

71-07-17

SUZUKI-ROSHI LECTURE

July 17, 1971. San Francisco.

I want to explain our precepts. As you must have found out, they are nothing so unusual--they are just about the things as they are and about what we are. You may wonder then why it is necessary to accept the precepts. This is a very important point, and I want you to understand it. It is a very common understanding which you can accept quite easily.

I said there are three kinds of precepts. The first kind is the indivisible three precepts, .Even though we say "three," that three is one. So it is not possible to be three--it is actually repeating one precept three times, from various angles. That is the first one. Where things exist, there are some rules. We say "rules," but 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, it has some function. So there is some rule in the function of the Great Being. But the function and the Great Being is one, not two. In Christianity, God is here, and it gives some rules to everything. That is more Christian understanding, but according to Buddhism it is not two. 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. Buddhism is very realistic. We do not seek for who does this, when this earth started, who created these things. We don't think in those ways--we accept things as it is. We do not try to think about things just with our minds, but before we think, we accept things. So when you see or accept things as it is, the function and Great Being is one. When you think, "Who did it?," then it becomes two. Sometimes it is Great Being's function and sometimes Great Being is some big being which always has some function. That is one. This understanding is actually the understanding of everything: the understanding of the universe and of ourselves.

The next one is the manifested three treasures, which are the three treasures which were realized by the Buddha. What Buddha realized was about great Being, and about the function of the Great Being. When Buddha found out the truth, he himself became "Buddha." He realized that he himself is also the function of Great Being and Great being itself. Buddha himself is Great Being, and his activity is the 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 (Dharma), he had many disciples. That was Buddha's group, Buddha's disciples, which is called "Sangha." That is the manifested three treasures.

And later, instead of Buddha himself, we have Buddha images and Buddhists scriptures and many Bodhisattvas and descendants of Buddha. Here we include various sages who are actually manifesting truth itself, who are actually talking about the truth, maybe in some other way, not only in this world, but in other worlds. That is

another three treasures, which maintains Buddha's teaching.

The relationship between zazen and those three treasures is that if you practice zazen actually, you are Buddha. But if you experience Buddha Nature, whatever you do after you have this experience is Buddha's activity. So we ourselves, through the practice of pure zazen, are the various kinds of three treasures: the indivisible three treasures, manifested three treasures, and the maintaining three treasures. We ourselves. That is what I told you.

But it is too common, nothing interesting. Why is it necessary then to accept the three treasures? There is some reason, a big reason. You say it is very common, but you should know how important it is to do very common things and to be interested in something very usual. I am drinking water now, and it is not sweet. It is very plain, no taste at all. But I drink it because something is wrong with me--my throat is not so good. And when I am very thirsty, to drink something common is very meaningful. So for us human beings it is very egoistic (?), very necessary to have a very common liquid like this. This is Buddhism. Before Buddha, actually, people were 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." It is very true.

We Buddhists are more interested in zazen practice rather than LSD. So as a Buddhist, it is very important to accept the three precepts and not to forget about how important these three very common precepts are. This is the point. We do not call you "Buddhist" if you do not accept the precepts. Even though you accept the precepts, it doesn't make any difference. But although it doesn't make any difference, it is necessary to remain very common, and in order to remain very common and usual, you accept the precepts. So that you are not involved in topsy-turvy ideas, we say, you should accept the precepts, if you decide not to be uncommon, not to be interested in something unusual. And we must study ourselves. Then that is the Buddhist precepts.

For Buddhists, this is very important. Not only for Buddhists, but also for human beings this is a very important point. The important thing is not always interesting. Even though the key is very small and usual, without the key you cannot live. The key is not usually mentioned, but the key is very important. Without the key, even though you have a diamond, you cannot use it. But usually, when you are not mature, when you are young children, which is most important, which do you like the most--the key or some candy? Children may like sweet candy rather than a key. Unless you are very sincere about your life, it may be rather difficult to be interested in Buddhism, which is very common. That is why we have the precepts. And our precepts include the three treasures. But the three treasures after all are about yourselves and about your practice, the pure practice of zazen. So the precepts and zazen practice is not different. It is all about ourselves.

So when we give the precepts, we say, "Don't be involved in, or don't be lost in other, different religious practices." Do you understand? But what we mean is very

different. If you understand it literally, Buddhism is not different from other religions which are 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. When you are strong enough not to lose yourself, then you can practice various ways. But there is something for you to do before you do many things. If you don't have a strong foundation, if you haven't established your freedom, or if there is some danger in you of being lost, then we want you to accept the precepts and practice more.

