

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi:
Friday, August 13, 1971
Zen Mountain Center**

Last night,¹ when we have question and answer, we came across the very important point. In the—in Japanese, we say [phonetic] *sabetsu-soku-byōdō*, or *shinkū-myōu*.² *Sabetbu-soku byōdō*. This is—*sabetsu* means "speciality," and *byōdō* means "equality." Speciality means, you know—speciality means various being which is special. Each being are special, and each being has its own meaning of existence. When something exist, there is some reason why something exist. That is speciality. And equality is even though things is different—different, but strictly speaking each things does not exist in that way, because they are changing, constantly changing.

So if it is changing, we cannot say something really exist, you know, something we see [laughs] does not exist. You think you exist here, but it is not so. And which is easier for you to understand is, you know—maybe intellectually it is easier for you to understand things does not exist. Equality is easier to understand, and speciality is difficult to understand.

When you say "freedom," the meaning of freedom or feeling of freedom is more like equality. We are, you know, each—"We are equal, so we must have freedom." [Laughs.] That is what you say, but to us it is absurd. You know, if—if—if you want to be special, then it is not possible [laughs] to have freedom at the same time. When you are special, there is—you have some special reason to exist, you know. So, for an instance, a woman should be a woman, you know, and a man should be a man [laughs].

So there is—when we put emphasis on the reason why you exist as a man, why you exist as a woman, you know, then woman is valuable. Because she is a woman, she has, you know, her own reason why she exist as a woman. And he has his own reason, which is a different reason from woman exist. That is why a man is a man and a woman is woman.

So when you want to have equality, woman should be woman, and a man should be a man. When a man is a man, and woman is a woman, and a stone is a stone, cucumber is cucumber, eggplant is eggplant, then [laughs] they are equal. No one can change their value. Each cucumber is valuable as a cucumber—cucumber. But as human being is very selfish, so someone who do not like eggplant may say cucumber is better

¹ SR-71-08-12, p. 9.

² *sabetsu* or *shabetsu* (speciality, separateness, or discrimination); *-soku* (immediately; is); *-byōdō* (equality; all the same; non-discrimination); *shinkū* (absolute void or true non-existence); *myōu* (wondrous or mysterious existence).

[laughs]. But actually cucumber and eggplant is the same. And so is man and woman, because each being has each own reason to exist. And each being cannot be replaced by some—something else. So we say each being has same value—equal value. So equality we mean is not equality [that] you mean, maybe.

So when we understand this point, we say because it is—everything is different, everything is equal value. That, you know—how we can obtain equal value is to have their own reason to exist, their own way to exist. And it is same—same with—with one person. Today I should be different, you know, and next day I should be different again. If I am always same, there is no reason why I should live. Day after day because I change from one being to the other it is—our life make sense.

So equality is—at the same time should be speciality—speciality at the same time, you know, equality. So if you put emphasis on just equality, that is—we call [you] "*tamban-kan*" [laughs].³ *Tamban-kan* means—*tam* is carry. *Ban* is board. "Carrying board fellow." [Laughing.] He is carrying board, so he cannot see the other side. He can see this side only because there is partition. If it is very high I cannot see this side [probably gestures]. If I carry a big board here [probably gestures] I cannot see the other side.

So if you stick to equality or freedom only—freedom is at the same time restriction. Restriction is freedom, you know. If you just stick to restriction or rules or freedom, you know, that is, you know—you are carrying a board on your shoulder. So you cannot—you can see just freedom or just restriction, or speciality or equality, emptiness or form, you know.

"Form is emptiness and emptiness is form." That is, you know, our understanding. To see form is to see emptiness. To understand form or color means to understand something more than that—something more than color or form—something which makes form form and color color, you know—something which give you color, something which give you form. You have—each one of us has some form, given by the emptiness. You—you call it "God" or something, but we call it emptiness. If you say "God," God could be someone who may create many things. But our God is not someone who create something—who create everything. If you are a Christian, you may be scolded if you say [ask], "If God created earth then who created God?" [Laughs.] You may be scolded. But will—immediately we ask, you know, who created God? If, you know, God is created by someone—some—someone else, then God is also, you know, not different from us, because they are created as we are—as our form and nature is given by emptiness. Actually we came out of emptiness.

