

Continuation of Lecture on Shi-sho-ku - Shunryu Suzuki Transcript

Sunday Lecture

Monday, June 12, 1967

From now on, on each Sunday service I want to continue the lecture about-- Shishoku [?]. This is our text [by Dogen Zenji].

We explained-- we studied about already the three-- the three refuges which is fundamental precepts for Buddhist and we have sixteen precepts, three refuges, triple treasures and ten commandments or ten prohibitive-- prohibitive precepts. And the three refuges and the three, the triple treasures are basic precepts. And before we take triple treasures, we take repentance.

So repentance and triple treasures and the three corrective precepts and ten commandments. This is our rules to take refuge or in Buddha or Dharma or Sangha. As we briefly studied the three triple treasures, so, today we will study about the three corrective precepts. Next-- next we should accept the three corrective pure precepts: that embracing good behavior, that embracing good deeds and that embracing all being and saving them. We should then -- we should then accept the 10 grave prohibitions.

So before we take 10 prohibitive precepts we take three corrective pure precepts. The precepts embracing good behavior, the precepts embracing good deeds and that embracing all beings and saving them. Those are the three corrective pure precepts. Our life is based on, of course, based on our instincts, instincts and desires and usually religious life is based on some pure mind which is completely different from those worldly desires, that is usual understanding.

That is why before Buddha they practiced-- practiced asceticism. To limit physical needs and to attain liberation of our pure mind, or pure spirit. That is their idea of religion. But Buddhism is completely different from that. And Buddha's time at the same time there were various thought like hedonism or materialism, there were many thoughts. Of course, leading religious thought supposed to be Hinduism. But at his time people started to think by themselves and that is why there were so many thought.

Briefly, major thought was supposed to be six, including materials and hedonism and-- or accidentalism-- accidentalism. There is no cause and effect, there is no maternal love or parents, parent is just-- parents are-- there is no relationship, spiritual relationship between parents and his children. And there is no instinct like maternal love. Recently, you know, people started to think in the same way, you know.

Some social-- under some structure, you know-- we have been-- we have had the feeling of or-- not something like instinct in some similar maternal love as an instinct but strictly speaking it is not our original instinct, that is the habit created by so-- under some social structure. Some scholars emphasize this point. So if the social structure changes we will have no maternal life, love anymore [laugh]. That is a kind of, you know, something like someone's thought in Buddha's time. Sange Beritputra [?] thought in this way. But it-- he does-- he-- he himself was very sincere and he was so sincere that he couldn't be-- he couldn't support some dignified or

some hypocritical thought so he thought, he thought he is very, you know, straightforward, [Laughter]. He was very honest to himself. That is why he supported this kind of thought. So it is not just we cannot say he was not sincere. He must be pretty sincere person but he was-- he was not-- his self is not deep enough, that's all. Buddhism-- Buddhist-- our way is not those two extremes. We-- another extreme for maybe for asceticism is asceticism. To limit our physical needs to the extreme and attain freedom of our pure mind or spiritual power.

But in Buddhism we accept our instincts or our desires we have actually, we cannot deny that we have various desires. Whether it is good or bad, anyway we have it [Laughter]. We cannot say we don't have it. And as long as we have actually, you know, this we have to accept it. And it is a part of true which-- truth which we should accept. And we think that to say that is bad is a self-- centered idea. If we-- if we are-- our thought is pure enough to see things as it is we have to accept it. That is our way. But, even though we have various desires, whether it is good or bad, we cannot leave it as it goes. So, it is necessary to work on it so that we can appreciate our original nature.

If we do not take care of those desires we will be-- eventually we will be disgusted with our true nature, with our instincts and with our desires. As-- as-- ascetic religion say sooner or later, if we do not take care of those desires we will be left in depravity or we will left [?] some destruction or fight. Nothing good will result from it.

But it does not-- even so-- so, it does not mean our original nature is bad. It is good, but that-- but that we don't take care of it, that is our fault and that is our lack of consideration. This is why we have this three precepts. So with our original desires or instincts we have, we should have desires to take care of it and to take care of myself-- ourselves and we have to take care of others. That is our vow as a Buddhist. To take care of myself, to take care of our desires and instincts and to take care of other's life. This fundamental meaning of the three corrective pure precepts. That embracing good behavior. That embracing good deeds. That embracing all beings and saving them.

