



Suzuki Roshi Lecture  
Tassajara, June 6, 1970

*(Note: This lecture was a special one given to a group of visiting philosophy students on the general spirit of the Sandokai at the time Suzuki Roshi was lecturing on it.)*

The purpose of this study of Buddhism is to have perfect understanding of things, and to understand ourselves, especially what we are doing in our everyday life. It is to understand why we suffer, why we have such conflict in our society, or in our family, or in ourselves. It is to understand what is going on in the objective world and subjectively within ourselves. If we see things "as it is", and if we are aware of what we are doing, we will know what we should do. This is the intellectual study of Buddhism (which includes dualistic study and non-dualistic study). And then what you should do is have some real experience of the Buddhist way. Study and practice are different; even though you have good understanding, if you do not follow the understanding it will not help you.

We are now studying the *Sandokai*, a kind of scripture written by a great Chinese Zen Master. Last night I explained what we mean by "darkness" and what we mean by "lightness". Darkness means something which we cannot see or think about, something which is beyond our intellectual understanding. Darkness does not mean some dark thing which you do not know, or which you will be afraid of. Of course, we do not know what is going on in utter darkness, but what we mean by utter darkness is something which is beyond our understanding. This room is pretty dark right now, but still you can see things. If there were no light you could not see

anything. But it does not mean there is nothing here. There are many things, but in utter darkness you cannot see, that's all. And brightness means something which you can understand in terms of good and bad, or square or round, or red or white. So brightness means "various things", and darkness means "one whole being" in which many things exist, something which includes everything. Even though there are many things, that which includes the moon and stars and all things is so big that we are just a tiny speck of this big being.

Darkness means something which includes everything. You cannot get out of it. If there is some place where you can go, that place is included in darkness. That kind of big, big being is utter darkness where everything can be acknowledged because everything is so small. But that does not mean there is nothing; various things exist in one whole great being. Whatever our study may be, it is always going on in the realm of brightness. So we discriminate things, saying "This is good, this is bad; this is agreeable, or disagreeable, right or wrong, big or small, round or square." Whatever you deal with is some thing in lightness, which is in the dualistic world. But it is necessary for us to know the utter darkness where there is nothing to see or nothing to think about. This kind of experience will be experienced only in Zazen practice. In your thinking or in listening to lectures, or in talking about the teaching, we cannot study what is actually darkness, but I can talk about something which we can understand, and by which you will be encouraged to practice Zazen and it will lead you to the experience of utter darkness. Darkness is sometimes called "nothingness" or "emptiness", in comparison to "somethingness". Sometimes we say, "no-mind". You don't think when you're in utter darkness.

I feel I have gone too far, so I have to go back to something, to some bright room. It is too dark to see your faces one by one, and what kind of problems you have. I think I must go back to our everyday problems.

I was talking with a student about my relationship with my wife. I have many complaints, but I don't think I can live without her. That is, to tell the truth, what I really feel. Since I came to Tassajara I have learned an expression, "hen-pecked husband". It is a very interesting expression. There is no time for him to raise his head; he is always pecked by the hen. Still he needs the hen. He feels that it is impossible to live with her; maybe it would be better to get divorced. Then sometimes he may think "oh, but I can't live without her. What should I do?" That is the actual problem we have in the relative world of brightness. When the lamp is bright I can see my wife and myself; when there is no lamp there is no problem. But we don't think about the utter darkness. We always suffer from the life which we can see with our eyes, which we can hear with our ears. That is what we are doing. So in the world of brightness it is difficult to live without things. It is impossible. And with things it is also difficult. What shall we do? With things it is too much; and without things we have no purpose for living in this world. In this way we have many problems. But if you have even the slightest idea of utter darkness, which is the other side of brightness, then you will find the way to live in the brightness of the world.

