

**Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi**  
**Saturday Morning, July 17, 1971**  
**San Francisco**

[In my last lectures]<sup>1</sup> ... I explain about our precepts. As you must have found out, "the precepts," we say, but it is nothing so unusual—it is just about the things as they are and about what we are. And that is precepts. You may wonder why then is it necessary [laughs] to accept precepts. But this is very important point. I want you to understand. It is very very common understanding which you can accept quite easily.

You know, what I say—what I said was there are three—the three kind of precepts. One precept is—first one is indivisible three precepts.<sup>2</sup> Even though we say "three," but that three is one. So it is not possible to—cannot be three. It is actually to repeat one precepts three times from various angle. That is the first one.

There's— In— Where things exist, there is some rules. And rules, we say, but it is nothing but way of—it is nothing but the function of great being which we cannot understand. It is something which is beyond our reach. But that something [is] always doing something, or has some function. So there is some rule in the way of—the function of the great being. But the function and the great being is one, not two, in Buddhism. But in Christianity, God is here, and it gives some rules to everything. That is more Christian understanding. But in Buddhist—according to Buddhism, it is not two. So this point is called "harmony." Harmony does not mean harmony between each being, but harmony between the function and the great being. Those are one.

The Buddhist are very realistic. Buddhism are very realistic. So we do not seek for who does this, when this earth started, who created those things. We don't think in that way. We accept things as it is. And if we cannot, we do not try to think about things just by my mind, but before we think, we accept things. So when you see or accept things as it is, the function and something, great being, is one. When you think, "Who did it?" [laughs] then it become two. But when you just see it as—as scientist see something, you know, observe something, then it cannot be two. Sometime it is great being, its function, and sometime great being is some big being which is—which has always function. You know, they are not two; that is one. This is—this

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<sup>1</sup> The opening words were not recorded on tape. The phrase in brackets was inserted by the transcriber. Suzuki-rōshi was probably referring to lectures SR-71-07-02 and SR-71-07-06.

<sup>2</sup> *ittai sanbō*: one, absolute and non-dual truth (*ittai*); the three treasures (*sanbō*) viewed as one.

understanding is actually understanding of everything and understanding of universe and understanding of ourselves.

And next—next one was manifested three treasures. Manifested three treasures are—three treasures was found out by—which was realized by Buddha.<sup>3</sup> What Buddha realized was about great being and about the function of the great being. And when Buddha found out the truth, he himself became Buddha. And he realized that he himself is also the function of great being and function—it—the great being itself. Buddha is great being. Buddha himself was great being, and his activity is activity of the great being.

So he became one with great being and one with the function of the great being, and when he talked about it, he had many disciples. And that was the Buddha's group, Buddha's disciples, which is called "sangha." That is manifested three treasures.

And later, we have instead of Buddha himself, we have Buddha image and we have Buddha scriptures, and we have many bodhisattvas and Buddha's disciples—descendant. And here we include various sages who is actually manifesting the truth itself, who is actually talking about the truth, maybe in some other way, not only this world, but some other world. That is another three treasures, which is protecting, which is—which maintains Buddha's teaching.<sup>4</sup> That is another three treasures.

But if you—and relationship between zazen and those three treasures is if you practice zazen actually, you are buddha. Or even though you don't practice zazen, you are buddha. But you, you, you feel or you experience buddha nature, and you—whatever you do after you have this experience, that is buddha's activity. So we ourselves, through practice of pure zazen, is three treasures—various kinds of three treasures: indivisible three treasures, and manifested three treasures, and maintaining three treasures. We ourselves. That is [laughs] what I told you.

It is quite, you know, it is too common, nothing interesting [laughs]. Why is it necessary, then, to accept the three treasures? There is some reason, a big reason. You say it is very common, but to know, you know, to know how important it is to do things very common and to be interested in something very usual and common [laughs].

I'm drinking water now, but it is not sweet. It is very plain: no taste at all. But why I drink it? Because something [is] wrong with me—my, you know, throat is not so good. So when I—or when I am very

<sup>3</sup> *genzen sanbō*: to become manifest, to realize manifestly (*genzen*); the three treasures (*sanbō*) as they actually exist(ed) in the world.

<sup>4</sup> *jūji sanbō* [?].

thirsty, to drink something common is very meaningful. So for—for—for us, you know, human being which is very egoistic [laughs], egoistic, [it is] necessary to have very common—to have very common liquor [liquid] like this. This is Buddhism. Before Buddha, actually, people interested in something unusual—unusual power or magic power or mystic being. And more and more they lost the ground they were standing on. As someone said, "Religion is opium." [Laughs.] It is very true. [Laughs, laughter.]