We have four vows of Mahayana Buddhism. Even though our-- even though sentient being is innumerable, we vow to save them. That is one. Even though our desires is-- evil desires is innumerable, we should take care of them. Even though teaching-- to-- teaching is innumerable, we should study. Even-- even though Buddhism is study of Buddhism is limitless study we should accomplish to study Buddhism. That is our four vow.

So, as our-- if desires or people are innumerable and their desires is limitless, we should keep our effort to save them and to take care of them. So, as long as this human life goes our effort should go with it. Buddhism is not some teaching which should be accomplished by someone. Buddhism-- it is necessary to study Buddhism forever. There is no complete Buddhism. So, Buddhism is some teaching which needs limitless study. That is nature of Buddhism.

If our desires are innumerable, the teaching for it-- for it-- for them should be innumerable. If the people are bad in Buddhism, as long as, you know, we are not so good we should strive for it. So, anyway, out-- this world is world of --, world of suffering, we say. World of suffering means world of pleasure or world of happiness or joy. World of pure joy-- so-called-it pure joy beyond our world is delusion. There is no such rejoice, actually there is no such grace for us.

But usually we adore for it; that is kind of adoration but not our adoration. So that is why the Buddhism is called middle way.

Buddhism is always in this world and it wants to-- we want some balance always. In this sense we respect Sangha which keeps harmony in their society. And the balance should be in person should not be like this or like that, it should be always level. It is-- it should be always pure, pure truth. So, that is why we take refuge in Truth or Dharma. And the truth should be manifested in this actual world, that is why we take refuge in Buddha who manifested the truth who-- in this world who realized the truth as a human being. Pause. Next we should accept the three corrective pure precepts that embracing good behavior, that embracing good deeds, that embracing all being and saving them. This is not, you know, prohibitive precepts. This is vow rather than precept.

And we should-- and then we should accept the ten great prohibits. And more in detail, more accurately speaking, this is-- those three corrective pure precepts will be briefly set up in ten commandments. One, do not kill. Do not steal. Do not commit adultery. Those are the precepts about our body, body activity. Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not commit adultery. Do not lie. Do not sell liquor. Do not bring up the faults of others. Do not boast and blame others. Do not boast yourself and blame others. Those are about our word or mouth. Do not withhold material and spiritual possessions. Do not become angry. Do not debase the triple treasures. Those are about our minds-- mind.

"Do not kill" means, in another word-- do not kill means do-- do realize our true nature. It doesn't mean just to kill some insects or it does not mean just to have mercy. It is deeper than that. Of course, do not kill is, we should not kill even an insect or any. But that is not the real meaning of do not kill. Do not steal.

Steal-- when we do not realize we possess everything we want to steal, but everything in the world is-- belongs to us anyway. So, there is no need to steal. Someone should take care of it [Laughter]. So, there is no need to steal it, that is do not steal.

Do not commit adultery [laughs]. Do not commit adultery. It-- it means attachment, you know, some extreme-- this precept emphasize especially our attachment to some particular thing. But it does not mean to-- not to attach to other sex [laughs]. But we attach to things-- to some particular thing as we attach to the other sex. As you attach to girlfriend or boyfriend. That is very true. So, if you, you know, if you keep yourself from being attached to-- if you are able to do it when it is necessary it means you are able to refrain from various attachment. Do not commit adultery.

I was scolded by my master many times: "You are committing adultery!"¹ [Laughter.] In my temple, Zoun-in, there was no female. But still he said, "Don't commit adultery!" [Laughter.] He was right, I think [laughter]. Do not lie. This precept belongs to, you know, world, but, he said, even though I don't say anything, don't lie [Laughter]. Your eyes telling lie, your countenance telling lie. It is true, very true.

Do not sell liquor. Do not-- this is very important precept [Laughter]. Do not sell liquor. Nowadays you should add one more here, something, do not sell liquor-- "do not sell" means,

you know, to boast or, you know, to take some advantage of liquor, you know. This is medicine. If you take it in the right way it will be benefit. This is kind of, you know, breaking precept because we have nature, you know. Our nature is very weak to the temptation. We should, you know, count this point when we take liquor.

So "do not sell" means, very-- meaning is very deep, sell. Do not sell liquor. If you boast about the profundity of Buddhist teaching you are selling a kind of liquor to the people. If some religion, if you say this-- the religion is wonderful you are selling some liquor. So, not only, intoxicating liquor but also all the, you know, teaching-- spiritual teaching or material by which we will be intoxicated is liquor. So, if you take those precepts literally, you know, it is a kind of selling liquor.