In the brightness of the world you will see something good and something bad, or something right and something wrong. In this world of differentiation things exist in different forms and colors. At the same time, in this world of various forms and colors, we can find the equality of everything. But the only chance for us to be equal is to be aware of, or to realize our own form and color and respect our own form and color. Only when you respect yourself as a man or a woman, as a learned person, or as an ignorant person will each of us have equal value. It looks like equality means to share something equally with everyone. But we don't think that is possible. Actually it is a kind of dream. For instance, if we share our food equally someone may like it and someone else may not. It is impossible to share things equally. And to have the same right, or responsibility, or duty, or commitment is not possible. Only when we realize our own capacity, our own physical strength, our own nature as man or woman, and respect our own character or nature will each one of us be an equal.

This equality is a little bit different from the usual understanding of equality. Here is a cup in which I have some water. Water and cup are not equal; water is water and cup is cup. If the water wants to be a cup, that is not possible, and this is also true for the cup. The cup should be a cup, and water should be water. So when water is in the cup, water serves its purpose. The cup without water means nothing. When water is water and cup is cup, and cup and water have some activity or relationship with each other, become interdependent, then water will have its own value, and the cup will have its own value. In this case we say that the cup and water are equal.

"Freedom" we say, but if you think freedom is just to ignore rules and to act as you want, without thoughtfulness, that is a kind of dream, a delusion. We shouldn't be involved in a vain effort to try to catch a cloud or the mist. How to get out of this kind of difficulty is to have a good understanding of ourselves, and to know what we are doing; to know what is possible and what is not. And we should be very realistic or else whatever we do will not work. If you enjoy your daydreams that is another matter.

Sometimes it is good to think about something which is impossible, dreaming about something which is wonderful. That is good, because the purpose of a daydream is just to enjoy it like a movie. You feel as if you become a movie star. But it cannot be our final goal in life. So we should know what is delusion and what is reality. And when we are sincerely involved in good practice, we should not dream of something which is impossible. We should work in something which is possible to realize.

So, the other side of differentiation is equality. Because things are different there is equality; things are equal. When you understand the equality of man and woman in its true sense, you have no more problem. "I cannot live without her." When you feel that way you don't know who she is and who you are. When you realize that she is important because she is who she is, because she is taking care of you even though sometimes it may be too much, then you understand her nature. And the nature of a man is different. He is usually more idealistic and thinking about something which looks like it is almost impossible, which is not so realistic, and he is trying to go on and on without thinking about what will happen to him. So his wife may

say, "oh, don't do that; it is too soon. Wait. Wait." If she says so he may think, "oh, I must do it right away." Then he may say, "I cannot live without her." But that is not her nature. A hasty careless man wants a careful, more emotionally conservative woman. Sometimes she may be very angry with her husband, but that is not her nature. So when he says, "I cannot live without her," something is missing in his understanding. "I cannot live without her" is right.

The other day I said that the Chinese character for human is two lines supporting each other. Man and woman may be like this, or teacher and disciple. If there is no teacher, there is no disciple; if there is no disciple, there is no teacher. So when teacher and disciple exist like these two lines in this character, there is a monastery. Everything exists in that way. "We cannot exist without her, or without him," is right. Many difficulties will be created when you reach this true kind of understanding of the other side of each event or thing. The other side of good will be bad. Another side of bad will be good; this is reality.

So the other side of darkness is brightness. You may say this room is dark, but it is brighter than the basement where there is no light. And now the basement is brighter than the hall of a morgue. So you cannot say bright is dark actually. Bright or dark is only in your mind; there is no bright or dark in reality. Sometimes we have to have some standard, or some rules or some means of communication, so we say something is good or bad, agreeable or disagreeable. But these are just words. When your girlfriend says, "I don't like you!", you may take her words literally. But maybe she means the opposite. Because she likes you so much sometimes she feels, "I hate you," but it is not actually so. You should not stick to the words. Without observing things from both sides you will not know what to do about things.