We Buddhists [are] more interested in zazen practice rather than LSD [laughs]. So as a Buddhist, it is very important to accept the three precepts and not to forget about how important it is—the three precepts which is very common. This is the point.

So we do not call you "Buddhist" if you do not accept precepts [laughs]. If you do not accept precepts— Even though you accept precepts, it doesn't make any difference. Although it doesn't make any difference, it is necessary to remain very common. To remain very common and usual, you accept precepts [laughs]. So that you—you are not involved in—involved in topsy-turvy idea, we say, you know, you should accept precepts. And you—if you are—if you decide not to be uncommon, not to be interested in something unusual. And we must study ourselves. Then that is Buddhist precepts.

And this is, for Buddhists, this is very important. Not only for Buddhists, but also for human being this is very important point. Important thing is not always interesting. Important, even though key is very small and usual, but without key you cannot live. Key is not usually—is not called; but key is very important. Without key, even though you have diamond [laughs], you cannot use diamond. But usually, you know, if you are not—when you are not mature, when you are young children, which is important, which do you like, key or diamond or something, you know, [like] candy? Which do you like? Children may take sweet candy rather than key.

Unless you—you are very sincere about your life, it is rather difficult maybe to be interested—to be interested in Buddhism, which is very common. That is why we have precepts. And this precepts—our precepts include the three treasures. But the three treasures [are] after all about yourself and about your practice—pure practice of zazen. So precepts and zazen practice is not different. It is all about ourselves.

So we say when we give precepts, we say, "Don't be involved in, don't be lost in other practice—other practice of other different, you know, practice of religion—religious practice." [Laughs.] Do you understand? But what we mean is very different. Don't practice; don't be involved in other religion, we say. Literally, if you understand

it literally, Buddhism is not different from other religions which is very sectarian. Do you understand the difference? Don't be involved in some other practice. It is so important to be just ourselves, without being involved in something curious, something mystic, something strange. This is very important for us. To be ourselves, to be free from everything is the most important point. If we are strong enough, when you are strong enough not to lose yourself, then you can practice various way, practice. But before—there is something for you to do before you do many things. Without foundation, without strong, you know, without, without establishing your freedom, or if there is some danger in you, danger of being lost in you, then we want you to accept precepts and practice more.

The young people right now are interested in many religion from East. But, you know, I—I feel if you come here, what I advise you is stay here. Why we—I say so is most of you are interested in some new, interesting, mysterious, or powerful religion. And you are, you know, repeating same mistake over and over. That was how we, you know, how human being [became] lost in our curiosity. We have been making wrong effort! You are heading to wrong direction. Difference may be this way or that way, not much.

So that is why I tell you "stay here." I don't want to be, you know, sectarian, and I appreciate various sages' or various people's effort to save, to improve our society. There are many good teachers, but actually there—there are not so many good students [laughs, laughter]. If I say some teacher is very good, maybe many of you will go to that teacher [laughs, laughter]. You know, the danger or, you know, it is not so wise to go to some teacher, even though he is good, you know, if you are not so good. If your attitude to study teaching is not good, it doesn't work. So until you have right attitude of receiving teaching or understanding teaching, I want you to stay here, until you become a good student. So study is not teaching, but practice.

When Dogen-zenji said we are not interested in teaching, we do not say, "This teaching is better than the other teaching," or deep or superficial. We don't say. But we [are] concerned about our practice [laughs]. It is very true. Don't you think so? Very true. There are many good teachers, but not so many good students.

How to be a good student is how to be he him- [partial word]—he himself, and ready to understand the true teaching. That is why we accept precepts—we receive precepts from Buddha. Buddha says in *Lotus Sutra*, people, you know, talk about something which is very convenient for them always [laughs]. But if—if I say Buddha said in *Lotus Sutra* "you should not be interested in mixing medicine, seeing stars, by practice of strange power, you should not attract people" [laughs]. Buddha said so. I think you must have underst- [partial

word]—you will understand what he meant. Before you are interested in something unusual, you should be usual first, and you should have strong confidence in yourself. And you should always try to be usual.

That is the main point of human practice, because we are always interested in something which is not true and we are not interested in something true. That is very [laughs], you know, accurate description of human nature. If *Life* magazine or *San Francisco Examiner* always, you know, tell you—write about something true, no one will buy *Life* magazine [laughs, laughter]. You know, there is something wrong. It is not true, but it is interesting [laughs, laughter]. So you buy it. That is human nature, and that is how to be successful in our life, in our society [laughs].

To know human nature is good, but we should not abuse the understanding of human nature. So if you, if you know this point, and if you are strong courage or confidence, then you can help people wherever you are, because wherever you go there is lot of mistake and lot of things you should correct. Maybe you need a lot of stick, wherever you go. Or you must talk [to] them: "What are you doing?!" [Laughs, laughter.] If you only have calm, open mind, you will see what we are doing. When you are interested in some special, interesting thing, and when you are lost in it, you cannot see anything. That is why we practice zazen, and that is why we receive precepts—we have to receive precepts from Buddha. After all, precepts is all about ourselves.

