

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**LOTUS SŪTRA, LECTURE NO. 5**  
**[Third Lotus Sūtra Series]**  
**Tuesday Evening, October 28, 1969**  
**Zen Mountain Center**

I think there must be many things to prepare before you understand—before you read *Lotus Sūtra*. First of all, we say always, you know, "Mahāyāna" or "Hīnayāna." So what actually means by Hīnayāna or Mahāyāna is one of the many things which you should know.

Buddha originally left teaching some time for some special people. But even so, people who listen to that—hear the Buddha's teaching maybe [have] different understanding, according to the ability of the people who listen—who hear him. So actually there are many various kinds of teaching in Buddha's teaching. We say, "Buddha's teaching," but—in one word—but there are many various kinds of teaching included.

But naturally, Buddha's teaching was divided in two—as his disciple or his descendant naturally divided in two, you know, as it is so always. They were divided in some logical student and some more conservative ones. The conservative one was so-called-it Hīnayāna or Theravāda. Even 100 [years] after—100 [years] after Buddha passed away, there is—there were some even [?]. Some radical students proposed to practice ten—ten more practice. But some conservative students—Theravāda students—called him: "He is heretic; he is not orthodox traditional—orthodoxical traditional students; that is not what Buddha said." In this was there was already some dispute.

And they had later a second meeting to—to—to unify Buddha's teaching. But, at the same time, some group had another meeting [laughs], you know. In this way, there were Buddhist—Buddhists divided in two. The conservative ones are mostly the ones who remembered Buddha's teaching and who has—who had some record, and who had some complete traditional texts. Radical ones more put emphasis on Buddha's intention to leave his teaching: why Buddha, you know, left this kind of teaching. That was the most important point for the radical ones. They didn't, you know, stick to scriptures only. And the conservative ones, you know, who wanted to oppose radical ones, more and more systematized Buddha's teaching, you know, and analyzed Buddha's teaching in various way. That is so-called-it Hīnayāna teaching.

The Hīnayāna teaching, in one word, [is] the teaching which—Hīnayāna teaching in one word, we say, in Japanese, *Sanze-jitsu-u-*

*hottai-gōu*.<sup>1</sup> It means that:<sup>2</sup> *sanze* is three [worlds]—past, present, and future is *sanze*. And *hottai* is the teachings—teachings analyzed our mind and—our mind and body, or subjective world and objective world in various way, like five *skandha*, you know, five *skandha*, or—do you know the teaching of five *skandha*? In *Prajñāpāramitā* [it] said, "Five *skandha* is empty—are empty." That five *skandha* or six mind, or seventh mind, or eighth mind—that is how they analyzed our subjective and objective world. And those, you know, elements were called *dharma*. And, in China, they counted in 75 or 100. And those, you know, elements supposed to be some—[are] supposed to be substantial things. The Hīnayāna students thought in that way. And it is always exist in that way.

But, you know, it is—originally, you know, those elements were result of the—result of our analyze, you know. We—they analyze our mind—how we—our mind works, you know. And they counted up the—in 75 [dharma] or something like that.

As you know, you know, Buddha's teaching originally—the most important teaching for Buddhist is—everything changes is the most important teaching [laughs]. It is rather difficult, maybe, but if you hear it over and over again, naturally you will understand—eventually you will understand. Everything changes is the fundamental teaching of Buddhism, as you know. Nothing has self-nature. But when conservative Theravāda students [were] interested in more and more analyzing Buddha's teaching, and trying to authorize his teaching [as] something which was given to them, and because the teaching are something valuable, they wanted to protect it. While they are doing—making effort in that way, they—after all those effort, they set up something which does not change [laughs], you know—teaching—teaching does not change! Teaching—"dharma" mean sometime "teaching," and sometime "various being," and it—it sometime it means "various element produced by analyze." And they—they put—they s- [partial word]—after all they said, those teaching does not change, and, at the same time, those elements which teaching denote does not change. And there is actually some elements—some entity.

But that is not anymore true, you know. That is not true. We say "mind," but where is mind? [Laughs.] Mind is not—is not some substantial thing. We say "eyes," you know. Eyes—when we—when I was learning psychology, we started to learn how our—it was like physics, you know. Teacher draw, you know, what do you—what do you call it—"eye"?

---

<sup>1</sup> The view of the Sarvāstivāda school that since the dharmas exist in a real sense in the three worlds, the substance of dharmas is real.

