

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
Sunday, June 19, 1966¹
Lecture C
Soko-ji Temple, San Francisco

Last time I explained the ten prohibitory precepts:

- Do not kill.
- Do not steal.
- Do not be immoral.
- Do not lie.
- Do not sell intoxicating liquor.
- Do not speak of other's shortcomings.
- Do not praise yourself or blame others.
- Do not grudge giving to charities material or spiritual.
- Do not be angry.
- Do not speak ill of the Triple Treasures.

Those precepts looks like quite common precepts and nothing—nothing special. It is not [laughs] quite usual, and almost all the people know it. But this is pretty difficult to observe it. This is well-known fact. It is quite simple, but it is quite [laughs] difficult to observe it.

So in this point there is some reason why we have to emphasize those ten precepts. And those precepts is in Buddhism—have special meaning because our precepts is not to attain some special achievement mentally or spiritually. To be a good citizen [laughs] is just why we have to be a Buddhist, you know. There will not be no need for us—for all of us to be a—to be sages [laughs]. If we are good enough to be a good citizen, that's enough. If we are quite good as a citizen of America, then I think we will [not?] have any more war [laughs] because we are too good. That is why I think we have to fight. If we are just good, common citizen, there will not be no need to fight. This point is very important for us. Our precepts should be so very common and should be very usual.

And those ten precepts may be, you know, well-understood custom among human being. And it will be unwritten rules, but sometime those ten commandments [are] set up as a law. Here—here we have —because it is difficult for us to observe it, we have law. So when it become—when those precepts is—are understand as a law of the country, someone may think it may be permissible to some extent to do something wrong—will be permissible if some attorney will say you

¹ This date is probably wrong: Four lectures on one reel-to-reel tape were assigned the same date. The previous recorded lecture in which Suzuki-rōshi commented on the ten prohibitory precepts was given on 21 January 1966, so this lecture may have been given shortly thereafter. (See SR-66-01-21-A.)

can do as much as is [laughs]—to some extent it is good. That is precepts when they are understood as a law. And sometime it may be understood as a moral rules. In morality—it is some rules which we should observe. So it—in morality we emphasize the negative sense of the precepts. We—"You should do this; you should not do this" is morality.

But this understanding of the rules of human being does not work properly, because under the moral rules we feel some—we do not feel freedom—we have no freedom in moral realm. But in religious realm, we have two side of the interpretation of the—our rules. One is prohibitory meaning. One is more positive meaning—we have to do it or we want to do it instead of we should do it. When we say we should do it, that is moral precepts. But when we say I cannot help doing so, or I have to, you know—no, no—I want to refrain from doing something bad, that is religious understanding of our rules.

So in this realm, we have freedom. But here religious faith is wanted. Without faith or without finding out your inmost request, you cannot obtain this kind of freedom. Because you—when you find out your inmost nature or buddha-nature, you don't want to do something wrong, and you want to do something good. Here you have negative sense—you understand precepts in negative and positive sense. This is why we have to have precepts.

So here precepts is not just contact between people or between countries, or it is not the law of the country or law of the society. It is—this contact will be—bring into the relationship between Buddha and sentient being. So there we have no chance [laughs] to break it, you know, because we want to do it. When you want to do it, there is no chance to break it.

So here, again, you come back to the—to animal stage. Animals do not [do] anything wrong. What he—what they do is always right. But human beings have some ability or [laughs]—I don't know what to say—freedom to do something good and bad. So in human realm, we have to have some conduct between us. So that we might not get into confusion [laughs] there is some rules. And we have two chances: to do something good and to do something bad. Morality is for human being.

So, as Buddha said, human being has some destiny to, you know, fight or—not "fight," but to struggle with himself and with others. That is the nature of human culture. But when our human culture is emancipated to the stage of religious culture, we have perfect freedom. In this sense, we emphasize precepts. Even though we—the difference between asceticism and Buddhism is this point: We acknowledge our human nature one hundred percent [laughs]. We are

one hundred percent good. We accept it. Whether someone say good or bad, we have human nature. We have to accept it, and as long as we are human nature, we cannot be a god in—in Christian sense. We cannot be a god. We are human being through and through. When we are human being through and through, we are, you know, buddha. But how to be buddha—buddha must not have—must be—must obtain perfect freedom. So when we find out our true nature, we are buddha. And for us there is no chance to do anything wrong. That is why we should observe our precepts.

So we do not observe our precepts by any gaining idea. Just to be human being is the purpose of observing precepts. There is no other purpose. Just to observe the precepts because we want to do it. That's all. That is the precepts. Ten prohibitory precepts.

