

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
JANUARY SESSHIN LECTURE: 1 PM
SHUSHŌGI: Sections 11–17
Friday, January 21, 1966
Soko-ji Temple, San Francisco
Lecture A

Tape operator: *Sesshin* lecture in January 20th—21st, I think, one o'clock.

Suzuki-rōshi: The next chapter¹ which we will learn is about precepts. And this is pretty difficult one, so before we study how to recite it, and I want to explain it beforehand.

The precept observation is very important for Zen practice. If we eat too much, we cannot sit. If we do not have enough sleep, we cannot sit. So your—physically and mentally, you have to adjust your life so that you can sit. This is very important point. Zen or Buddhism is actually the way of life, and way of life is the precepts. [Possible gap in recording.] To live is how to observe precepts. It is not some rules of 16 or 250 or 500. There must be innumerable number of precepts. And—so it is necessary for us to have full understanding of precepts and to make effort to observe precepts. So whenever a great Zen master or religious hero appears, precepts observation is emphasized by him. Or before someone appears—some great teacher appears, precepts observation always have been emphasized by many precedent masters. Before Dōgen, there were several famous masters who emphasized precepts.

[Section 11] *Next we should deeply respect the three treasures: the Buddha, the teaching, and the Buddhist community. In fair way or adversity, they deserve our respect.*

Excuse me, maybe they have to put in this way:

We should yearn to respect them and make offering to them in fair way or adversity.

This is literal translation. But here it says:²

¹ Suzuki-rōshi is commenting on *Shushōgi*, by Takia Takishū and Azegami Baisen (1890)—a summary of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*. Suzuki-rōshi discussed Section 1 in SR-66-03-13-B.

² This second version appears to be Reihō Masunaga's translation, in either: (1) "Shushōgi: True Meaning of Training and Enlightenment," in *Zen for Daily Living*, Tōkyō: Shunjū-sha Publishing Co., Nov. 1964, p. 50; or (2) *ibid.*, in *The Sōtō Approach to Zen*, Layman Buddhist Society Press, Tōkyō, 1958,

They deserve our respect and offering no matter where we wander from life to life.

This is more maybe advanced, maybe—not literal but it takes—this express the meaning what he meant.

We should yearn to respect them and make offering to them in fair way or adversity. It was respect for Buddha—for the Buddha, the teaching, and the Buddhist community that was truly transmitted from India to China by the Buddhas and patriarchs.

Buddha and sangha—the Buddha and the sangha, and then Buddhist community is also precepts observation, you know. Those are how we practice Buddhism. So how we practice Buddhism is to keep our precepts. It is—precepts is not just prohibitory precepts. We have three refugees, and three corrective precepts, and ten prohibitory precepts. This is three of the sixteen of Sōtō precepts or [1 word] precepts.

The three treasures is—has—should be—will be understood in three ways: the manifested three treasures, the supreme one [?], his dharma, and his sangha. This is manifested treasures—manifested three treasures. And maintaining three treasures—Buddha's images, sūtras, and precept—priests. Those are meant—those are called "maintaining three treasures." And one body, three treasures. Essentially Buddha. No body of Buddha. The harmonious body of Buddha. This is more philosophical understanding of three treasures.

Anyway, we have to take refuges in three treasures as long as we are Buddhist. And—and then it says:

[Section 12] If the unfortunate and virtueless cannot even hear to [of] the Three Treasures, how can they make refuge in them? Do not take refuge in the spirits of the mountains or the ghosts of the dead, and worship not at heretical shrines. Such refuge-seeking lead us away from salvation. Let us instead quickly take refuge in the Buddha, the teaching, and the Buddhist community, seeking three—seeking there not only release from pain but complete enlightenment.

When we take—when we observe our precepts, may I ask you with what mind [laughs] do you observe precepts? This kind of, you know, story is everywhere in Zen kōan. "With what mind do you [laughs]

p. 174. The source of the first quotation read by Suzuki-rōshi is unknown. For the rest of the lecture, Suzuki-rōshi follows Masunaga with only minor changes.

observe those precepts?" This is a kind of tricky [laughs] question. With what mind? If you say, "With this mind—with this kind of mind I—we observe precepts," then it means your mind is separated from the observation of the precepts. Precepts is there, and you are here—your mind is here. That is dualistic understanding. It is same thing when we—will happen if you practice zazen with your mind. Same misunderstanding will happen to you.