Excuse my saying so, but our eyes unfortunately go towards the outside and we cannot see inside ourselves. It means that we are liable to be concerned about another's practice or life and be very critical of them. And even though we start to think about what kind of practice we should have, which way we should take, we still cannot find our own way, because our eyes and our thinking are directed towards the outside. When you say, "which way should I take?" the "way" is there and the "I" is here and the I is not realized. You don't know who you are and what you are about, or the way you should go, and you are completely ignorant about yourself. So you criticize yourself in the way that you criticize others. That is terrible! It is easy to criticize others and also to criticize yourself, even though you don't feel so good when you criticize yourself. When you do so, you suffer. That is what you are doing every day. The reason you suffer is because something is missing in your understanding of what you are doing.

Buddhist understanding is that things which appear to exist outside actually exist within ourselves. When you think, "he is not so good," it means that you are actually criticizing someone within yourself. It is a picture of yourself. This is the understanding of Big Mind which includes everything. Things happen only within yourself; they are an activity of your life within yourself, like your stomach digesting things, but someone may think, "here is my heart and here is my tummy," and if they lack understanding there is not much relationship between them.

But your heart and tummy are closely related to each other and if you make your tummy strong, your heart will also be stronger, so it is not always necessary to have a big operation on you heart.

When you understand in that way, things are closely related, and there is no need to say tummy or heart any more. When you don't know what is going on in your physical body you are in complete health; when you don't talk about him or her or yourself, then your life is getting sound and good.

How you obtain this kind of harmonious life within yourself is by practice. To talk about things is to arrange your food or your dish. Every morning my students arrange food beautifully on each dish. But fortunately, or unfortunately, if I eat or chew it, it is all mixed up in my mouth and I have just the taste of food, no color, no beauty, no sesame salt or brown rice. It is even more mixed up when it reaches my tummy. I don't even know what it is. When things are in full activity there is no idea of good or bad, this or that. But it is good to see things in different dishes. It is good to think about food, your life, or the nature of man and woman. But even though you think about these things, it doesn't mean much unless you really have a taste of them; a taste of your life. Unless you chew it up and mix it together and swallow it, your life doesn't make sense.

So why do we study this kind of thing? The reason we study Buddhism in this way is just to arrange our food in different dishes and appreciate its color and form. But eventually we must eat it and then there is no such teaching whatsoever. When you actually eat it, there is no teacher and no disciple; there is no Buddhism, no Christ.

How to eat is our practice. And we are fortunate, even though we chew things up and mix them together, to know how to arrange things in various ways, in order to know what we have been doing. To analyze your psychology or your practice is important, but this is actually the shadow of your practice, not the actual practice itself. So our practice will go on and on in this way, arranging carefully and mixing together, and chewing and analyzing to see what you are doing. In this way, analyzing in a bright light, mixing in a dark room, over and over, our practice goes on and on endlessly. So at the end of *Sandokai* Sekito says, "If you go in this way step by step, it is not a matter of a thousand-mile stream or a one-mile stream." Then there is no enlightenment and no ignorance because we are going on and on and on, and we are always on the path of Buddhism. But if you stop working and stick to the idea of good and bad, then you will have a difficult barrier like a big river or a high mountain, because you create the river and the mountain for yourself. But they don't exist. When you analyze and criticize yourself, you have some special concept of yourself in terms of good or bad and you think you are like that. It is not actually so, but you create some difficulty for yourself. That is what you are doing.

End of lecture

### *Questions and Answers*

*Student A:* You said, "Zazen is darkness and listening to the lecture is brightness." If someone listens to the lecture with good understanding, then that's Zazen, isn't it?

*Suzuki Roshi:* You should understand as the *Sandokai* says, "Even though you recognize the truth that is not enlightenment." But the lecture will encourage you, and you will know why you practice Zazen. You are arranging things according to my recipe, Buddhist recipe, and you are cooking something here. So you should eat it. How to eat it is to practice Zazen. This food is prepared for people who practice Zazen. So if you eat it, it will help your practice.



*On November 4, 1989,  
Issan Dorsey was  
installed as Abbot of the  
Hartford Street Zen  
Center. Congratulations  
to both Issan and Hartford  
Street!*

*St. A:* You said, "Zazen was darkness, and lecture was bright." And also you talked about *ri* being this and *ji* being that, but what I want to know is whether you can really separate them?