I wanted to tell you next—the next three—about next three precepts, but [laughs] before I started, I wanted to make it sure about your, you know, to make sure about your understanding so far I talked about. [Sighs.] Okay? If you have some question, please ask me.

**Student A:** Rōshi?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** *Hai.*

**Student A:** [Few unintelligible words said as an aside.] Can we—can we rely on anything?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Hmm?

**Student A:** Can we rely on anything?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** On anything?

**Student A:** Mm-hmm.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** As Buddha said, why don't you rely on yourself? There

is nothing, you know, you can rely on.

**Student A:** Can you rely on— You can rely on yourself?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** You can— The *only* thing you can rely on is you yourself. If you try hard to rely on yourself, you will, you know, rely on big self. When you rely on someone else, it means that you are relying on small self. The "someone" is projected small self, you know. When you say "he's bad," you are bad actually [laughing]. If you think more about it, you know, it is very—most of the—not always, but most of time it is you which is bad, not him. So to rely on, in other word, to rely on zazen, rely on nothing! [Laughs.]

**Student A:** When you feel, you know, when you feel he is bad, should you ever say anything, or should you always not say anything until you feel everything is okay?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah [laughter]. I think so.

**Student A:** When should you be honest? [Question unclear.]

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Honest! Yeah. People say maybe I'm dishonest because I don't say so much [laughs], but it is not so. [Laughter.] I try—I'm trying to be honest, so I can not say so easily. I must see myself, you know, first. Uh-oh. [Laughs.]

**Student A:** Better not say? [Question unclear.]

**Suzuki-rōshi:** That's— Yeah, that is— We say if someone ask you, you should answer. If someone don't ask you, you know, don't say. It makes sense, because someone ask you—when someone ask some question, then I have something to talk about. But if no one ask me any question, I have nothing to talk about, because I should accept things as it is, as they are. So it is nothing—it is much more than to talk about. So may be better not to say anything.

This kind of practice is very important—to be silent. To be silent means to be open and calm. That is how to be silent. Like zazen. To be silent does not mean to do this. [Sounds as though he is covering his mouth. Laughs.] To open our mind, and to open our big mind, and to see things as much as we can—that is how to be silent—how to have—how you have—you obtain yourself—true self. *Hai*.

**Student B:** Rōshi, without the experience, what does it mean to accept precepts or have confidence in usual activity?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm. Without experience—without experience, you know, without special experience, but usually we have many

difficulties in our everyday life. And we have many problems. And how we—why do we have this kind of problem is something you should think [about]. And that kind experience—usual experience of difficulties will help you to have this kind—to accept this kind of precepts.

**Student B:** Paying attention to our usual difficulties is included in what you mean by accepting precepts?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Pay- [partial word: "Paying"?]—no.

**Student B:** Is the word "accept"? I don't—I mean, you accept the precepts on one basis. I would have to accept it on another. And for me, confidence comes from experience—some kind of understanding or something. So without it, I'd have to accept ....

*[Sentence not finished. Tape turned over. Original tape case stated that a "student question" was asked as the tape was turned over.]*

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm. Yes, that— If a teacher is very good, he will help.

**Student B:** Apart from a teacher?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Apart from teacher? Apart from teacher?

**Student B:** Apart from [?] practice of truth. Accepting the precepts—truth or—

**Suzuki-rōshi:** "Truth," you—we say; but truth usually, maybe, usually is one-way, you know, street. "Go! Anyway, go this ways"—that is truth, usually. But the truth—when we say "truth," truth can be, you know, various truths. So if you try to follow, you know, some direction only, or if you always depend on the, you know, sign, you will not find out the—your own way to go. So the best thing is to have eyes to read the sign.

I have this kind of experience when I was in Manchuria at the end of the war. The sign said, "We will not sell ticket. And there is no boat to Japan" [laughs]. That was sign. When I read it, there is ticket, we can buy a ticket [laughs], and there is a boat. [Laughs, laughter.] I understand in that way. [Laughs, laughter.] So I—because I didn't depend on, you know, railway transportation only, or some line or some company only, there is boat. I am quite sure about it. But the boat which does not belong to special line or ... [2 words unclear], or some special line. So whatever it is, it will give you some information. I rather rely on the carpenters' information who is working in harbor. "Is it dangerous to go to Japan right now? And how many—how many

ships were, you know, damaged, and how long does it take until it get repaired?" They know much better than officers in station—railway station.

