

71-07-06

SUZUKI-ROSHI LECTURE

July 6, 1971, San Francisco

I want to continue talking about Buddhist precepts. Last time I talked about the indivisible three treasures, which is Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. We say three treasures because you can understand it in three ways. But the three treasures are indivisible because Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are actually one-it is not three.

Shakyamuni Buddha attained Enlightenment, realizing the indivisible three treasures, then he talked about it. That is Dharma. And his disciples are the Sangha. We call this the manifested three treasures. And right now we have temples, and in the temples we have Buddhas, big or small, bronze or gold or wooden Buddha images. That is Buddha for us. And we have many scriptures bound-up somewhere, sometimes in the library. We call them Dharma. And Sangha is priests and laymen. Those are the three treasures which maintain Buddha and Buddhism as a religion. They are called "Juji Sambo"-maintaining three treasures, the three treasures that sustain and protect Buddhism.

tonight I want to talk about the manifested three treasures. They are not different, but the difference between the indivisible three treasures and the manifested three treasures is : Buddhism which was told by Buddha is the manifested three treasures, and Buddhism which was told by Buddha is the manifested three treasures, and Buddhism which exists even before Buddha is the indivisible three treasures. After Buddha, you can say this is Buddha, and this is the teaching which was taught by Buddha, or Dharma, and this is Buddha's Sangha, which includes priests, laymen, and laywomen. We can tell by our eyes which is Buddha, which is Dharma, and which is Sangha. But with the indivisible three treasures, we cannot say this is Dharma, this is Buddha, or this is Sangha. This is the difference. For us it is very important to figure out the difference between Buddhism which was told by Buddha and Buddhism which actually exists, whether Buddha came out on this world or not.

Most people think Buddhism is the teaching which was started by Buddha. And some people say before Buddha there were many sages, and Buddha is one of the sages we have had. We also include those sages. They are not included in the indivisible three treasures, and they are not the manifested three treasures, because the manifested three treasures are Buddha, the teaching he told us, and his sangha. So where are they now? For instance, here is another Buddha-where is he? It looks like Buddhism has no place for other sages. It is very sectarian, you may say. But actually they have a reserved seat. You must think about that. It is a koan for you: Where are they?

If you think more, you will have many questions, and as a Buddhist it is necessary to figure out those questions clearly and to answer them. You should study now or tonight

to have full understanding of the indivisible three treasures. Unless you understand this indivisible three treasures, you cannot be a perfect Buddhist. This is a very important point for us to understand. Of course, to have full understanding of it, it is necessary for us to actually practice, you cannot figure it out with your mind. Actual practice is necessary. If it is not Buddha or sangha, what you understand will be the Law of Buddhism, or the law of the universe. Or if it is not the law of the universe, it may be something which exists in this universe-trees or mountains or rivers. It is almost impossible to know what Buddha is. Buddha is so called "emptiness" or "nothingness." If you think you can figure out what nothingness or emptiness is, that is not emptiness. It is somethingness, some idea of something. How you can tell what emptiness is is to have a full understanding of mountains or rivers or each one of us, of what a stone is, what a cat is, what a dog is. When you actually know what a dog is and what a cat is, you will know yourself. Only when you know yourself will you fully understand what a mountain, a dog, and a cat is. And you will understand that a cat is not just a cat-a cat is you too. You are a cat. At the same time, you are a dog. And if you think it is ridiculous for you to be a dog, then that is usual understanding-it is not indivisible truth. That is why we must actually have practice. Unless we have practice, we cannot reach this core of the teaching.

People may say Buddhism is atheism because we do not have any particular Buddha to worship. People know that it is not monotheism. But it is not true, as many people say, that Buddhism is atheism. atheism and monotheism are religions which you can teach with your thinking mind. You can figure out what god is. But Buddhism is beyond our understanding. Every religion actually should be so, but Buddhism puts emphasis on these points. I think Buddhism is a very good religion for American people, because you like something which you can figure out. If we say you cannot figure out what Buddha is, you will be discouraged-"Oh, Buddha is no good." A mystical religion will be pretty good for you, but not exactly (right?). Religion should give you some advantage in your life. That is the most appropriate religion, not only for American people, but for almost all human beings. Otherwise, no one will be interested in religion. We Buddhists are very concerned about this point, because of the weakness we have of not being able to be satisfied with anything. That is why we suffer, why we have difficulties in our life. Only when we can be satisfied with ourselves and with what we have and how we are will we have complete freedom from everything. that is how we have complete renunciation.