Zen practice is a practice which happens within your mind [laughs]—within your big mind. Precepts observation is the—how our life goes in its true sense. That is precepts observation. Precepts—your life goes in that way automatically. That is precepts observation. So if you think the precepts is some particular rules which was set by Buddha, that is wrong understanding. Precepts is the way of life recorded by tape recorder [laughs, laughter] or printed by film [laughs]. That is precepts, you know. If you take a record someone—someone's speech, it will say something, you know, moment after moment. That is precepts.

So if you say, "Printed," you know, "[film] negative is precepts," that is wrong understanding. "Recorded voice is precepts." That is wrong understanding. What I am saying, what I am doing, whatever it is [laughs], that is precepts. So as a Buddhist, it is quite natural for them to observe—to respect Buddha or take refuge in Buddha and dharma and his sangha. In this way, precepts should be observed. In other word, it is sincere effort to—effort to make your life meaningful. This is precepts observation in its true sense.

Do not take refuge in the spirits of mountains or ghosts of the dead, and worship not the heretical shrines.

Because heretical understanding—according to heretical understanding, we take refuge in something, you know, which is different from your—yourself. That is heretical understanding. That is not our understanding. According to our understanding, everything is within our mind. Our mind include everything, and in our mind many things will take place. So when we do not lose this mind, whatever happen to us, that is precept observation. When we are caught by dualistic or something objective existence or idea—objective existence and worship them, that is heretical understanding. So the spirit of the mountain or ghost of the dead and to worship heretical shrines is not our way of observing precepts.

Such refuge-seeking lead us away from salvation. Let us instead quickly take refuge in the Buddha, the teaching, and the Buddhist community, seeking there not only release from pain but complete enlightenment—to complete enlightenment.

When we have enlightenment, many things happen within enlightenment, within big mind. In this case, we call it—we call our activity "precepts observation."

[Section 13] To take refuge in the Three Treasures, we must come with pure heart or faith. To take refuge in the Three Treasure, we must come with pure faith. No matter when—or whether at the time of the Buddha's appearance in the world or after his disappearance—we repeat with clasped hands and bow head—bowed head: "I take refuge in the Buddha. I take refuge in the teaching. I take refuge in the Buddhist community." I take refuge in the Buddha because he is our great teacher. I take refuge in the teaching because of its curative effect. I take refuge in the Buddhist community because here we find wisdom and warmth—warmth—warmth. To become followers of Buddhism, we must uphold the Three Treasures. We must lay his foundation before receiving the moral precepts.

We—before we—before the observation of moral precepts, we have take—we have to take three refuges. And this is those observation of taking refuge in the Buddha, and the teaching—and his teaching, and his community is included in the sixteen precepts.

[Section 14] The merit of Triple Refuge will always ripen when responsible [responsive] communion take place between the trainee and the Buddha. Those who experience this communion—whether deva, dwellers in hell, and animals—or animals—will take this refuge. The embodied merit increase—increases through the various stage of existence and ultimately leads to the highest right enlightenment. Buddha himself confirmed the merit of the Triple Treasures as supremely valuable and inconceivably profound—profound. All living beings should therefore take this refuge.

[Section 15] The next we should accept the three collective pure precepts—that embracing good behavior, and embracing good deeds, and that embracing all being and salvation—saving them. We should then accept the ten grave prohibitions:

*Do not kill.
Do not steal.
Do not commit adultery.
Do not lie.
Do not sell liquors.
Do not bring up the faults of others.
Do not boast and blame others.
Do not withhold material and spiritual possession.*

*Do not become angry.
Do not debase—debase the Triple Treasures.*

Those are ten prohibitory precepts. "Do not kill."