<sup>2</sup> The remaining two terms are: *jitsu-u*: reality; *gōu*: appears to be equivalent to *kō*, "always" (Nelson No. 1683). Later (p. 4), Suzuki-rōshi translates the phrase as "everything exist in past and present and future."

**Student:** Eyeball?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Hmm? No. This.

**Student:** [Unclear]?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Round one [laughs]. Eyeball? [Laughs.]

**Students:** [Several suggestions at once.]

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Eyeball? Eyeball is like [laughs, laughter]. Nerve—the —he, you know, draw nerves. This connect to brain, you know— something like that [laughs]. But we say "eyes," you know. "Eyes" is actually a part of skin [laughs]. And nose is also a part of skin. And ears, to, you know. So you may say, "This is eyes," you know. But strictly speaking, all those eyes and nose and mouth and everything is part of our skin. Even our tongue is a part of skin. But we tentatively, for convenience sake, [say] "This is tummy; this is eye; this is nose." That's all, you know.

So Buddha said [laughs], "There is no eyes." No such thing as eyes. Tentatively, you know, this part of skin you may call it—call them "eye." This part is nose. And this part is ear. Actually, we—we have, you know, nose and mouth and everything, but it is not any particular thing. There is some difference. So we—we—we—we may say, "There is eyes," but at the same time, even though it is different from other part, but originally it is a part of it. There is no borderline between your nose and eyes or ears. From where [laughs] is it, you know, belongs to ear? And from where your nose start? No one knows. Maybe someone may say "from here" [laughs], someone may say "from here." All your way from your tummy to—it will come to here.

**Student A:** What—what smells when you [1-2 words unclear]?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** That is function—function of the—some particular part of skin [laughs, laughter].

**Student B:** [Entire question unclear.]

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Skin.

**Student:** Skin.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** I'm just—right now I'm—maybe you can hear it as a— a kind of joke. But it is true, you know. We understand, you know, our—in Mahāyāna teaching, we understand things from various angle, and standpoint we take is very free, you know. This way and that

way. Someone—if someone say yes, someone say no. And yes and no they discussed until yes and no become same. That is more Mahāyāna way.

And moreover, you know, the Hīnayāna students, when they talked about mind, you know—mind is also, you know, something which exist [as] some substantial thing. You may call it—some people may call it "soul" or something, you know. But no one knows the exact terminology of "soul." And if, you know, if—soul is actually, you know—mind is actually—you think you have mind, you know, but no one knows exactly what kind of substance the mind is. No one knows. But we—because we have various function, you know, so someone must be there, you know, who has—which has that kind of function. That is mind.

So if you say so, it—it is too much—too far [laughs], when you don't know what—what kind of thing it is—whether there is mind or not. Before you know that, you say here is—there is mind, and that—or soul. And that soul or mind is always some substantial thing. And it does not change. It is—it was like that in past time, and—and it will be like this. It will exist in future as it exist right now. So they said *hottai*<sup>3</sup>—"everything exist in past and present and future." They reached this kind of conclusion after trying to authorize Buddha's teaching in various way. They went too far, and they forgot original—the most important teaching of Buddha.

That is what has happened to Buddha's teaching after Buddha passed away. Some people, you know, didn't feel so good when some student authorize Buddha's teaching in this way—in that way, because Buddha's teaching more and more became far away from the original teaching. That was actually what has happened to Buddhism. That is why Mahāyāna school became strong—stronger.

In Mahāyāna teaching, they, in word—in one word, his teaching—their teaching was [that] present—present things—things in this moment exist, but it doesn't—nothing exist in past or future, or, you know, in past or future it doesn't actually—things doesn't exist, actually. That is quite opposite, you know, statement—to destroy their—Hīnayāna statement of Hīnayāna students they—they said *Kan-ni mutai genzai jitsu-u*.<sup>4</sup>

So, as you must have realized, in, you know, *Lotus Sūtra*, they put emphasis on present. That which exist in present—present time exist in past and future. But that past and future is quite different past and future of tomorrow—tomorrow's past and future. And future's past

<sup>3</sup> *Sanze-jitsu-u-hottai-gōu*, from pp. 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Phonetic only; spelling is not verified. Possibly: *mutai* (Jap.): "not to reply"; "not to respond"; *genzai*: "present time"; *jitsu-u*: "reality."

and future—yesterday's past and future. That is more Mahāyāna's mystic understanding. May be the same, but for us right now it—it is different. That is more Mahāyāna understanding of time and things.