³ See also SR-69-03-30: "We call someone who understand things from just one side, we call him '*tamban-kan*.' *Tamban-kan* in Chinese or Japanese means 'a man who carry a board on his shoulder.'"

Maybe if I say so I am already—already creating some trouble or misunderstanding, because form itself is emptiness, and emptiness itself is form. We cannot say "create" or "to give form" or anything like that. But so that, you know, you can understand what I am saying easier, I am saying this way. And this kind of thing which could be understood by practice, by zazen practice, you cannot accept this kind of truth by thinking mind.

Anyway, I want to introduce you [to] some saying: *Tamban-kan*. *Tamban-kan* [S.R. says each syllable separately].

And how to, you know, how to get rid of stickiness of our mind is our practice. Our mind is very sticky. We easily stick to something—some idea, or speciality or equality, or man or woman, teacher or disciple, you know. We easily stick to some idea. I am disciple, you know. But you are not always disciple. Teacher is not always a teacher. Teacher could be sometime student. So we shouldn't stick to the idea of teacher or disciple. That is real freedom.

So—so that we can [be] free from sticky, you know—stickiness of our thinking mind or emotional feeling, we practice zazen. And if you will practice zazen, your character will be more and more clear and simple. Your—if someone say, "You are student." "Yes, I am student." [Laughs.] And if someone say, "You are teacher." "Yes, I am teacher." No stickiness, you know. "You are like a man." "Yes, maybe so." [Laughs.] "You are like a woman." "Yes, it is so." No stickiness in accepting various idea. So you have freedom, you know. That is how you attain freedom. That is the point of practice.

And many teachers or many people have pretty difficult time to get rid of this kind of stickiness of human mind. So you should remember this point, and you shouldn't lose the point of practice or study. So whatever you do it is study. If you eat something, you know—if you don't say "I like this" or "I don't like it," then that is freedom. If you eat something, you know, well-cooked, you should, you know, appreciate the taste of it. If it is raw, it is also good [laughs, laughter]. That is how to get out of stickiness—stickiness of our feeling. "Everything is good." Then you are free—you have freedom.

So you shouldn't be concerned about what people may say about you. You know, it is okay. Whatever they say it may be so [laughs, laughter]. As they say so, maybe so [laughs]. But because of your sticky mind, you say, "No, I am not so." [Laughs.] Then you will lose your freedom. You make your world narrow—small for you. Wherever you go you have freedom if you are free from the idea of sticky mind, if you do not carry a board on your shoulder. It is very heavy—actually very heavy. Because of this board you will suffer a lot [laughs]. *Tamban-kan*. *Kan* means

"fellow," you know. Exact translation is "fellow." *Tam-ban-kan.*
Tamban-kan.

And we—we have this kind of technical term: *aku-byōdō*.⁴ "Wrong," you know—"wrong equality." Wrong—when you stick to the idea of equality, that is wrong equality. If you stick to the idea of equality, you want everyone the same size. You will be too high. Chuck Hoy is extra high. So we must cut their head [laughs, laughter] to make them equal. That is, you know, wrong equality.

Our equality is—because Chuck is high he is equal, and we need him. When I cannot reach for something he may help out [laughs, laughter]. That is why he is, you know, he has his own virtue. [Laughing.] If we make you—if you—if I make you same size, you know, you will be—all of you will be dead, you know. There is no reason why we have so many people. Maybe one is enough. If you are same size, and same—and your hand and feet and face are same, you know, one person will suffice. We don't need so many people. That is so-called-it, you know, wrong equality, *aku-byōdō*.

So something should be equal—only one thing should be equal, but rest of things should be different. And to understand how important it is to be different is actual practice. This is the practice [to which] many teachers devoted themselves. Practice of difference is very difficult. That was the, you know, point we came across [in last night's lecture].

Here is a Zen story about Hyakujō—Hyakujō. Do you know Hyakujō?⁵ Hyakujō is a great Zen master in China who established Zen precepts. And what we are observing at Tassajara or in Japan is mostly Hyakujō's way. How we live in [leaving? leave the?] zendō and how we—what kind of sitting we have is almost [completely] set up by Hyakujō. And we are still following his way. It is difficult to, you know, to go out of his way.

