

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**MAHĀYĀNA AND HĪNAYĀNA BUDDHISM**  
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The difference between so-called-it Therāvada Buddhism and Sarvāstivādiān or Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna is very important and directly, you know, concerned with our present problem. We are supposed [laughing] to be Mahāyāna Buddhist, but I think most of us are Hīnayāna, actually. There is not much Mahāyāna students. Almost all of us may be Hīnayāna or sectarian Buddhists because we study Buddhism as something which is already given to us, like Hīnayāna Buddhist thought Buddha already gave us—have given us—the wonderful teaching. So what we should do is to preserve his teaching as you like—as you put food in refrigerator [laughs]. That is Hīnayāna way. And to study, you know, Buddhism is to take out food from refrigerator. So wherever you want it, it is already there. That is Hīnayāna way of understanding.

But Mahāyāna students rather interested in how to produce food from the field—from the garden. So naturally Mahāyāna Buddhist, you know, put the emphasis on ground or garden which has nothing in it, you know, which you don't see anything in it. You know, if you see the garden, you don't see anything. But if you take care of seed, it will come out.

So we—Mahāyāna Buddhist make our effort to, you know, to see something come out from ground. And joy of the Mahāyāna Buddhist is joy of take care of the garden. That is Mahāyāna Buddhist. So we—Mahāyāna Buddhist—that is why Mahāyāna Buddhist, you know, put emphasis on emptiness. Emptiness is—is a garden where you cannot see anything. But it is, actually, mother of everything from which, you know, everything will come out.

Teaching eventually will be almost same, but our attitude towards teaching is different. So actually, Mahāyāna teaching and Hīnayāna teaching does not differ so much. And so we say, "We should practice Hīnayāna teaching with Mahāyāna spirit, with the gratitude of raising things or taking care of teaching or to appreciate teaching. How to appreciate teaching from nothing is, actually, our practice.

All of us has buddha-nature, so the teaching which will grow from the buddha-nature will be the same. But attitude is different. When you, you know—when you think teaching is already given to you, then your effort—naturally, you know, how to apply the teaching in this common, you know, world—ordinary world so that, you know, they make a great effort to apply the teaching to the—our mundane world. So that is a difficulty they had.

And the more and more the teaching is flavor or real sense. I think you—Yoshimura-sensei told you about something—a teaching of 20—12 links, you know. Did you or—? I think most of them listened to his lecture. And their—Hīnayāna understanding of the 12 links and Mahāyāna understanding of it is quite different. One is, you know—Hīnayāna Buddhist apply that teaching of 12 links, you know, for our actual life, you know, how we born and how we die.

But the original purpose of the teaching—when Buddha told us the teaching, he used it to explain the interdependency of the—of various being. So there is a big difference between the interpretation of the same teaching.

The more and more Buddha's teaching became very common and meaningless. Buddhas, you know, Buddhas—why Buddha told us, you know—how Buddha—and how Buddha tried to save us is to destroy our common sense.

You know, we are not usually, you know, as a human being, we are not interested in nothingness, you know, nothingness of the ground [laughs]. If you—you have something on—in the garden, you will be interested in something which is on the—in the garden. That is our tendency. But we are not so much interested in—usual person, at least, is not interested in the bare, you know, soil. But if you, actually, if you want to have good harvest, the most important thing, of course, is to make rich soil and to cultivate the soil and to weed the soil. That is the most important thing.

The Buddha—Buddha's teaching is about not what is there, but how it grows and how to take care of things. So he is not interested in, you know, various idea of deity, you know. But he rather interested in the deity, you know, which will grow [laughs] from the ground. So for him everything may be some holy being—not special, you know, given deity. So he looks like atheist, you know. He doesn't—he was not interested in some special deity, which we find out as something which is already there. He is not interested in them. But he was interested in the ground from which various gods will appear.

And this difference, you know, or lack of understanding of Buddhism result many non-Buddhist practice. For an instance, you know, in this zendō, in our group, we have, you know, officers, you know [laughs]. But, you know, officers are, you know, someone who appeared from the group, you know. So sometime, you know, officers are not someone who is, you know, the most respectable—which our—we must know from where he appeared [laughs]. You know, from our group he appeared, tentatively, to take care of our group. That is officer. But when we understand officers or respect officers as someone who is—who is selected people from your group, and who is the most respectable people because he is officer, that—that is very non- [partial word]—un-Buddhistic

understanding. As we are living as a Buddhist in this Zen center, there must be someone who should take care of—someone should take care of our group. That is officer.

As a officer he is not, you know—he should be grateful [1 word] as a officer, as a—to take—he should be interested in to take care of our group rather that someone who is respectable, who is capable, you know. There is big difference, you know, in understanding themselves and in understanding officers, you know, his—their own understanding as a officer and people's understanding of officer.

When—I am not blaming [laughs], you know, anyone who is in the position of officer, but I am a, you know—as an example, I'm talking about this matter, but don't misunderstand me. When you become officer, you know, when you become officer you think you are some special person. [Laughs.] That is also very un-Buddhist—Buddhistic idea. We—each one of us comes out of the ground of Zen Center, you know. The ground [laughs] is the most important thing from which everyone of us comes out. So it is the ground, you know, which should be taken care of—not the plant, you know. If the ground is good, naturally good officers will appear. So we should respect all of the members of the group. Take care of Zen Center and you yourself, as a member of Zen Center.