The Mahāyāna students observed things [as] one whole living being, you know. Everything is just one whole being. Like, you know, I said, you know, we say "eyes and nose and mouth," but it is actually one whole body, and those are a part of it. So to—if you want to experience one whole being there is no other way to experience it in this moment. That is more Mahāyāna teaching.

Body and mind is the same, you know. Living being—there is one living being which is called—you know, I don't know what is the name of it, but—one whole being. It has various activities. And one activity—if we classify the activity of big being, it may be mental activity, and it may be—the other will be the physical. But it is one whole living being. That is more Mahāyāna teaching.

So when, you know, when someone stick to some idea or some substantial idea of A or B, you know, that is more Hīnayāna understanding. When we put emphasis on interrelationship between various thing, that is more Mahāyāna understanding. And that is more faithful to—Mahāyāna understanding is more faithful to original teaching of Buddha: selflessness, and everything changes. "Everything changes" means one whole being is taking always activity. Continuously they are taking activity. That is original teaching of Buddha. And Mahāyāna teaching is more faithful to the original teaching.

Attitude of the student is also different. The Hīnayāna teach- [partial word]—student put emphasis on self-realization. And Mahāyāna Buddhist put more emphasis on helping others. And to help others is—why we should help others, and how we help others, when you want to help others—you—we should know—we should have wisdom. That wisdom is based on everything is one whole being—one whole living being. So, you know, to help myself—if you want to help ourself—himself in its true sense, you should help others too. And to help others means to help himself. That is more Mahāyāna understanding or attitude of practicing Buddhist way.

One is very idealistic. The other is very practical. But if you read *Lotus Sūtra* you may say that is not so practical. But, you know, if you seize the underlying thought, you may [be] amazed how practical teaching—was hidden in that kind of parable.

I don't know what kind of, you know, understanding you have. So tonight, you know, I will not talk any more, but I want you to ask some questions, and I want to answer why.

**Student C:** Rōshi, could you tell us [rest of sentence unclear]. If I put my hand in front of my eyes, you know—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Uh-huh.

**Student C:** —what—what sees it [?]?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Your skin see [laughs]. I—what I said, you know, "no nose" means, you know, if you say, you know, according to—for an instance, according to Hīnayāna teaching, you know, Theravāda teaching, there is eyes. Eyes has its—it is one of the important element of our being. And that is more independent element, and more substantial thing, and something which has self-nature.

"Self" means, you know, something which has, you know, self. Buddhism is self- [partial word]—teaching of selflessness. But when—I must explain [laughs] this point too—mmm—let me see. Buddhist teaching is teaching of selflessness, but Buddha didn't establish that kind of new teaching. But he wanted to correct their misunderstanding when they say "self," you know. So because he doesn't want to establish any teaching, you know, so if someone—when someone say "self," and that self means something proper, then Buddha may accept it. "Yes, we have self," he may say. If the "self"—if some appropriate meaning the words "self" has, Buddha will say, "Yeah, there is self." But when they have misunderstanding about self, he says, "No, there is no such thing, self."

"Self" means, you know, to have—when Buddha did not accept "self," that "self" means some—something which has self-nature, and which has some special substance. That is self. So something which has its own nature, you know—it own independent nature. That is self. You know, when you say "self," you have your own character. And that is maybe a kind of, you know, nature—your own nature. So you call—you—you say you have self. In the same way, Buddha—when Buddha said "no self," he means—by "self" he meant some independent nature which is quite different—quite different from other nature.

And accordingly, because of that nature, it has some characteristic— independent character. That is self. And this kind of self, we attach to it, you know. And because of this kind of self, we make various mistake, ignoring [laughs] others' self. You become very, very independent, and you become very selfish because of this kind of understanding. So Buddha says "no self." You say you have your own nature, but that is also universal nature. And you have your own characteristic, but [it is] little bit different from other one [?], as many things is not exactly the same—[2-4 words unclear]. But you should not point out some characteristic which is quite different from others.

Mostly your character is the same as others'.

So that you say you have independent nature is wrong. That you have quite different character or characteristic, that is also—not wrong, but not complete. That is what Buddha said. So what Buddha says is—point up—point at our misunderstanding. Do you understand? What he is talking about [is] reality—things as it is. If someone make some misunderstanding, he points at many things, and fundamental teaching is "everything changes" and selflessness, because most people thinks things has its own nature. But there is no such nature exist. It is based on universal nature. Oh. *Hai*.

*[The poor sound quality of the rest of the lecture makes accurate transcription impossible. The batteries in the original recorder appear to have faded.]*

---

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Bill Redican (7/5/01).