Hyakujō once mounted the pulpit—the altar like—like this, you know, and kōan says whenever he appears on the altar, the old—an old man also appear at the rear of the row—in the corner of the lecture hall. And when —when people leave, you know, when students leave, that old man also left. One day—one day, all the—almost all the students left, but that old man did not leave. He was still sitting. That is trouble [laughs]. Anyway, I have to explain. [Laughs.] That is already trouble.

And Hyakujō asked him. "Why don't you leave?" And the old man said, "At—at—in the day of seven buddhas"—you know, before Shākyamuni Buddha we count several [seven?] Buddhas—and Buddha—Shikin⁶

⁴ *aku* (wrong); *byōdō* (equality).

⁵ Hyakujō Ekai (Baizhang Huaihai): 720-814. Ch'an master of T'ang period. Student of Baso Dōitsu, master of Isan Reiyū.

⁶ One of the six buddhas who preceded Shākyamuni Buddha.

Buddha—"when the time of Shikin Buddha, I, you know, I was a teacher." And someone asked him—wise man—if—if wise man will fall into the teaching of cause and effect or law of cause and effect. And I said to him, "Well-trained teacher or enlightened man will not fall into the rule of—law of cause and effect. Because I said so, since then I became a fox—wild fox. And actually—I am actually an old fox who live in the mountain." And the fox or the old man asked him, "What will be the right answer," you know, "for that question?" And Hyakujiō said, "Enlightened person will fall into the law of karma—even an enlightened person cannot get out of the law of karma. That is my answer." And old fox attained enlightenment and vanished. That was the story.

What do we mean by—by a fox? Fox is not fox. It is actually emptiness, or absolute, or source of all being, or forms and colors is the old fox. So it—it appears—when people appear, it is okay. When, you know, an idea of emptiness or absolute is in our mind, it is: trouble because we are already—our mind is already stick to the idea of an old fox, or idea of emptiness. That is trouble—already trouble.

So when people, you know, or everyone leaves zendō or leaves lecture hall, there should not be any idea of the first principle or idea of form or emptiness, because each being, each student in zendō is the absolute itself—emptiness itself. When each one of you feel you have the absolute value, you are embodiment of the absolute truth. So when you leave, everything should leave. When you leave, mountain and river should leave. Everything should leave. Then there is no trouble.

Because you stick to the idea of, you know, form or the absolute, there is trouble. And the question and answer here they made back and forth, "to fall—the law of karma—to fall into the law of karma" means to stick to the, you know, law of karma, cause and effect—to lose freedom from the law of karma. So that is, you know, to fall into the idea of karma. Not to fall—the idea of karma or law of karma means not to stick to it, and stick to—not to fall. The idea of karma is to ignore the law of karma. You cannot ignore the law of karma. And we cannot—cannot stick to—we shouldn't stick to the law of karma. There is two, you know, [of?] our attitudes.

Sometime, even though you follow the teaching of karma, it does not mean you lose your freedom from the law of karma. Do you [laughs] understand? So when at first—when he [the soon-to-be old fox] said so, because he thought he understood equality of various being, he said, "Wise man will not," you know, "stick to the idea of karma." But when stick—he does not stick to the idea of karma meant for him, you know, no, there is no such, you know, thing like law of karma because each being does not exist [laughs] originally, you know. We are empty because we are changing. So I—when I don't exist—when everything doesn't exist in its strict sense, how is it possible to live? To—for

everything to follow the law of karma, that was what—how he understood. It is—he was *tamban-kan*. Because of his one-sided understanding of the truth he became a fox.

But when Hyakujō said you will—you must follow the law of karma, even though enlightened person, as long as he has—he is human being, he has physical body, it is not possible for him to be—not to follow the law of karma. So he could understand the reality he felt from both sides. That is why he [the old fox] could vanish from the zendō. That kind of fox shouldn't exist in zendō. In zendō there must be, you know, only student, and teacher and student. Teacher or student is each being, you know, in the realm of speciality. So what you can see is each student; you cannot see the absolute or old fox. When you have, you know, real understanding of the reality—old fox, does it exist? That was the parable—manifestation of [1-2 words] Hyakujō [1-2 words].

Do you have some question? *Hai*.