You may say that is utterly impossible, but actually that is not so-there is some way. Because you think so, it is not possible. When you say it is not possible, you stick to your gaining idea, and you still continue to play games with things. You are not serious enough with yourself. You need something to make you feel good. Buddhists feel very sympathetic with people who cannot be Buddha because they want something more. That is all. So it is a pity, you know. Isn't it? A completely qualified Buddha, just because he needs a little bit more, cannot be a Buddha. How silly we are if we really know ourselves. This is the point we do not notice.

This is the reason why Buddha appeared in this world. Buddha's enlightenment was

just to be himself, and when he became himself, he found everyone was a Buddha and everything was Buddha. When he just knew who he was, then everyone was Buddha. Everyone is Buddha. That is how he attained enlightenment. And his teaching is actually to let everyone know why we cannot be a Buddha. So his teaching is about our human nature. That is why we say if you study Buddhism you will be a good human being. And when you know your bad points, you also know you are originally Buddha. It is the same thing. At least if you listen to his teaching, you will know you have suffering as a human being, and that is how you can be free from suffering. The same teaching will work in two ways. But actually he was talking about himself, as a person who was born at a certain time, at a certain place. If so, what is Buddhism? Where is Buddhism? Buddhism is each one's own nature. In this sense, each one's own nature is called Buddha Nature, because Buddhism is about how a Buddha loses himself and how a Buddha stays himself. So it is all about each one of us.

So if you say Buddha attained enlightenment or Buddha started Buddhism, it is so. But even if he didn't appear in this world, Buddhism would be here as long as we are here. So there is nothing new for us to study. But Buddha's teaching will give you some light to know yourself. In this sense we have Dharma-the light by which we can see ourselves like a mirror is Buddha's teaching. All that we can know is about ourselves. Here in the manifested three treasures, the same thing is true. Buddha, Sangha, and the Teaching is one. we say sangha, but each member of the Sangha is Buddha. And we say his teaching, but that is just light with which to know ourselves. So actually there is no special teaching which we should remember. There is no need to recite sutras, in the true sense, but it will help anyway. You should pay homage to yourself, which means to pay homage to Buddha and to the Dharma. That is the structure of Buddhism.

The same thing is true with the manifested three treasures. They are indivisible, not different. But because our mind is not so clear, in order to have a good understanding of Buddhism, we have the precepts. So the precepts are not something to observe literally. Through the precepts we should know the structure of Buddhism, and the points, the core, and the spirit of Buddhism. that is why we accept the precepts.

As for the three treasures which maintain Buddhism, the scriptures, priests, and bronze Buddha, I think you do not find much meaning in a bronze Buddha or the scriptures, maybe. You especially are not interested in a bronze Buddha at all. You say it is an idol, and Buddhism is idol-worship because every day all of us are bowing to Buddha. Just now we bowed to Buddha nine times. Your feeling may be that Buddhism is nothing but idol worship, but you know, this category of the maintaining Buddha also includes various sages who are actually helping people, whether they are Buddhists or not. That is also Buddha for us, not because we are so generous, but because we have a clear understanding of who Buddha is. each one of us is already Buddha. why are not various sages who are helping people Buddha? They are all Buddha. We say Buddhas in other worlds. "Other worlds" means not in this society, or not Buddhists. another world could be a Christian world or some other religious people's world. This point should not be missed. We rarely pay homage to those sages.

This is a brief explanation of the precepts of the triple treasure. To have a clear understanding of our triple treasure, and to have the right practice, we should make those points very sure, through practice, through intellectual understanding, and through discussion. If we do not discuss this point fully, we will not have good practice in its true sense, and we will be lost. Even though you practice hard and make great effort, you will be lost. We should accept those treasures which were transmitted from Buddha to us so that we won't lose ourselves in our practice, in our religion. Actually, Buddha realized this point, and it has been carefully discussed by various teachers and patriarchs so that we might not lose our way.

You can criticize Buddhism from various angles-that is necessary. If it is not necessary for you, it will help someone else, even though you end up in your criticism(?). It will help people. For your own sake and for other's sake, you should criticize Buddhism. You can even fight with Buddhism. If you don't fight with Buddhism strongly enough, all human beings will be lost. Only when you fight with Buddhism are you actually helping people. You should stay study Buddhism on that point by all means and from various angles. As long as you are fighting with it, you are not yet a Buddhist-you are outside Buddhism. But from Buddha's viewpoint you are a Buddhist, even if you feel you are not. Buddhism is this kind of religion. You should know what Buddhism is very clearly. And if you are going to be a Buddhist, you should be prepared for this kind of problem which you will have only because you became a Buddhist. If you were not a Buddhist, maybe you would not have any problems. Through this kind of fighting, you can help people in its true sense. If you want to be protected by the three treasures, that is not the way to accept the three treasures. This is the spirit with which we receive our precepts; this is why you become a Buddhist.