So ten prohibitory precepts may be the Three Refuges—or no—three corrective precepts, "the precepts which enjoin us to complete good behavior—the precepts which enjoin us to complete good deeds—the precepts which enjoin the completion of benevolence or loving kindness to all beings."² Here we emphasize positive side of—side of the precept—precepts. And here, in three corrective pure precepts, we emphasize both negative side and positive side. So when we—oneness of the positive and negative side is attained, we—we say pure. By "pure" we mean oneness of the duality always.

When the Sixth Patriarch³—as the Sixth Patriarch said, there are—it is not—there is no practice and enlightenment. There is practice and enlightenment, and enlightenment is enlightenment, and practice is practice [laughs]. But you—he said, you should not think after you practice it you will attain enlightenment. So our practice is a mean[s] need to attain enlightenment. That is not right understanding, the Sixth Patriarch said. And when he say so, he say you should not have a polluted idea of practice and enlightenment: stained idea. Stained idea means dualistic idea. Practice—if you think practice and enlightenment is two different things, that is stained idea. If you understand the practice and enlightenment is one, that is pure, you know, unstained idea of practice. So he said, although there is practice and enlightenment, you should not have stained idea: *zenna* in Chinese or Japanese.⁴ *Zenna*. *Zenna* *sinke torii zai*.⁵ "You should not have tainted idea." That means you should not have—you should have pure understanding. By pure understanding, we means understanding which is more that just intellectual dualistic

² It sounds like Suzuki-rōshi is quoting someone, but the source is unknown.

³ Daijan Huineng (Daikan Enō): 638-713. Sixth Chinese Patriarch of Zen.

⁴ *zenna* or *zenma* (Jap.): to defile a pure mind with a delusory one; to be attached to a dualistic view.

⁵ Phonetic guess only. Transcriber is assuming the next sentence is the English translation of the Japanese phrase.

understanding.

So here it is—here we say the "three corrective pure precepts" because this precepts express the oneness of the negative and positive attitude of observing precepts. And whether those positive and negative attitude of observing precepts will be attained when we realize our true nature and take refuges in Buddha and law—Buddha, law, and sangha. That is why we have sixteen precepts.

The first Triple Treasures means our fundamental nature to take refuge in Buddha, or the truth, or the sangha. And this—when we realize our true nature, that—it means we have the—both negative and positive way of observing precepts in everyday life.

But as we have some human nature which is special to human nature, we have to emphasize more—more negative, prohibitive side of the precepts, you know. It is more, you know, suitable for human being to emphasize the negative side. When we realize our true nature, we—naturally we will emphasize—we will have some—not [2 words] but negative understanding of life. Because when we realize our true nature—before we realize our true nature, we emphasize rather positive [laughs] side until you are completely caught by [laughs]—caught by your positive side of the activity: ignoring not to kill, not to steal, or not to be immoral, not to lie, you know.

It is quite true when Dōgen-zenji says human being like something wrong [laughs]. That is quite true. And ignoring something true [laughs]. We are not so interested in something right, something true. If we start to [be] interested in something true—always all of us [are] interested in something which is completely right, then all the social activity will be stopped [laughing]. There will be no newspaper, no magazine, no movie, no traffic, no airplane, no trip to the moon [laughter]. Our world—human world will be completely blocked up. That is true [laughs]. We—we should know that.

So it is quite—Buddha was quite wise to accept both [laughs] sides [laughs]. Half and half. And for—for his—because of his mercy, he emphasized the negative side with little more—more than positive side [laughs]. There is no need for us to emphasize the positive side. We are quite positive anyway. This is the structures of the precepts.

So precepts eventually goes so far as the formality or behavior or demeanor which no moral rules or law of the country cannot reach, you know. Whatever you do you have, to some extent, you have freedom. Even though you do not behave like a good citizen, you should not be put in jail [laughs]. So you have to have—you have some—to some extent, you have freedom.

But in religion, religion goes deeper than that. So it bound you so far as it goes to the demeanor of—not only behavior, but will go how to smile or how to blink [laughs] eyes. It should go so far, you know, because what will happen to you if your boyfriend makes [laughs] his eyes triangle [laughs, laughter]. That is, before you say anything, that is the end of the [laughs] friendship. Religion goes so far. It is—religion is deeper and it is more, you know [laughs], real to us. That is religion. So it goes very deep.

But when you take—when you understand religion as you understand some social contact, or rules, or law of the country, you know, religion is very bad, you know. It is terrible [laughs]. When a religion lose its faith and lose its freedom to believe in, religion is worst, you know, [laughs] thing which you will have. So when—if you believe in religion, you should believe in [it] from the bottom of your heart, or else religion is worst thing to observe or believe in.

So anyway we should have a complete freedom in religious faith.

Thank you very much.

Source: Original City Center tape. Verbatim transcript by Adam Tinkham and Bill Redican (5/18/01).