

71-06-12

## SUZUKI-ROSHI LECTURE

June 12, 1971, San Francisco

Although I say, "You are Zen students," and although you say, "I am a Zen Center student," I don't know! I am not so sure who you are. As long as you are here, to me you are Zen Center students-that's all. But if you go out of this building, I don't know who you are. Do you know who you are? Do you belong to some particular religion? Are you a member of some particular church, or do you strictly belong to some group? I don't know. Perhaps most of you do not belong to any group in its strict sense. But some of you may strictly belong to Zen Center. And if some of you belong to Zen Center in its strict sense and some of you do not belong to any school and yet are practicing our way in the same building, how is that possible? If that is not possible, should I only accept students who belong to Zen Center in its strict sense? Maybe some students think in that way, but I accept students from various religions. Some of you maybe Christian. Some of you maybe Rinzai students. Some of you may always have some other teacher in your mind. But I still accept you. Why is it possible for me to accept students from various religions as Zen Center students? Without any discrimination, I and we is the same thing. If I say "I", it may be okay, but if I say "we", it looks like there is some group, so-called- "Soto" or "Rinzai" group. If I say "we", you may not feel so good, but to me it is the same thing. We-I-the same. At Zen Center I can accept students from various religions without any discrimination. That is why I feel I have to explain why we sew *rakus*, why we keep Buddhist precepts. If I say "Buddhist precepts," again some of you will not feel so good. So it is necessary for me to explain what Buddhist precepts are and why you sew and wear *rakus*.

I have no intention of explaining precepts in the traditional way, but I want to explain them as much as possible in some way that you can understand, saying truthfully how I feel about precepts. First of all, for Dogen Zenji or Bodhidharma or some other teachers, the precepts are something which everyone has as his own nature. The precepts were not decided by Buddha. Originally the precepts were what makes Buddha Buddha. Because of the precepts he became Buddha. So the precepts were first, and Buddha appeared next. Before Buddha appeared there were precepts, and before Bodhidharma came to China there were precepts. So before everyone comes to this world there are precepts. Everyone has the precepts in their true sense. When you come out, you may already be male or female, so accordingly, as soon as you take some form, there is a reason why you appeared in this world as a man or as a woman. And naturally women have their own way and men have their own way. Naturally various ways of life will appear, and in accord with the various inborn characteristics or physical conditions, there must be various ways of life. That is actually the precepts. A woman is more complicated, emotionally and physically, so naturally a woman must have more precepts than a man has. If you say that is not fair, it doesn't make sense, you know. It should be like that. If a woman has the same precepts as a man has, that is not fair! That is how the precepts became written down.

If so, why should we have both Buddhist precepts and Christian commandments?

According to the way of life, there are various interpretations of our true nature, but originally it is just human nature. According to human nature we have various precepts, and according to the conditions in which we live, we have various precepts, that is all. When we transmit the precepts, we put emphasis on this point-not on each of the 250 precepts, but on the original point which is universal to everyone, which is available to everyone, and which everyone can accept in some way. So instead of putting emphasis on various precepts, one by one, we put more emphasis on our original human nature or Buddha nature. To realize what our human nature is beyond various ways of life is our way of transmitting precepts. So the explanation of each precept is how each precept appeared. Why we must have, for instance, 16 precepts, and how we can accept the precepts as their original nature is how you study precepts. If so, intellectual study does not make sense. If you want to study the sixteen precepts just with your head, you can compare them with another. But it is difficult to accept just one precept which is the source of all precepts. It is not possible to accept precepts with your mind only, so physical practice should follow. If you come to the point where you should observe the precepts one by one, then you will see what the true meaning of the precepts is. Before you face your problems, precepts are there, and you are studying precepts. But if you face each problem you have, then just studying the precepts doesn't work, and should make some decision about which way you take. Usually there is dark way and a promising way. You can see some light ahead of you, so you should make a choice. Then there is a real precept. So that kind of precept can be discovered when you face a real problem. That is actually how you observe precepts, how precepts make sense, how precepts help you.