It is not—those rules is not manmade—is not supposed to be manmade precepts like social rules, or custom, or rules of some special countries. It is something more than that. It is not manmade one, but based on the truth—a universal truth of universe. If so, it does just mean not to kill. Strictly speaking, we cannot kill anything [laughs]. You think you can do it, but it is impossible. When we realize this, we will not kill anything. We will not try to kill anything because it is impossible. This is one way of observation—observing the precepts "Do not kill." So "Do not kill" is not just matter of—matter of forcing something to others or—or empower a person to do something, or formality observation. It is not—it is something more than that. If you realize this fact, that you cannot kill anything, then you will be free from dualistic activity of killing or not killing.

So "Do not kill" means ex- [partial word]—to extend our life activity or our life. "Do not kill" means [refers to?] sometime lazy attitude, you know, lazy way of life. If you—when you are lazy, or when you are not sincere enough in your practice you are killing [laughs] Buddha. Buddha will not manifest itself. You are keeping Buddha within yourself without doing anything [laughs]. That is actually to kill Buddha or to kill something. "Not to kill" means to do something with sincerity. That is fundamental way of observing precepts. So precepts observation is to do something with your utmost effort. That is how you observe those ten prohibitory precepts.

So negative precepts and positive precepts observation is not different. This is the most important precept.

"Do not steal." When you find out you cannot kill anything, how is it possible to steal something from others? When you have everything, there is no need to steal something from others. When you have no idea of others, when you understand your life [is?] something which is happened—which happens is in your mind, it is not possible to steal anything. That is actually a practice of zazen. When you practice zazen, you practice zazen with big mind—the mind which is not matter of big or small [laughs] [and] with your true mind. That is our practice of zazen. So the practice of zazen is not different from—to—from observation of the precepts.

"Do no steal. Do not commit adultery." You will not attach to what will be within your, you know, capacity. When you think—when you have some object of adultery, you think you can—you will become—you commit adultery. But when—when you do it as if you—as if you—

as if your eyes breaks [laughs], that is not adultery. This—there is no need to be caught by some unchaste act.

"Do not lie." You cannot tell lie, you know. Whatever you do, it express your true nature. So you cannot tell lie.

"Do not sell liquors," or, you may say, "drugs." "Liquor" means something, you know, some intoxicating medicine or intoxicating teaching. Those are liquors. Even the Buddha's teaching—even Buddha's teaching, if you sell it [laughs], that is liquor. If you are caught by it, that is liquor. So not only wine or drugs, but also you should not sell anything [laughs]. Do you understand? You should not sell. It should be your life in its true sense. This is very important precepts for us, and subtle understanding is necessary.

We call—Japanese people call *sake*—do you know *sake*? Japanese wine made from rice. We make Japanese wine from rice. That is—another name for *sake* is "best medicine of all the medicine" [laughs]. If you do not intoxicated by it—if you take not—if you do not take too much, that is the medicine of all [laughs]. But when you are intoxicated, that is *sake* which you should not take or sell.

We say "sell." This is very subtle. "Don't take" is not, you know, adequate enough. "Don't sell" mean—when you yourself [are] intoxicated by something, you know, by—by some gaining idea to make profit from it, or—or you are—when you are caught by something, you will try to sell it to others. "Buddhism is so wonderful teaching! [Laughs.] Why don't you join us?" At that time you are already somehow intoxicated by it. So "don't sell" is very subtle expression. But it means also "do not take it."

But even though—you can take it if you do not [get] caught by it. You can do it. But precepts observation—why we emphasize precepts observation is it will protect yourself from bad habits. Precepts will protect yourself, as our human nature is—has some weak points—so many weak points we have. So it is necessary for Buddha to protect us from evil habits by setting up some rules for us.

But if we are alert enough, we should—wise enough, we should take care of ourselves with alert—with alertness. Not to fell into the pitfall of human nature. We have many danger in our life, and sometime we know it and sometimes we do not know it. So it is necessary for us to have some rules to protect ourselves. And actually, precepts observation is difficult way, but actually it is easy way, you know. Not—difficult way is to—to be—to behave like Buddhist without precept, without any rules. This is very difficult. But if we have some precepts, it is easy for us to observe our way. How do you think [laughs]? Do you think this is just, you know, some—some good explanation of

precepts? It is not so.