Student A: If [4-6 words] in the beginning you said that if you're not in the zendō, then you don't have any [1 word], and then you don't have to go, well—everybody is centered [?] in the zendō [1 word]—at least they are now.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, yeah.

Student A: Then the fact that we're in freedom resumes that center [?], and I think [3-6 words] what we have.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes. Uh-huh. That is real freedom, you know. But whether we feel, at the same time, you know, specialness—so you cannot be arrogant, you know, even though you have some special talent, you know [laughs]. That is your speciality. And someone else may have, you know, his own speciality. And so that is why everyone is same. And you cannot be arrogant about it, you know. And at the same time there is another danger—danger, you know. "This is my speciality," you know [laughs]. So you will be very much individualistic—selfish, sometime, which actually does not exist. Self doesn't exist. At the—at that moment, you know, when you say, "This is my speciality," speciality exist. But it doesn't exist in—in the same way always. If you stick to your own speciality always, in the same way, you will be dead [laughs]. No one will be interested in you if your—if you are saying same thing over and over again like a fake record. What you say should be changed, and your feelings should—should change.

So speciality exist, and at the same time it doesn't exist, so both, you know. Exist and doesn't exist. So double-edged, you know, sword. Exist/not exist. It is not so easy, you know [laughs], this practice. You have no time to rest. "This is my speciality. All I have to talk [about] is

in this book." [Laughs.] That is, you know, [1-2 words]. Even though you become buddha, you know, buddha cannot stay always as a buddha. [*Sentence probably finished. Tape turned over.*]

... buddha must be someone else. Buddha should be a friend of people, or else buddha cannot help people. That is why Jesus is, you know, a messenger or son of a god. God himself cannot do anything with people [laughs]. Only, you know, buddha is not buddha [god?]*—*he can help people. The same thing is true with everyone. We cannot be same way always.

Student B: Would you say that equality cannot exist with differences?

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student B: Would you say that equality cannot exist even with differences?

Suzuki-rōshi: Ahh. Cannot exist in the same way, you know. At that time, right here, in this moment, it exist, actually. But I don't know next moment—I don't know. Next moment you will exist, you know, in some other way. Like Dōgen-zenji said, firewood—when firewood is firewood, you know, firewood has its own past and future. And when firewood become ash, you know, ash has its own past and future. Firewood is firewood, and ash is ash [laughs]. So, you know, I am here right now, but tomorrow I—I shall be ash, not firewood. Looks like same, but actually it is not, strictly speaking. That is why, when you understand the —all things in its strict sense, we cannot stick to any idea. But right here, at this moment, everything exist. I'm—looks like arguing [laughs] something, but it is so, isn't it?

Student B: So the things are constantly in change—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes, constantly.

Student B: —[1-2 words] the young ones—

Suzuki-rōshi: Everyone.

Student B: —[4-6 word] when I was growing up that things can be constantly in change, and change can be different. [1-2 words] you know, you have a tall man and—you have a tall man and a short man. But they can be the same [?].

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student B: Anyway—anyway, thank you. Abstract things can be rhetorical.

Suzuki-rōshi: Rhetorical? Abstract? Abstract? [Laughs.] Yeah. There is, you know, some difference between your understanding and my understanding, you know. The equality is not—for—to me it is not abstract thing; it is very real. But to you, because you have no experience of the abstract, you know, to you it is some idea. So idea doesn't change, you know—has no validity. It is equality, you know, because—ahh—[laughs]—it is rather difficult to say. Maybe you understand, you know.

Equality, if it doesn't—doesn't have any power or, you know, any meaning—for an instance, everything has, you know, salt. In each plant has salt, you know. But salt for you is something, you know—salt is salt—salt for you. When you eat vegetable, you don't feel there is salt in it, you know. But once you know, you know, the real taste of salt, then you will find out the salt in each vegetable, you know. So for you, salt is, you know, something in—in—in some container, and white stuff is salt. There is not much difference, you know.

Salt for me is—even though actually I don't feel salty when I eat apple or some other vegetable, I don't feel salty. But imagine if there is no salt—no salt in vegetable [laughs], what kind of taste you taste? You cannot imagine, you know. May be very—it may be terrible taste. Because of salt, apple tastes like apple, eggplants like—taste like eggplant, cucumber taste like cucumber. Do you understand? That kind of difference.

