

Shunryū Suzuki Rōshi
One-Day *Sesshin* EVENING LECTURE
Saturday, December 11, 1965
Sokoji Temple, San Francisco
Lecture B
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Buddhism has many annual layers like big trees. And traditionally we respect those efforts which our patriarchs did for more than 2000 years. We have made a great effort to develop Buddha's way, and this point is very, very important for Buddhism as a religion. Without this point – without appreciation of the efforts of our patriarchs – I think it is difficult to have religious feeling in Buddhism.

This temple is – was – started 1964 [1934]. At that time, there were not many priests in America and the founder worked very hard and collected the donation and bought this building, but he couldn't pay for it completely. Part of the expense was borrowed from bank and after that, Japanese members year after year, they paid for this building even they were in camp ?? They collected the money in the camp and pay the mortgage. This was – they were very proud of their effort which they did in the camp, but if you compare their effort to our ancestors' effort – India, China, and Japan – and Patriarchs' effort, who devoted to this teaching, it is nothing. That is why Zen was ?? in this way so even though – even one line of a gatha or scripture is the result their actual effort. That is not just teaching. They wrote it by their breath (??) So we should not forget this point, and we should continue this effort forever, generation after generation. Wherever we are, we must continue this effort. This is our responsibility as a Buddhist.

As I said this morning – this afternoon – it is necessary to have some aim in our life. The supreme aim of a Buddhist is to be a successor of our ancestors, to be a successor to the patriarchs. That is the most important point. Or else you are studying Buddhism from outside. You are already outside of it. For outsiders, Buddhism is nothing. When you accept it as your own and when you try to develop it as your own, then Buddhism has tremendous meaning to us.

It may be difficult for you to understand what kind of life our patriarchs had. And those stories, those historical events are not translated into English so much, but I think it is the most important point, if you want to study Buddhism. Intellectual study is of course necessary. Especially intellectually, Patriarchs made a great effort. Sometimes they studied Buddhism intellectually. Even though they ?? they were treated as a heretic, they studied completely from just pure intellectual point. They did not ignore the smallest logical point of Buddhism. And they developed, sometime they developed that

historical [several words indistinct] but there was a reason why they did it and why they did it was also intellectually understood by all the Buddhists. For an instance, our lineage, historically there are some doubts in our lineage from Buddha to us. Especially before Bodhidharma there are some doubts. Anyone knows that is not historically true, but even though what was the name of the patriarchs is not historically true, but Buddhism should be carried out in that way and actually Buddhism was carried on, transmitted, or was taught one to the other. If so, what is written is not exactly right, but the fact that the teaching was transmitted in that way and the spirit of teaching in that way. In this way there are many historical untruths or scientific untruths in Buddhism, but we Buddhists know scientific study is not perfect. There are limits in scientific truth, and artistic expression of the teaching also is not perfect. But in art too, that which was painted is more real than actual existence. So, it is same thing with our teaching. Our teaching is more human -- actual human being -- so some precepts is -- most of precepts is very difficult to follow, but the precepts which is -- which are difficult to observe appears more directly to us and encourage us more and help us more than to observe some rules -- worldly rules -- which it is possible to observe. The rules, if you do not observe you [indistinct word] because of the person all the rules [indistinct word] are possible to be observed, but the point is to observe and why we should observe is not for ourselves but for others. Not to disturb others [indistinct word] observe it. Someone other than yourself that is the nature of law, usual role. But our precepts are for ourselves, not for others. It will protect you yourself. And it will encourage you and it will appease your inmost request. That is why we have precepts. Although precepts is not -- looks like -- [indistinct word] looks like idealistic, looks like too idealistic, but actually it is more practical for a human being. And those precepts were created by our effort.

So without this kind of understanding, you can not understand what is Buddhism. You cannot treat Buddhist precepts as you treat the role of the country. What we do, or practice here looks like very [indistinct word] to spend all day in sitting on your cushion is a big waste of time. Most impractical too. But if you understand you yourself, you will understand why you practice zazen.

The necessity is within yourself. The necessity of the precepts is in yourself not outside of yourself and you try to observe strict precepts for ourselves, not for others. So for the advanced student we have more and more strict precepts. The rest of the precepts we recite is "Don't ignore or don't be blasphemous about the teaching this is blasphemy". People who have been critical of the teaching is pretty advanced students. For such students we give very grave, strict punishment because of [several indistinct words].

Strict discussion about the teaching and the punishment accordingly should be very strict where if you kill someone or something, some animal, the punishment will not be so bad. They are good enough to punish. But we do not encourage to kill, but they are not so good, but the people who become critical of the teaching will be punished very strictly and at the same time to punish you is very difficult. Not so easy. This is the nature of our strict precepts.

Zazen is very difficult, everyone knows, and you cannot practice it completely. But we should not give up. When you give up, you are not human being any more. As long as we are human being, we should not give up. We have enough reasons why we should practice it. Before you realize the necessity -- need -- for practice, you ignore it, but your practice [inaudible] various necessity why you should practice. And that necessity will drive you. Sincere practice. In this way, our practice will be polished up and at the same time our everyday life will be polished up, refined.

So in this way Japanese culture was polished, has been polished. Before Buddhism came, Japanese people are very optimistic people. They have no idea of sin, they have no darkness in their life. They are very optimistic people. But when--after Buddhism was introduced to Japan people became more and more pessimistic [laughing] they have to think more and they have to reflect on themselves more. Before, they thought "We are doing everything right", but it was not so. So, Prince [Shoto]? Set up the constitution of Japan and said it is necessary to correct, to improve our characters. If we want to improve our character, it is necessary to study Buddhism. Without respect our triple treasures, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, triple treasures, how is it possible to reform our character? In his constitution, he said he, declared [inaudible word] And in this way we became more and more reflective and we are concentrated to work inwardly instead of just outward. Maybe before Zen Buddhism came, we became too pessimistic. Buddhism -- Zen Buddhism was very practical, although it is more strict and more simple, but it was practical. The pessimistic people in old times tried to make some compensation by their elaborate effort building beautiful temples or making priests [inaudible] by [inaudible] or making [inaudible] stupa. In this way they wanted to -- they practiced repentance, but still that -- their sincerity should be appreciated, but their way is too elaborate, and their way was not practical enough. So, Zen was very simple and the teaching is very direct and to the point.

So Zen Buddhism was accepted completely by people after Kamakura period, but even so, our effort is concentrated mainly inward. Even though there were fighting with each other, they did not forget to practice Zen and to make some effort to reform our characters. And we respected the lineage of that time for its more reflective and kind

and sincere, not only powerful but also they have to [inaudible word] and they have to have good understanding of Buddhism and they have to respect their families. And we have many National treasures owned by [inaudible] people at that time. In this way, Zen was developed. So even though as busy a country as America -- like America-- there must be some--we should spare some time in this kind of practice and I think we should have more composure in our life and we should respect our tradition. Both Buddhist tradition and Christian tradition.

Transcribed from digitized tape by Joe Galewsky, 5/10/09.

This replaces the former transcription which was incomplete. Footers but no notes removed. Verbatim but needs to be rechecked, thus named VU – DC, 7-12-09

Former provenance: This transcript is a retyping of the existing City Center transcript. It is not verbatim. No tape is available. [tape found] The City Center transcript was entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. It was reformatted by Bill Redican (10/27/01). This lecture appeared in edited form in *Wind Bell*, 1966, 5(3), which gave the date as Dec. 11, 1965.