When I was young, I wanted to remain celibacy. You know, I wanted to—I didn't want to get married, because I know myself so much, I know—I knew what will happen to me if I get married. So I thought I'm not so, you know, good. I know pretty well. So I thought it may be easier to remain alone—to be a Buddhist. This is easy way. But some people may think to get married, to remain Buddhist, may be easier because his life will help him [laughs]. So it may be easier. Yes, in some way it is easier, but it makes—makes us—makes him more difficult—more difficult to be a good priest.

So precepts observation is very—we should be very—we should be very grateful to the precepts. It is mercy of the Buddha. If you think the precepts will be a bandage for your life, or precept is the rules of your life, that is big misunderstanding. It means your effort is not—you are not sincere enough. You don't know yourself, and you do not make your effort enough to be a Buddhist. When you become Buddhist, you will find the true meaning of those precepts.

And so, the Buddhism is not some knowledge or some philosophy—something to talk about. Buddhism is for yourself. And to study Buddhism is to help you yourself in its true sense. So all the teaching is just within yourselves, not without. The spirit that started Buddhism is the spirit to solve everything as your own problem. That is how to study Buddhism, as Dōgen-zenji says: "To study Buddhism is to study yourself." It—from beginning to end, it is study of our life. No one help you. If you expect someone's help, it means you have—you lost your step, and you lost your true mind.

[Section 15, cont.] *The Buddha have received and kept the Triple Refuge, the three collective pure precepts, and the ten grave prohibitions. [Repeats.] The Buddha have received—the Buddhas—excuse me—the Buddhas has—have received and kept the Triple Refuge, and the three collective pure precepts, and then the ten grave prohibitions.*

To transmit Buddhism is—to receive transmission means to become successor of a Buddhist, you know. So succession of Buddhist life is to receive transmission. So, of course, to receive transmission is to receive Triple Refuge, the three collective pure precepts, and the ten grave prohibitions.

[Section 16] *By accepting the precepts, you will attain supreme enlightenment—the indestructible Buddhahood realized or to be realized by the Buddhas of the past, present, and future. Would any wise man reject this goal? To all living beings, the Buddhas have shown that when they accept the moral precepts, they*

*attain Buddhahood—the rank equal to the Great Enlightenment
—that—and that they are truly the children of the Buddha.*

When you become successor of Buddha's life, you are children of Buddha.

[Section 17] All the buddhas dwell here and embrace everything in their infinite wisdom. All the buddhas dwell here and embrace everything in their infinite wisdom.

All the buddhas is in your life, you know, in its true sense—should be within your life. If so, within your life there should be precepts. And that is, at the same time, practice of zazen.

[Section 17, cont.] *When all beings dwell here and embrace everything in their infinite views see no distinction between subject and object—when this happens, all things—whether earth, vegetation, fence post, brick or pebbles—take grace of the Buddhas. The resulting wind and fire, fanned by the profound influence of the Buddhas, drive us to intimate enlightenment. This is the merit of non-doing and non-striving—the awakening of the wisdom mind.*

This is, you know, description of our life as a Buddhist.

[Repeats.] *All the Buddhas dwell here and embrace everything in their infinite views. When all things dwell here and embrace everything in their infinite views, see no distinction between subject and object—when this happens, all things—whether earth, vegetation, fence post, brick or pebbles, take grace of the Buddha. The resulting wind and fire, fanned by the profound influence of the Buddha, drive us to the intimate enlightenment. This is the merit of non-doing and non-striving—and the awakening of the wisdom mind.*

—awakening of perfect wisdom which has no within or without. We call it limitless wisdom—activity of one mind. Here he said "intimate enlightenment." This is something new, you know. You—always you say "great enlightenment" or "highest enlightenment," but Dōgen-zenji says "intimate enlightenment"—"intimate enlightenment." Most intimate one is enlightenment. Most intimate one to you is enlightenment. Do you understand? Enlightenment is something within you, or—you cannot say "within you." If I say "within you," it is not intimate enough to you. It is [laughs] hiding within yourself. So—if so, it is not intimate. Of course, if it is something beyond you, that is not intimate. Even—if it is something to attain it, it is not intimate one. He says "intimate enlightenment." This intimacy to the enlightenment is our practice.