It is a big mistake to think that precepts always show the way for you before you try to go. When you try to make the trip, the sign will make sense. When you do not drive, the sign does not make any sense. There are various signs on the way from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and to just study them does not make any sense. But if you drive a car from San Francisco to Los Angeles, you just follow the signs, and then they make sense. So life is first-your actual way of life first. To accept as it is the various things which may happen to you in your future and to try to make some trip is the most important thing for you. In this sense, it doesn't matter for us whether you are a Buddhist or Christian. Each one has each one's own problems, and there is no Christian problem or Buddhist problem. By uselessly comparing Christian precepts to Buddhist precepts, you create problems. But if you are concentrated on actual life, moment after moment, and if you are sincere and honest in your life, then there is no difference between Christian precepts and Buddhist precepts. There is no name-a sign is just a sign, which way to go, you know. If you understand in that way, if your way of life is concentrated on that point, there is no need to think about if this is a Christian precept or Buddhist precept-it doesn't matter. What Christian people think is right is right for Buddhists too. If there are two ways, something is wrong with the precepts. There is only one way for you to go.

But there is another problem-the problem of right or left, good or bad. Mostly for us it is the problem of good and bad. But this is quite simple too, you know. No one finds it so difficult to tell which is good and which is bad. Because of your egoistic desire, you

want to make some excuse when you take a wrong course. At that time you may say, "Buddha said" or "Christ said"-to make some excuse for yourself for going on a wrong course. "Buddha put more emphasis on sight-seeing along the way, so maybe it is better to go through Santa Cruz instead of on highway 101, even though it may take more time. I have to arrive at Tassajara by ten o'clock, but we have to go through Santa Cruz, because Buddha said so. Maybe we will arrive at eleven o'clock." When you say "Buddhism" or "Christianity," usually you are making some excuse. But the way is very simple, and the best way is just to see the sign. There is no problem actually.

Another point is that when you observe precepts in your everyday life, if you really want to know what precepts are, you should be concentrated on what you do. You should not even think about precepts. Then naturally you will find out your own way. That is something I have practiced closely related to Zen practice. If you take a trip from San Francisco to Los Angeles like an everyday driver, then you don't have to think so much about the way you go to Los Angeles. The only thing is to go to Los Angeles without having an accident. That is a more important thing for a man who is always driving a car. That is the most important point-not the precepts, but to be concentrated in each moment on one's driving.

When Oka Soten-roshi was a young boy, his teacher, Token-roshi, told him to buy some bean curd. So he went to the store. On the way he saw a picture advertising an acrobatic theater. While he was standing, looking at the various pictures in front of the building, he heard the bell of his own temple-it was the signal for meal time. He was supposed to come back to the temple with the bean curd and finished cooking it before meal time, but he had been looking at the picture for such a long time without knowing what time it was. Hearing the bell, he noticed what his duty was. He dashed into the store-"Give me tofu." As soon as the old man gave it to him, he dashed back. But on the way back he noticed that he had left his hat in the store. So he ran back again-"Give me, give me." And the old woman said, "What?" "Give me." He meant his hat, but his mind was so busy that the word "hat" didn't come out. "Give me, give me!" "What, what, what?" And at last he could say "my hat." "Oh, your hat is on your head. What is the matter with you?" And again he went back to his temple with his hat. That was the story.

The precepts are something like his hat. The precepts are always on his head. Because he wanted to say "hat" or "precepts," it didn't work. If he always has his hat, then there is no need to think about it. That is actually how we should keep the precepts. So we put emphasis on actual practice or zazen, how to be concentrated on what we do, moment after moment. During sesshin I talked about *shikan taza*. I feel I haven't met you for such a long time. Most of you were sitting for the five days, but I feel I am seeing some of you for the first time. But actually, I was making our practice, what *shikan taza* is, clear. In short, *shikan taza* is to live each moment. *Shikan taza* is how to live in each moment. So you can apply *shikan taza* to your everyday life, and the point is to be concentrated on what you do in its true sense, without seeking for anything, inside or outside. When you do something, you are with everything. When you ignore your actual activity, thinking about something else, that is not real practice. So real teaching is not outside of you, and it is not inside of you. When you do something, there

is where real teaching and where real practice is. If you miss real practice in your everyday life, you will be regretful later. If you are doing your best, that is the only way to be yourself and to be with everyone. When you are with everyone, you are keeping our precepts, without knowing whether you have your cap on your head or not. Even though you don't notice it, your cap is here. If you become you yourself, and if your practice includes everything, moment after moment, then the more explicit precepts are always with you. That is another point which maybe more important than verbal transmission of verbal precepts. If I tried to explain those precepts, it would take time, but how you keep them, in short, is to live in each moment, to be sincere with yourself always, without looking around. If you come here, you must be you, that is all. If so, why is it necessary to say you are a Christian or you are a Hindu? Why is that necessary?