*S.R.:* That is a good point. We are separating tentatively something which is not possible to separate. It is like two sides of a coin; this side is darkness and the other side is brightness. I am talking about this bright side and by your practice you will see the other side. In this way, you will see the whole coin; that is reality. If you think that by your practice you will understand something which is completely different from this bright side, that is a big mistake.

*St. A:* I was wondering why you spoke about one side or the other. Is it impossible to speak about both sides together?



*Tassajara Founder's Hall*

S.R.: Both sides together is not possible, because when you talk about it, it is the bright side. It is not possible to talk about the other side. But because I have some experience or understanding of the other side, I can talk about this bright side. If I had no experience of this other side, what I am talking about wouldn't mean anything. No matter how beautifully I may describe it, this bright side would be poison for you. This bright side is something which is quite different from the other side and it is not possible to mix them or put them together. Something which does not agree with the other side is poisonous. Something poisonous may look very beautiful but if it isn't in accord with the other side, if the other side is ignored, that teaching is an opium or drug.

St. A: We chant, "an unsurpassed penetrating and perfect Dharma" before lecture, and I am wondering how the lecture enters into darkness. How does the lecture teach us? How is it something besides brightness? How is the lecture Zazen?

S.R.: How can I talk about Zazen?

St. A: What is *teisho*?

S.R.: *Teisho* means to give encouragement. It is not just to talk about something, but to give some suggestion and to help people have a good understanding of our practice. The words must come from the actual experience of—I don't want to say it, but—actual experience of enlightenment. These are big words. The actual experience of reality is *teisho*. The words should not be dead, should not be something we study or read in a book. That is the difference between *teisho* and lecture. Strictly speaking, lectures give some knowledge of something; *teisho* mostly helps propel actual practice and enlightenment. So, pushing people towards real practice, that is *teisho*. "Here is something you must have as a Buddhist!" "Look!" That is *teisho*. So we must have something real to talk about.

If you read my book, even memorize it, that is not *teisho*. *Teisho* is something that comes out from inside, from the bottom of the heart. Because I must use words I must follow logic and use special philosophical technical terms. But sometimes, ignoring those terms, we can directly speak about reality. Sometimes it may not be with words. [A knock] *this is teisho*. To talk about something which is not possible to talk about is *teisho*. Excuse me, I cannot explain it so well.

*St. B:* Your lecture on the *Sandokai* is supposed to give us understanding, you say. Then you say we can't understand the bright side unless we understand the dark side, unless we have good *zazen*. Is your lecture just skillful means?

*S.R.:* You will stick to my words, so after giving you a lecture, I take it from you. It is just something intellectual. You should forget what I said, but you should be sure what the real meaning of my words is.

*St. B:* Is talking to the students Buddhist skillful means?

*S.R.:* It should be that way whether we are Buddhists or not. But Buddhists know that if we stick to words, we will be enslaved by words, and we will understand just a little part of what is said. When you are interested in something which I have pointed out with this finger, it may be better for me to cut off this finger so that you will no be attached to it anymore.

We explain how to cook something in a book, but, actually, what we do is cut vegetables and cook them. As long as you try to understand what is written in the cookbook, it may take time before you can cook. When you forget all about our cookbook, you will be a good cook. It is better to study by seeing someone who is actually doing it. That is the best way. To give something directly is *teisho*. But usually your attitude in listening to *teisho* is to think about it, whether it is good or bad, wondering "What is he speaking about?" or wondering whether it is acceptable for you or not. "If it is good I will accept it. If it is not good I will not accept it." That is extra; you don't need to be so careful. If you just listen to it, you don't even need to understand it. If you don't understand it, it is ok; if you do understand it, it is better, that's all. There should be no special attention in listening. Just listening is how you should listen to *teisho* or lecture. It is different from studying something. As you are very logical, your mind works logically and I have to be logical. If you are not logical, I can say whatever I like. I can sing a song even.