [active?] (what was the word?) lazy—lazienc—you know, in lazience, very responsive.

**Student:** "Disoriented."

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mmm? Disoriented. Who are you [laughs] talking about?! [That is, S.R. himself?! Said in mock outrage.] [Laughs, laughter.] Disoriented. Sometimes they didn't, you know. Why it is so is they lose true self, you know. That is why, you know, when student find his teacher like a machine [laughs], he—they will never, you know, respond—give him good response. When they are real, you know, teacher, or self—acting, you know—when they are based on real self, you know, when they are settled on true self, you know, they quickly respond to them.

Why this kind of difference happens to the same person? It is not matter of just when they are in good condition or some other reason—even though, you know, I know that kind of ex—how it happens. Even though we are sick, you know, students give you very good response.

When a teacher is sick, you know, they will worry about him very much and give him very good response.

There is some point which we must understand. For instance, we observe ceremonies very formally and strict way, even though we observe ceremony very formally if, you know, that is just formal ceremony, the people who practice it will not enjoy the ceremony, and people who see the—to attend that ceremony will not be interested in it.

Kitano-zenji<sup>1</sup>—when I was at Eihei-ji, the abbot of Eihei-ji was Kitano-zenji. When he come, you know, to *hattō*<sup>2</sup> [long pause], we had, you know, special feeling with our practice. He observed our ceremony very strictly with good spirit, but when he bow, you know, he is so old that when he bow it looked like it is impossible to stand up again, you know [laughs]. He had very difficult time to stand up again. He almost looks like sick person who is going to die. And when he stand up [laughs], and [not] showing any, you know, agony [laughs] with joy he stand up, but actually it was terrible effort for him. You know, that is very fresh, you know, very, you know, strong, you know, fresh activity. It is not just formality which is based on his, you know, spirit of Zen.

We practice zazen in zendo, but we understand that it is rare opportunity to sit in zendo. Morning after morning we feel in that way, you know. Why we practice Zen is not to establish Zen Center or to, you know, observe the formality of Zen Center. Or we do not practice zazen to attain something or to have a special, you know, experience about Zen. To go back to the life activity which is the foundation of all our activity, and to settle every activity we take on that activity of practice is the purpose of practice.

[Kōshō] Uchiyama-rōshi, you know, Uchiyama-rōshi wrote [drew] a *manga* (you know *manga*?) [laughs] comic [laughs], and on the person, his head is, you know, picture of his head is (I should brought it to show you, but—) it's various activity you have in your mind. In that picture, you lose yourself on this mundane world. And you lose yourself in religion [delusion?] [laughs]. Many people are losing themselves in religion. They cannot find out true self in their religion. The more they believe in religion, they lose true self, you know, in religion. They cannot—that is why, maybe, they practice, they believe in religion: to lose themselves, so that you can forget all about our modern world. That is why you believe in or you practice some religion.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kitano Daiko Genpō-zenji (1862–1932): The 67<sup>th</sup> abbot of Eihei-ji.

<sup>2</sup> Dharma hall.

But that kind of, you know, picture is its head, and his body is sitting [laughs] on, you know, to settle oneself, you know, to settle all those, you know, activity on zazen is our practice. I couldn't [laughs] explain it so well, but the point is, you know, that kind of—so point is, you know—anyway, point is to practice zazen, you know, true zazen, every morning, and to organize or to feel yourself in everyday life, whatever life it may be—Zen Center life or city life or in deep mountain, you should not forget the true foundation of your life. That is, you know, actually our practice.

Maybe it is necessary to explain what is our universal self more. This is very important for Zen Center, because Zen Center become bigger and bigger. And Zen Center looks like, you know, now, a kind of company [laughs, laughter], but there is some difference [laughs], some difference, you know. *[Sentence completed. Tape turned over.]*

You know, if you know clearly, you know, what is our framework of society now, you will find out the difference between Zen Center and some company in San Francisco. You should understand it. Maybe because you don't know what is, you know, the framework of our society, you don't know what is our practice. You hate it, that's all [laughs]. You don't like it. That is good [SR said "good" tentatively and humorously], but [laughs, laughter] if you hate it, you know, before you hate it you should know what it is first of all.

Maybe so it is necessary, you know, for us to study more, to talk about more about our framework of, you know, our society, modern world, and what kind of, you know, mistake we have been making for maybe from 1800, after Industrial Revolution. Is that correct? Yeah. After Industrial Revolution. I talked about Japanese militarism, you know [laughs], but, you know, it is not only Japan. All over the world that kind of idea was going. That is our life after 1800. And what kind of base we had? How we lost—at that time already we started to lose ourselves, and we lost the foundation of zazen practice.

Perhaps, you know, it is maybe useless to explain it, you know, but our understanding about it is a little bit different, you know, from usual understanding of our modern world.

Anyway, I think we should try hard to extend our practice in our organization, and in our practice and in our everyday life or in city life.

Thank you very much.

---

Source: City Center transcript. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Bill Redican (5/23/01).