That is why—why we practice zazen, and we start our life from nothing. After you sit, you know, especially in morning, instead of lecture, you stand up, you feel, you know—your feeling will be indescribable. It is—that feeling is something quite different from feeling you have in your ordinary practice. That is the feeling you have when you come out from empty—emptiness. That is the taste of the real vegetable.

Okay? Maybe [laughs], I think—does it make some sense to you?

Student B: [2-3 words] I can see the idea that [4-6 words]—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Yeah. That is enough.

Student B: —the idea of a vacuum—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student B: [1-2 words] the fact that I am even telling you about it—

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. Uh-huh. Yes.

Student B: —it would take a lot of discussion, first of all. I don't know if

[1-2 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah, I know. Anyway, old fox appeared [laughs], right here. So we have to discuss about the old fox. It appeared last time and still, you know, almost vanished [laughs]—almost. If you practice zazen tomorrow evening, it will go [laughs, laughter]. Something like that, okay? It is impossible to, you know, to explain it fully. It is not something which is possible to explain from the beginning.

Some—some question? *Hai*.

Student C: Rōshi [4-6 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: —and in my mind I get some pictures and they're [4-6 words].

Suzuki-rōshi: Uh-huh.

Student C: —and I try to get rid of them so that I don't have any picture of what it is.

Suzuki-rōshi: Mm-hmm.

Student C: Then I don't feel that I have any understanding of what it means when you say "emptiness."

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah.

Student C: So both ways it seems like there is not right or not left. Is there some other way?

Suzuki-rōshi: Mmm. [Laughs.] Some other way, you know, is practice. You have to, you know, you have to be trying to figure out intellectually what it is from various points, you know, comparing one understanding of emptiness to another understanding of emptiness, because we use many words, you know: symbolic words, first principle, buddha-nature, or emptiness. Each time, why we apply that various words is to destroy various idea of, you know—special idea of emptiness. So real understanding of emptiness is—you should be—you should experience what is emptiness rather than idea, you know. That is, you know, in Rinzai that is *kenshō*. Even though it is not so big, once you have *kenshō*, you know, you have taste of it, which is not words.

And *shikantaza*—in *shikantaza* you have also taste of emptiness by actual—through actual experience, or else it doesn't makes much sense, you know. If I talk about it, it is already a kind of philosophy. Our teaching

should be philosophical, but philosophy doesn't reach to the reality; it is still words, and result of thinking mind. But if you understand this kind of thought—Buddhist thought, your practice will be more and more concentrated on important point, or else you—your practice will be, you know, lost in various direction. You will go round and round same place, or you will go in wrong direction. And there are so many directions, so you will be lost.

So, in that way, for long, long time—long, long time ago, Indian philosophers, teachers, you know, discussed about our religious experience: What is real religious experience? And those people were called *ronji*.⁷ So Zen priests or teachers of various schools of Buddhism were at the same time a kind of *ronji*—a kind of philosopher who can discuss—who can discuss the truth with various schools of teacher—teachers of—of various schools. And they tried to—to be concentrated on some important core of religious experience.

That is something what I am trying here with you. Okay? You may be confused, I know, because maybe you are trying to understand—trying to—maybe you are—instead of thinking, you know, by yourself, you try—you depend on, or you are trying to understand what I mean. But what I am trying is to destroy your, you know, various wrong idea of practice. That is the difference.

I know you—you have various, you know, obstacles. So to get rid of those obstacles from your mind is my purpose of lecture. Do you understand? Because you may have so many ideas, you know, so that is not what I mean—that is not what I mean. This is—this is wrong, and you take off, you know, various obstacles from your mind, so that we can [be] concentrated [on] more—most important point, so that you can trust yourself, trust your buddha-nature which you have. Okay? I am not trying to give you any idea, but I—I am explaining something by your words [laughs]—not my words, by your words. I am using your words, but what I mean is something more than that.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript by Barry Eisenberg. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Bill Redican 9/27/00. Miyagawa Keishi-san kindly provided assistance with the translation of Japanese terms.

⁷ *ronji* (Jap.): master of discourses.