

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
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Most of us, maybe, want to know what is self. This is a big problem. Why you have this problem, you know, and is—I want to understand [laughs] why you have this problem. I'm trying to understand. And even though, it seems to me, even though you try to understand who are you, it is, you know, it is endless trip, you know, and you will never see your self.

You say to sit without thinking too much is difficult. Just to sit is difficult. But more difficult thing will be to try to think about your self [laughs]. This is much more difficult. To do is maybe easy, you know, but to have some conclusion, you know, to it is almost impossible, and you will continue it until you become crazy [laughs, laughter]. That is, you know, when you don't know what to do with your self. Or when you don't know, when you find out it is impossible to know who you are, you know, you become crazy.

Moreover, your culture is based on the idea of self and science and Christianity [laughs]. So those element, you know, idea of Christianity or sinful idea of Christianity or, you know, idea of science, scientific-oriented mind, makes your confusion greater. You try to always, when you sit, you know, perhaps most of you sit to improve your zazen. That idea to improve, you know, is a very Christian-like, you know, idea and, at the same time, a scientific idea: to improve. You acknowledge some improvement of our culture or civilization. We understand our civilization, you know, improved a lot. But, you know, when we say "scientific" in sense of science, you know, or "improve" means before you went to Japan by ship, now you go to airplane or jumbo [laughs] plane. That is improvement.

So when you say "some improvement," it include idea of value. And that is at the same time, you know, base of our framework of our society—economy. Now I understand you are rejecting that kind of, you know, idea of civilization. But you do not, you know, reject the idea of improvement. You still try to improve something.

And I think in Christianity, you know, all the improvement or civilization should be, you know, end. When the Last (what do you call it?) Last [Judgment], you know—when you are judged, you know, when what you have done is judged by God [laughs], you should go to hell [laughs, laughter]. You have done—you have made a atomic bomb, so you should go to [laughs] hell. You invented, you know, jumbo jet plane, so you should go [laughs, laughter] to hell. And when you go to—that is the end of everything. So our society has some end, you know. When we have end, you can say "improvement." You are improving our civilization just to go to hell [laughs]. That is, you know, improvement according for the Christian.

My friend [George] Hagiwara<sup>1</sup> has very Christian-oriented mind. He criticize always, you know, people, scientists, who are trying to go to the moon, you know. Someday all of us will be, you know, must go to hell [laughs] by trying that kind of thing [laughs, laughter], he always says to me. At first I couldn't understand what he meant, actually. Now, you know, I have some clear understanding, you know, how he feels. He believe in, you know, Last Judgement of God.

What I am talking about is the idea of improvement, which we Buddhists do not, you know, have so much. Nowadays, you know, in Japan or in China, all the people are trying to improve their way of life. We are deeply involved in the idea of improvement of something—to improve something. This kind of element, you know, of idea of to practice—when you practice zazen, you maybe try to improve yourself, and you want to know yourself more, you know, psychological way. That is why you are involved in—interested in psychology so much.

But psychology will tell you about your psychological things, but psychology will not tell you exactly who you are [laughs]. It is one of the many, you know, interpretation of your mind. One of the many. So if you go to, you know, psychologist or psychiatrist, endlessly you will have new information about [laughs] you [laughs]. Endless. So as long as you are going, maybe you feel, you know, some release. You feel as if, you know, all the psychological burden you have, you know, you will be released [from] the burden you carry by a psychologist, by a psychiatrist. But, you know, the way we understand [laughs] ourselves is quite different from that kind of understanding.

This morning I want to introduce Tōzan's, you know, famous saying. Tōzan,<sup>2</sup> the founder of Chinese Sōtō school, he said, "Don't try to see yourself," maybe, "objectively." Maybe we can say scientific way. He didn't say so, but, "Don't try to see something which was given to you," you know. In other words, don't try to see, you know, some information about you which is given to you by some objective truth. That is information.

He says real you is quite different from the information you will have. Real you is not that kind of thing. "I go by myself my own way," he says [laughs]. "I go by myself in my own way. Wherever I see, I meet with myself. Wherever I go, I meet myself." When you [laughs]—so, you know, he reject that kind of effort to try to be, try to cling to the information about yourself. But you should, he says, but you should go, you know, alone with your legs.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the Japanese-American members of the Soko-ji congregation. The Hagiwara family were, before WWII, caretakers of the Japanese Tea Garden in San Francisco. George's father was said to have been appointed by Emperor Meiji.

<sup>2</sup> Tōzan Ryōkai (Chin. Dongshan Liangjie or Tung-shan Liang-chieh, 807-869): Chan master of the Tang period.

Or you should, you know, in other word, you should practice our way, you know, with people. Whatever people may say [laughs], you should go your way, and you should practice with people.