I think maybe its better to have a question and answer time for twenty minutes. Do you have questions?

Question: What do you mean by fighting with Buddhism?

Suzuki-roshi: To have doubt, to wonder what it is, to have many questions about Buddhism is mostly what i meant. We do not use any weapons, so it is impossible for you to fight it with a gun.

Question: I have only come here off and on, but the people who seem to be studying here the longest never ask questions.

Suzuki-roshi: They do! Will you ask questions then? You can ask questions.

Craig: It is because our legs hurt so much.

Suzuki-roshi: Do you have some more questions? You must suffer twenty minutes

more.

Question: Could you say something more about emptiness, the void, or pure nothingness?

Suzuki-roshi: Because I cannot say anything about this, I talk for such a long time. It is impossible to say something about it, but it is possible. The only way to know what emptiness is is to be you. Then that is emptiness. Do you understand? Nothing has its self nature, so the only way to have it is to be part of it. If I say to be a part of it, it is already creating (a) some question for you, but to be a part of it is to be one with everything. Then when you are actually a part of all things you are the whole thing. When you think you have your own way or your own self nature, then you are not part of all things, so you are something. When you are completely a part of everything, you don't exist anymore. When you drink water from this cup and say, "This is water," this is not water anymore. When you empty it into the river, it is really water. It is flowing endlessly, it doesn't stay anywhere-that is water. We think it can stay here, but this is just because I think "Here is water in the cup." It doesn't actually stay here-it is going away. So when water is really water, it is nothing, it has no self nature. There is no water. You cannot catch it. So in his sense, we can say nothingness. Water is nothingness. Because it is nothing, it is water, true water. When it is true water, it is nothingness. So everything is nothingness, and everything is everything, just everything. Everything can be everything, and everything can be nothing. This is a kind of technique, you may say, "I understand what nothingness is." But then you don't understand. When you don't know anything, then you really have Buddhism. So it is better not to be concerned about nothingness too much. Did you understand what I am saying? NO? That is good. If you said you understood, maybe you have understood something else. That is your own understanding. So don't ask a question about nothingness. You must surrender anyway, if you ask a question about nothingness. Maybe I have to surrender too. Some other question?

Question: You say it is necessary to have doubt. Is it necessary also to have faith, to be able to try out Buddhism? Do you sometimes need faith and sometimes need doubt?

Suzuki-roshi: Yes, but big doubt should follow the confidence to try it out. But actually we are trying it out-even if we die, we are still trying in some way. Isn't that true? Even though we have no physical body, we are still trying. The physical body seems to act quite easily, but my true nature cannot seem to act. But even though there is no more earth, still something is going on, endlessly. If you are discouraged by something which happens to us, it is because of a lack of understanding of our true nature. If you really know what we are, you cannot be discouraged. Even though your small mind may be discouraged, your big mind is still going. It is okay, you know. Some more questions?

Question: Is it possible to study Buddhism without doubt?

Suzuki-roshi: Yes, it is possible. That is better. If you are on the track, maybe you can go without doubt. That is why we have various practices. We have various rules and

rituals so that you can go on and on without much difficulty.

Question: When you doubt so much that you hardly know that you are on the track, if you are doubting all the time, how do you know you are doing the right thing?

Suzuki-roshi It is not necessary to be sure. Anyway, you will not be lost. That is very true. When you think you will be lost, then you have something wrong with you. You may have a very small mind.

Question: Okay, that is the case with some (mentally disturbed?) people-what happens to them? They go of and something happens to them, or what?

Suzuki-roshi: I think if our society is supported by this kind of Big Mind and spirit, we will not have so many mentally disturbed people. Why a mentally disturbed person feels he is afraid of being lost is that he is not fully supported by Big Mind. He is always confronting his own small mind with someone else's small mind, such as his parents, his brother or sister, or his neighbors. They are all involved in small mind, so he always has to confront with small minds, and he will always be discouraged. His mind cannot be so broad and big because when he has Big Mind he feels as if he is lost. He feels something is wrong with him, because everyone has small mind. When everyone has small mind, even though he has Big Mind, he feels as if he is lost. That is the trouble with the society that is not supported by this kind of Big Mind.

Question: What about weakness, desire and struggle? What is the sense of it? What is the sense of all this-small mind having weaknesses and desires? Why?

Suzuki-roshi: Actually, we do not have so-called small mind to suffer, but to support ourselves, to know what we are actually doing, inch by inch. That is small mind. You can call it small mind, but if it doesn't cease to act, going on and on, that is actually Big Mind. So if you lose the background of small mind which is Big Mind, then small mind ends up as a small mind for you. It is actually going, but you don't feel so, and you are always afraid something will happen to you. That is fear. That is why we suffer.