When you think officer is some special person, that is, you know, that understanding is to understand things, you know, as some—to unders-[partial word]—to have more understanding of substantiality, a concrete idea, as a officer—officer as some special, you know, being, that is already concrete idea. Officers is something appeared from the members, you know, not special person. Cannot be any special person, because any one of you can be a officer. If members are very good, any one of you cannot—can be a officer. But because the soil is not so good [laughs], you know, so only capable one should be officer. The fault is each one of you—the reason why you should choose a special person. And special person should feel so bad, you know, to be appointed always same position [laughs]. "Oh, it's awful! [Laughs.] I wish someone can take my place," you know. If they—we are all good spirit, you know, anyone can be a officer. But that I should be always be officer is very regretful thing. The officer should understand themselves in that way. Then that is very Buddhistic, you know, understanding of their position.

So Buddha says: "If people are good, good buddha will appear." Because if people in some country, at some—in some time are not good, they will not have good buddha. That is very interesting, you know, remark. Buddha did not think himself to be some special person. He tried to be the most common people wearing ragged robe, you know, making trip with a, you know, begging bowl, without having any special novel teaching. He just tried to be a good friend of people. That was, you

know, why Buddha appear in this world, and that was what he did at his time in India.

You know, because he had that kind of spirit or understanding of world, he could be a buddha. And he thought that I am—I have many students is because students are very good—not Buddha himself. That is most—the most Buddhistic understanding of teaching. But after Buddha, you know, the people respect his teaching or respect Buddha because of his—his teaching and his character. Maybe his teaching was very good, but why his teaching was very good is his understanding of life was good. His understanding of emptiness or his understanding of people was good. And because his understanding of people was good, he loved people, and he—he enjoy helping people. And that was why Buddha was great. *[Sentence finished. Tape turned over.]*

... enjoy himself as a—as—because he is some special person or special sage, you know [laughs]. He enjoy himself as a friend of people. And he amazed at, you know, people's buddha-na- [partial word]—buddha-nature, which is in each person. So it—when he attained enlightenment, he said, "It is wonderful to see the buddha-nature in everyone of us." That was what he said when he attained enlightenment.

And buddha-nature is not some special nature which only human being has. In Buddhism, when we say "sentient beings," it include, you know, plants and stones and mountains and stars and the sun and everything. That is sentient being. So, in short, it is emptiness, you know. The ground from which everything comes out: stars and moon and everything comes out—that is, you know, emptiness. That is why we call—we put emphasis on emptiness. So emptiness could be sometime, tentatively Zen Center or America or Japan or this world or this cosmos, from which everything comes out. So purpose of our practice is how to take care of Zen Center, how to take care of America, how to take care of this world or this cosmos, and enjoy things from which appears.

I said we are mostly Hīnayāna Buddhists [laughs], you know, although we call ourselves—we think ourselves Mahāyāna Buddhist, maybe because we don't mind [laughs] so much about precepts, or we eat feed—meat and fish. That is why we, you may think—because we don't mind as a Mahāyāna Buddhist to eat meat and to eat fish, Mahāyāna Buddhist is not so lazy, you know.

So we are Mahāyāna Buddhist. But that is not [laughing] real Mahāyāna Buddhist, you know. Of course, you know, Mahāyāna Buddhist doesn't mind so much about any special given teaching.

But we should be, you know, we should not be caught by the idea of substantiality. To be caught by idea of substantiality means, you know, to become dualistic. When we put emphasis on emptiness, you know, in

emptiness there is no dualistic idea. If you, you know, start to have dualistic idea of emptiness that is not emptiness. A dualistic understanding, you know, appears when you have some idea of substantiality. When you have id- [partial word]—some idea of duality—priest and officer, you know—officers—officers and students—that kind of idea is already very substantial—substantial.

Because there is students, there is officer who take care of students. Without students [laughs] there is no officer. But you may think, "I was once a officer of Zen Center." [Laughing.] He thinks, you know, he is always officer [laughs]. Very substantial, you know, idea. That kind of idea is not our idea.

In Sōtō school, you know, there is ridiculous things, you know, in giving some title to a person, you know [laughs]. I think only when I was in Zen Center, I am a teacher of Zen Center. I am a teacher, you know. If I go back to Japan, I don't think I can be a teacher any more because I am already too Americanized [laughs, laughter]. I don't know, you know, what is going on in America. So I cannot be a teacher, you know, if I go back to Japan. That is right, you know. I should be like that, you know.

If I think I am always teacher wherever I go, even though I join monkey teachers [laughing]—ridiculous idea, you know. I cannot be a teacher of a monkey or monkey group or teacher of fish. That is not possible, you know. So I should not have any special title, you know. But here, today, I shall be a teacher of you, you know. I think that is real teacher.

But people, you know, very Hīnayānistic people think, "I'm always teacher. I am entitled as a teacher by Sōtō headquarters" [laughs, laughter]. That is very, I think, Hīnayānistic teach- [partial word]—idea. And that is, I think—that is why I don't like sectarianism. But most people, you know, involved in this kind of misunderstanding. That is why it is—there is some difficulty in managing—in the management of the group. If we—we really become interested in Mahāyāna Buddhism, there is no problem of this kind.

Even though we are teacher and disciple, teacher and student, we are, you know, eternally friend of Buddhism. That is very important statement, I think. We are eternally, you know, friends. Tentatively, even though we have position, but we are eternally friends. This point should not be forgotten.

Thank you very much.

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Source: City Center tape transcribed by Sara Hunsaker (2/27/00). Transcript checked against tape by Bill Redican (5/22/00).