This is, you know, another point. "With people" is another point. It means to meet yourself is to practice with people. To meet yourself. When you—you will see yourself—someone's practice, you know, if you see someone practicing hard, you will see yourself. You say, you know, if you are impressed by someone's practice, "Oh, she is doing very well," you know. That "she" is not she or you. Something more than that. "Oh, she is doing very well," you know [laughs]. What is "she"? After thinking, you know, for a while, "Oh, she is there [laughs], I am here." But when you, you know, struck, when you are impressed by her practice, you know, that "her" is not you or she. When you see it, when you're struck by it, that is actually real you [laughs]. "You" is, you know—tentatively I say "you," but it is—that "you" is pure experience of our practice. As long as you are trying to, you know, improve yourself [laughs], you know, having some core of idea of self, you know, trying to improve yourself, that is wrong practice. That is not practice we mean.

When you, you know, empty your mind, you know, when you give up everything and just practice zazen with your open mind, whatever you see, that is to meet yourself. There there is "you," you know, you which is beyond she or he or me. So as long as you are cling to the idea of self and trying to improve your practice, trying to, you know, to find out something, or to see, you know, improved self, better self, or to find better practice, then your practice, you know, is in [has gone] astray. You have no time to, you know, to reach the goal, so eventually you will be tired out, or and you will say, "Zen is no good. [Laughs.] I practiced zazen for ten years, but I didn't [laughs] gain anything!" [Laughs, laughter.] But if you just come here and sit with sincere student and find yourself among them, and, you know, then that is, if you continue in that way, our practice. That is our practice. And this kind of experience could be everywhere. As Tōzan said, "Wherever I go, I meet with myself." If he see water, that is he himself. Even though he cannot see himself in the water, you know, to see water is enough for him.

I think it's a, it—I don't want to, you know, criticize someone's religion, Christianity or anything, but if you do not understand the nature of the religion, you know, you believe in, you will be lost. Even though you are a very good Christian, you say you are a very good Christian, or—even though people say you are good Christian, but, you know, you will be lost if you don't understand how to be a good Christian. Teaching is good, but when you don't understand the real teaching, you will be lost. So actually for a Christian, you know, if you go to church and do this or [laughs] you don't do this [probably making a gesture] [laughs, laughter]. I don't know this way or that way or [laughter]—that is enough [laughs], you know. There is, you know, complete liberation. You are saved at that time. Because you, you know, pray for [to] God for something, you know [laughs], you cannot save yourself. Actually,

you know, when you are already saved, you know, you say, you know, you pray for His help [laughs]. That is why, you know, you cannot be a good Christian.

So how you understand yourself is not to understand yourself objectively or try to cling to the information, you know, from various source. If people say you are crazy—"Okay, I am crazy." [Laughs.] If people say you are bad student, "Okay, I am—maybe so I am bad student, but I am trying, you know, pretty hard." That is enough, you know. In this way, when you, you know, continue or when you sit in that way, accepting, you know, yourself and accepting everything with yourself, when you are involved in various, you know, silly problem, you should sit with the problem you have. You know, that is you, you know, at that time. When you try to get out of it, out of them, you know, that is already wrong practice. If you cling to, you know, some idea created by you, like self or some objective world, you will be lost in objective world which you created by your mind. So you are creating one after another [laughs], so there is no end. There—maybe there many kinds of world, and, you know, you are creating. To create it may be very interesting—to see many things is very interesting, but you should not be lost in it.

Another side of, you know, our practice is we, you know, we try to think and we try to act. We do not try to, you know, to be like a stone, you know. We—for us, our everyday life is our practice. Instead of being enslaved by thinking mind or imagination or emotional activity, we just, you know, think, in its true sense. Thinking mind, thinking activity, comes out, you know, from true self, which include everything.

Before I—we think in our practice, trees are [thinking] and birds [are thinking] and everything is thinking, you know. And when they think, they grow—they—they sing, you know. That is their thinking. There is no need for us to think, you know [laughs], more than that. You know, if you see things as it is, that is thinking. Already we are thinking. This kind of pure thinking is the thinking mind we have in our practice, so we have always freedom from ourselves too. And we can see things as it is. At the same time, we can think about things.

For us there is no truth or no falsehood because we have no particular, you know, standard for our thinking, standard to which we cling to. *[The preceding sentence was finished by Suzuki-rōshi, but the rest of the lecture was not recorded on tape. A handwritten note was enclosed with the original tape containing a summary of the missing conclusion: Before you ask for dokusan with me, start your own practice. Stand on your own feet. Then I can help you. If you want to find out about yourself, maybe better to go to someone else. They will tell you many interesting things.]*

Source: City Center transcript plus handwritten note enclosed with original tape.  
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