So whatever it is, you know, it will give you good information. But if you depend on something, some special thing only, and depend upon something which usual people may depend on, it means that as long as you, you know, you are not strong enough to go by yourself, you cannot find out your way.

So first of all, to know yourself and to be strong enough to live without any sign, without any information, that is the most important point. Right now, what your question is, you know, about which way you go, but that doesn't help so much.

**Student B:** When— When I start shutting out the interesting things and the curious things, when I stop reading, and when I stop going to movies, and stop listening to music, I get very restless. If I had a strong desire to, to say, read an interesting book about Buddhism, should I go ahead and read, or should I sit zazen instead?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** You can, if it is, you know, about Buddhism. [Laughs, laughter.] But, you know, some books are very, you know, encouraging—encouraging you to wrong direction, maybe. I think so. But not all the Buddhist book. But if you, you know, know the foundation of Buddhism, you—you—you will have eyes to choose book you read.

**Student B:** I can get very interested about a book on Buddhism.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Hmm?

**Student B:** I can become very interested and fascinated about a book on Buddhism.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah. [Laughs, laughter.] I don't— [laughs] That is not so good. [Laughs, laughter.] That is why we say you need teacher and you have to practice zazen, even though zazen will not help you [laughs], and your teacher will not help you, you know, so much. But he knows what you should do and what you shouldn't. So that will be the way for you right now. Or you can read any book you want to until you—you experience, you know, something. And you will know eventually what will help you and what will not. If you do not—if you—if you come here once in a while [laughs] to listen to this kind of lecture, I think it will help. I think I am helping you a lot [laughs]. Some other question? *Hai*.

**Student C:** Until you have eyes that can see, how will you find out

what to do?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** I say—if I say "eyes to see" it looks like, you know, you must have some special eyes. But it is not so.

**Student C:** Until you can see what to do, how do you know what to do?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Mm-hmm. Actually, that is not big problem. [Laughter.] It looks like big problem if you—before you, you know, come to the point to choose which way to go. If you go there, there is your way. But before you arrive at that point, that is problem. Or because you are lazy [laughs] and thinking about it, you know, and you are trying to find out some good way to go, you have that kind of problem. I— Yeah. If you actually come to the point to make some choice, it is not so difficult. You can depend on yourself pretty well.

You are raised in, you know, the idea of good or bad, which, you know, by some—some map, you know, to see. Here is your map for your life, so if you follow this map you may be okay. But that is not our way.

**Student C:** Several weeks ago in your lecture in the evening, you spoke about how the youth of today is not strong.<sup>5</sup> How does one know what to do?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Yeah. That is my problem too. I don't know what to do with you [laughs]. My stick is not long enough [laughs, laughter]. It is not so difficult thing, actually. If you—if we are with you, it is not so difficult. But if you ask me what to do before you give me some difficulty you have, it is almost impossible. Or we usually do not give any answer. It is impossible. We do not say, "This is bad and this is good," you know. Good or bad is—actually there is nothing good or nothing bad. The situation makes something good or bad. That's all. So we do not say "good" or "bad" in that way. Instead, we—our training is for to see or to have enough power or special power to be ourselves. That is our training—our way. So I cannot tell you how to live as a Christian minister will tell you. That is not our way, you know. Excuse me, but [laughs], do you—did you understand? Actually, it is not so difficult. Most of the people does something knowing that is wrong, yeah. But it is not difficult for him to know which is right and which is wrong under that circumstances.

**Student D:** Why does a good teacher have to have so many bad students?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Hmm?

<sup>5</sup> Possibly SR-71-06-22.

**Student D:** Why does a good teacher have to have so many bad students?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** [Laughs.] Good. Maybe he is so bad [laughs], so he must have bad students. It is so—there is actually—what I want to say is there is no special good teacher or bad teacher. The teacher who is always with you is best teacher. We have no—that—no such idea of good teacher or bad teacher or sage who knows everything [laughs], who tell you exactly what you should do next day or next year. You know, we—we have no, you know—I don't think we—we have good teacher in—in that way. Maybe for—for some time your practice will be [laughs] to be just yourself without being interested in something special. Without relying on me you should, you know, try hard to sit. Okay? We can sit with you. So that is only way. And we need some encouragement. That is someth- [partial word]—that is a kind of thing which I want to tell you about in next two-three lectures.

What is good and what is bad is big problem. For some religion it is not problem, because it is told already by someone, you know, some teacher tell about things which is good and which is bad. So if you follow it that is a way, and your way has been to follow some special sage's words. That is why you became weaker and weaker. That is why I am telling you to be strong in that way.

Okay. Thank you.

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Source: City Center transcript. Entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Transcript checked against tape and made verbatim by Jeffrey Schneider and Bill Redican (9/26/00).