When you sit, just sit, you know, with big mind. That is intimate enlightenment. It is so intimate that you do not realize [laughs, laughter] enlightenment. That is what he means. *Shitashii—shitashii*—in Japanese, *shitashii*. *Shitashii*—"friend, good friend." We say "good friend." *Shitashii—shito—shitashii*—person who is intimate to—to you is *shitashii—shito*. It means, you know, "intimate friend."

And we say also, *Shitashii nakani mo rei ni ya*, you know. Even though man and wife is intimate, you know, but there must be some rules between them. That is our way. You may say if it is intimate relationship, there is no need to have some rules [laughs]. That is wrong understanding, because relationship between them is so intimate that it is necessary to set up some rules. So our rules is based on intimate relationship—not to make some harmony between us, but to make—to make our life more meaningful we set up some rules. It is—to observe rules is to be appreciative of the intimate relationship. That is rules, you know. If there is no rules [laughs]—there is no—to enjoy within—within our relationship. If we want to feel something, then we should have some rules, or at least we should be appreciative to the intimacy. Do you understand? This is precepts.

So within our relationship between man and man, or man and woman, or man and nature, there is rules based on the intimate relationship. So in observing rules, there is no trace of a rule. Even though there is rules, there is no need to be caught by it, because it is the expression of the intimate relationship. It is expression of it. It is not something to—necessary to set up because of some unharmonious relationship.

So when—in our practice, there is no trace of practice, and there is no shadow of the rules. No trace of the rules and no shadow of rules. To have shadow of rules means, "I must do this." That is shadow [laughs]. Sometime [laughs] you [are] scared of the shadow of yourself [laughs]. That is shadow. We should not have shadow of the rules. Until you do it, that is not rule. When you do it, that is rule. When Buddha did something, that is rule. There is no shadow for the Buddha, or there is no obligation for Buddha. So we should not shadow of the rules or trace of rules. If you do it, that's all. That is the real Buddha. We sh- [partial word]—we should not be caught by what we did, even though it is right. We shouldn't say, "What I did was right [laughs]." We should do in the same way. That is—that means you leave the trace of the teaching or trace of the precepts.

So Dōgen-zenji said, "Fish swim like a fish [laughs]. Bird flies like a bird [laughs]." That is Buddhist life. Fish swims, but there is no trace. Birds fly, but there is no trace of bird. There is no setup, you know, or trace for birds.

In original Japanese, "this bird" is beautiful sentence [laughs]. This translation is very good, but—and at the same time it is rather difficult to understand.

But in your practice, we, you know, repeat lecture after lecture, you know, talking [about] some advantage of zazen practice [laughs]. So naturally you will be—naturally it means I am selling some [laughing] drugs or *sake* to you, and you are buying it, and you are taking it [laughter]. This is not so good. So, you know, actually it is better to do it, you know, without listening [to] anything—just by the suggestion of the teacher. That is best way. And you should just stick to the teacher [laughs] with patience.

So pure mind is—interpretation of pure mind is purity of the mind and patient mind—patient mind. It should be, when you study Buddhism, the patience, you know—endurance is absolutely necessary, because we do not talk about—too much about the advantage of Buddhism. Until you find out [laughs], we—we will wait. If so, both for the teacher and student, the most important thing is endurance—to wait for the chance to—which will become between us. If you give up, you will have no chance to understand it in its true sense because Buddhism is not something—some knowledge or intellectual understanding. That is why we say do not sell [laughs] Buddhism. Do not sell anything. Do not take anything. Cover your ears and eyes and mouth [laughs, laughter], and wait for the chance which will come to you [laughs]. Do you understand?

I cannot talk [said as he was covering his mouth with his hand] [laughs, laughter]. You cannot listen [laughs, laughter]. You cannot smell, even. That is how you study Buddhism. That is observation of precepts. So whatever the religion is, the most important thing is a kind of austerity. This element is very important for every religion. I don't know other religion, but the austerity is very important. "Let alone" [?] is not good. When you limit your life to certain extent, it is easier to find out the truth. If you do too many things [laughs], you will be lost in your activity. But if you limit your activity, you know, you can see. That is why we observe precepts. The precepts observation is very important.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Adam Tinkham and Bill Redican (5/8/01).