Question: Yes, I know, but my question is why was all this created in the first place? Why was all created, what is the sense of this?

Suzuki-roshi: Why are we created in that way? Yes, it is something which is difficult to answer. But actually, the purpose of Buddhism is not to answer that kind of question, like Christianity does. Your question is something like "Who is responsible for," but no one is responsible for that. If you say someone should be responsible for that, you should be responsible for that, because if you change your mind a little bit, if you have a little bit of right understanding, you will be free from that kind of problem, and you can even enjoy the problem. So actually, you are creating and you are responsible, but we are not talking about whose responsibility it is. But actually things are going in that way.

That is the nature of Buddhism, the nature of Buddha's teaching. He didn't say anything definite, and he didn't pick up any special cause.

It is impossible to answer when this earth or this universe started, and where we are going, and what is the limit of the universe. Is that possible? It is not possible. This is also an important point. If we think there is some limit, it is not absolute anymore. Because there is no limit to the universe, and things started from a beginningless beginning and are going to an endless end, that is why we can believe in our destiny. If there is a beginning and an end, as in the Christian teaching, you can believe in God, but you cannot believe in each one of us. We can believe in our destiny. That is a very important point.

If Buddha had an answer to that question, he would not be Buddha anymore. Because he didn't answer that kind of question, he was great. That we don't know anything about it is a very important point. That we cannot answer this is very important. When you say this is very important, it is not important anymore. If you can compare it to some other thing, and say which is important, then this is not absolutely important. You cannot depend on that kind of thing, which has some limit, which has some beginning and some end. Because emptiness has no limit and no beginning, we can believe in it. Isn't this so? This is very important-I am not fooling you! Okay? If you really understand this, tears will come out. You will really feel happy to be a Buddhist. Just now, this is questions and answers, so you don't have this kind of feeling. But if you struggle hard enough, you will feel how important this point is. The way you can struggle with this is if you are supported by something, something you don't know. As we are human beings, there must be that kind of feeling. You must feel it in such a city or building or community. That is, I think, very important. So whatever community it may be, it is necessary for it to have this kind of spiritual support.

That is why I respect Trungpa Rimpoche. He is supporting us. You may criticize him because he drinks alcohol like I drink water, but that is a minor problem. He trusts you completely. He knows if he is always supporting you in its true sense, you will not criticize him, whatever he does. And he doesn't mind whatever you say. That is not the point, you know. This kind of spirit is necessary for human beings, without clinging to some special religion or form of practice. You have ten minutes now-you have to sit ten minutes more, okay? Some more questions?

Question: A change of pace: Why do you carry that wooden stick?

Suzuki-roshi: This? When you find it difficult to understand me, I whack you! It is much better not to have this. I am very short-tempered, so I may rely on this too much. When I can't express myself-whack!! If I don't have this, I must try hard to make verbal communication. So it may help not to have this, but as I am pretty old, I must depend on this a little bit.

Question: Does anyone ever hit you with it?

Suzuki-roshi: (in a whisper) Don't ask me. I am ashamed of myself. Hai.

Question: I know by the way I feel when I come to Zen Center that it is very important to be with people who are practicing zazen. But I have to spend a lot of time away from Zen Center with people who don't know there is anything else but small mind. And what I keep trying to remind myself is that I am a Buddhist. I feel much different from them, and it causes me a lot of trouble. It is difficult to be really myself outside of the Buddhist community.

Suzuki-roshi: But if you were always in the city, without knowing Zen Center or some religious group, then you think you would be happy and your life would be good?

Question: No, but I can't spend all my time here.

Suzuki-roshi: But that is why we are here and you come here. Even though you have difficulties, it is good to come here, and you should not be so impatient. It takes time. We started Zen Center quite recently, not such a long time ago, and it is quite natural for us to have various problems. Even though we have problems, the problems we have are very important problems for human beings. That is why you come here. I don't think I can help you so much. As much as I can, I shall be with you, that is all. And I shall be very glad if you carry on this kind of work, that is all. Don't think that because you come here you will have a very good everyday life. Whether you have a good everyday life or not is out of the question. We should not be concerned about it so much. But we should know what is right and what kind of life we must have. That is a more important thing for us to know. We must have that much confidence, even though we cannot help people so well, okay? I am sorry I cannot help you, but I can help you to have big confidence in your way of life. If you have confidence in your life, the rest of the difficulties you may have are not such a big problem for you.

Thank you very much.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 71-07-06