Young people right now are interested in many religions from the east. But if you come here, what I advise you is to stay here. I say so because most of you are interested in some new interesting or powerful religion. And you are repeating the same mistake over and over. That was how we human beings were lost--in our curiosity. We have been making the wrong effort. You are heading in the wrong direction, this way or that way. So that is why I tell you to stay here. I don't want to be sectarian, and I appreciate the various sages' or various people' effort to save, to improve our society. There are many teachers, but actually there are not so many good students. If I say some teacher is very good, maybe many of you will go to that teacher. It is not so wise to go to some teacher, even though he is good, if you are not so good. If your attitude to study the teaching is not good, it doesn't work. So until you have the right attitude for receiving teaching or understanding teaching, I want you to stay here, until you become a good student. Our study is not teaching, but practice. Dogen Zenji said we are not interested in teaching, we do not say this teaching is better than the other teaching, or deeper or more superficial. But we are concerned about our practice. It is very true. Don't you think so? Very true. There are many good teachers, but not so many good students.

The way to be a good student is to be you yourself and be ready to understand the true teaching. That is why we accept the precepts, receive the precepts from Buddha. People always talk about something which is very convenient for them. But if I say that Buddha said in the *Lotus Sutra* that you should not be interested in mixing medicine, watching the stars, or practicing strange powers to attract people, I think you will understand what he meant. Before you are interested in something unusual, you should be a usual person, and you should have strong confidence in yourself. You should always be trying to be usual.

That is the main point of human practice, because we are always interested in something which is not true and not interested in something true. That is a very accurate description of human nature. If *Life magazine* or *S.F. Examiner* always wrote about something true, no one would buy them. There is something wrong--it is not true, but it is interesting, and so you buy it! That is human nature, and that is how to be successful in our society. To know human nature is good, but we should not abuse the understanding of human nature. If you know this point, and if you have strong confidence or courage, then you can help people wherever you are, because wherever you go there are lots of mistakes and lots of things you should correct. Maybe you need

a lot of a stick, wherever you go. Or you must talk to them--"What are you doing?" If you only have a 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 have to receive precepts from Buddha. After all, the precepts are all about ourselves.

I wanted to tell you about the next three precepts, but before I start, I want to make sure about your understanding of what I have talked about so far, Okay? If you have some question, please ask me. Hai.

Question: can we rely on anything?

Suzuki-roshi: As Buddha said, why don't you rely on yourself? There is nothing you can rely on. The only thing you can rely on is you yourself. If you try hard to rely on yourself, you will rely on Big Self. When you rely on someone else, it means that you are relying on small self. "Someone" is your projected small self. When you say he is bad, you are bad. If you think more about it, not always, but most of the time it is you who are bad, not him. So in other words, to rely on zazen, to rely on nothing.

Question: When you feel he is bad, should you ever say anything, or should you be silent until you feel everything is okay?

Suzuki-roshi: Yes, I think so. People say maybe I am dishonest because I don't say so much, but it is not so. I am trying to be honest, so I am not saying anything so easily. We say if someone asks you, you should tell them. If someone doesn't ask you, don't say anything. It makes sense, because when someone asks some question, then I have something to talk about. But if no one asks me any question, I have nothing to talk about, because I should accept things as they are. It is much more than just to talk about something, so maybe it is 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 not make any sound. To open our mind and to open our Big Mind and to see things as much as we can is how to be silent, how to obtain your True Self. Hai.

Question: Without experience, what does it mean to accept precepts or have confidence in usual life?

Suzuki-roshi: you say without special experience, but usually we have many difficulties and many problems in our everyday life. You should think about why we have this kind of problem, and then that kind of usual experience of difficulties will help you to accept this kind of precepts.

Question: To accept the precepts on one basis, I would have to accept them on another...

Suzuki-roshi: Yes, if a teacher is very good, it will help.

Question: Apart from a teacher?

Suzuki-roshi: Apart from a teacher, there is truth, you say, but truth usually is a one-way street. "Go this way,"--that is truth, usually. But when we say truth, it can be various truths. So if you try to follow one direction only, or if you always depend on signs, you will not find your own way to go. The best thing is to have eyes to read the signs. I had this kind of experience when I was in Manchuria at the end of the war. The sign aid, "We will not sell tickets. There is no boat to Japan." When I read it, we could buy a ticket, and there was a boat. I understand in that way. Because I didn't depend on railway transportation only, or on a certain line or company only, there was a boat. I am quite sure about it. But the boat did not belong to some special line. So whatever it is, it will give you some information. I rather relied on information from the carpenters who were working on the harbor. "is it dangerous to go to Japan? How many ships were damaged, and how long will it be until they get repaired?" They know much better than the officers in the station. So whatever it is, it will give you good information, but as long as you depend on some special thing only, depend upon something which usual people may depend on, it means that 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 is the most important point. Right now, your question is about which way you go, but that doesn't help so much.

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

Suzuki-roshi: You can read, if it is about Buddhism. But some books are very encouraging, encouraging you in one direction maybe, but not all the Buddhist books. If you know the foundation of Buddhism, you will have eyes to choose the books to read.

Question: I have become very interested and fascinated about a book on Buddhism...

Suzuki-roshi: I don't know if that is so good. That is why we say you need a teacher and you have to practice zazen, even though zazen will not help you and your teacher will not help so much. But he knows what you should do. So that will be the way for you right now.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 71-07-17