It looks like I am trying to put you in some form, like zazen practice, but it is not so, actually. I put emphasis on the form of practice because that is the only way to have real concentration. If you miss one instruction which we may give you, there is no real concentration. If your back is like this (not straight), it is impossible to have deep, good, smooth breathing. Good breathing is explained by Dogen in various ways, using various characters. But good breathing means smooth, deep breathing. and it should be calm, it should be strong, without having any brokenness. If you take breathing in this way, if you stop at some point, it doesn't go through. When you have good posture, breathing can be very smooth and deep. It should reach to your tummy-you should feel in that way. But for a woman, maybe it feels different. It looks that way, because you have an extra organ here, I think. So maybe women don't feel as though breathing reaches to the bottom of their tummy. But your breathing should be pretty deep, and it must feel as if it comes to the bottom of your tummy. Actually, in men, breathing does not reach to the bottom of your tummy either. It may come to the bottom of your lungs, but it doesn't reach there. So the same thing will be true with women's breathing.

When a Japanese calligrapher or Sumie ink artist works, even though he is not in perfect zazen posture, he applies that posture to his work. So for him, one stroke or one line expresses many things, just as our practice includes everything. That may be the difference between usual art and Zen art. Full concentration is on one dot, on one line. If you see the way they do it, you will understand it. They have the brush mostly in their right hand, but their left hand is working harder. So you may think he is working with his left hand with a brush in his right hand. In the same way, his whole body is working on line. Maybe it is also true with your art. If your painting is done just by your right hand, you cannot work properly. Somehow your left hand should help your right hand, and your whole body should make your brush and your hand work freely to express something. So if you actually become one with everything, if your brush includes or expresses all of your effort and if you are completely one with everything, you can work in its true sense.

So that is why we put emphasis on posture. If someone cannot sit, he should keep his back straight as much as possible, and he should find out how to be concentrated on his activity. There must be some way to be concentrated on what you do. While you are sitting, without dreaming of anything, if you can express yourself fully in your zazen,

there there is actual practice which includes everything.

If you have that practice, Buddha is with you, Bodhidharma is with you, and all the sages should be with you, actually with you. At that time, who is Christ, who is Buddha, who is Bodhidharma, who is Dogen? Who are they? It is you yourself. How is it possible for Buddha to exist forever? The only way is to exist with us. How is it possible for various sages to exist in our human history? Actual history is with you, and there is no need to think about it, because you have it-you are with them always. when you think about him, he is with you in some form. when you do not think about him, he is still with you. And that point should not be forgotten. You think that only when you have his image with you is he there, but that is not (his) real being. (His) real being is always with you, even when you do not think about him. That is actual truth. I forgot who said so, but someone said when you think about him, he is always with you. Those are very simple words and very beautiful words. There were some more words after those: "but if you do not think about him, where is he?" Where is he? If you think he is not there anymore, that is very shallow, materialistic understanding. You are not sincere enough. You put him in a book and put it in the bookcase, that is all. That is why he suffers, in a bookcase. If you do not put him in a bookcase, he is always with you. can you deny this fact? No one can deny this fact.

If you understand various sages in that way, can you be just Buddhist? Or can you be just Christian? You cannot. You say, "I am Christian," but actually you are not only Christian, but also Buddhist. That is very true. When you become you yourself, when you do not put them in a bookcase, how is it possible to say, "I am Christian" or "I am Buddhist?" The next question maybe, "Then why do you wear Buddhist robes, and why do you sew Buddhist robes?" but I don't have time to talk about it right now.

But a more important thing is this practice, this sincerity. You may laugh at what Oka-roshi did when he was a boy, but he was a good priest, even though he was so small. He was very good. He had to be scolded by his master when he came back to his temple, you know. They had to wait maybe another 30 minutes before they ate, so he had to be scolded. But even though he was scolded, he was a good boy. There is no question about that point. You cannot say he wasn't observing the precepts. He faithfully observed the precepts, and he always kept his hat on his head. This time he forgot about his hat, that is all.

I am so happy to see you from various religions. It is okay with me, and you don't have to feel this is a Zen Center, a special building for Soto priests. Here we are doing our best to live with people in the true sense. That is all.

Thank you very much.

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