We should have always freedom to the teaching and precept. We should take them in consideration always. We should not forget it. But we should not, you know, be bound by the teaching or precepts. That is how we keep our precepts. That is why we have the fifth. The fifth one means absolutely-- absolute freedom from all the teaching. Do not sell liquor, this is very deep. Do not bring up the fault of others. When we talk about someone's faults, it means you are talking about your own fault. Almost all the time it is so. A mother who have-- in Japan, this is in Japan, not in America-- I don't know in America-- but in Japan if he, if a mother has-- when a mother has his own son who has-- who start to have some concubine, you know, some secret relationship with some, you know, girlfriend having his wife, the mother talks about concubine-- talk-- talks about someone who has a concubine. So, what-- when some old lady start to talk about concubine, I thought something must have happened to her baby. [Laughter.] That is very true.

When you talk about someone's faults, it means you have same faults, and you are aware of it. So it is good thing to talk about it [laughter]. But if there is no need to talk about it, it is much better. Do not bring up the faults of others. Do not boast and blame others. Do not boast yourself and blame others. When you boast yourself and blame others it means you are very, you have very small self.

Do not withhold-- withhold material and spiritual possessions. People talks about material or spiritual possessions especially but to talk about it-- If you want to keep this precepts in its true sense, it is necessary for you to talk about possession. Whose possession? It doesn't matter for you who has how much money, doesn't matter. So we should not be concerned about others' property or money. We should not count others'. It is busy enough to count your money [laughs]. So, we should not concerned about others' possessions. This is actually what we mean, do not withhold material and spiritual possessions-- possession-- possessions.

Do not become angry. This is very difficult. Nearly all the Zen masters-- Zen masters are very short-tempered but we-- we couldn't say do not become angry to our masters. [Laughter.] So it may be better to recite this part-- "do not become angry"-- before our master. If he-- if he say do not become angry we should say Do Not Become Angry.

Do not debase the triple treasures. I thought this is very, you know, funny precept for Buddhist to set up this precept. They are protecting-- it looks like Buddhist, Buddhist protecting themselves by setting up this precept. And this one supposed to be the most fatal,

important precept. If you break it [laugh] you will be expelled. I thought so this is rather, you know, unfair to set up this kind of precept. "Don't kill" is good, "don't be angry is very good" [laughter], but don't be blasphemous with triple treasures is very selfish precept.

Moreover, if you commit this precept, you know, you are supposed to go down to the bottom of the hell [laughter]. If you kill someone -- [laughter] you will -- you will -- you will -- even you kill someone. This is very funny. This is our system [laughter]. Very good system. Very good system to me but not to you [laughter]. But those who commit those-- ten-- the last commandment or precept is supposed to be-- supposed to be very intelligent one, he is very hopeful. That is why we put very strict and heavy duty to them. The system of hell is not punishment, you know, it is training [Laughter].

So if he is strong, that is quite understandable, you know. If he is good we should, he should have, anyway, those who kill people or those who steal something is not so, you know, intelligent. Usually they are not so good. Anyway, if they are not so good it is no use to put strict-- strict teaching, it might be better to treat them just in appropriate way, in tentative way. That is why we do not put so heavy duty to them.

But the people who are angry supposed to be very honest and very good and who have very strong will and sincere person. So, we should put heavy burden to them. That is why we put them heavy duty. So, if you see the order this is most, this is most intelligent, good one.

The ninth is next good. Do not withdraw material and spiritual possessions, you know, the scholars and good teachers maybe classified in this group. Material or spiritual possessions. "I invented this," or "I know this." This is, you know, awareness-- strong awareness of spiritual possession. I don't boast-- do not boast and blame others. They are pretty good, you know. To boast, who can boast, they say. Not so bad.

Do not bring up the fault of others-- faults of others. Do not sell liquor. Do not lie. Do not commit adultery-- adultery. Do not steal. Do not kill. Those are the ten commandments.

Thank you very much.

[Laughter] means students and Suzuki both laughing. [Laughs] means mainly or only Suzuki is laughing.

Source: Original transcript by Steve Weintraub, 8/28/69. City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. Slight copy-editing by Bill Redican (11/26/01). This transcript is a retyping of the existing City Center transcript. It is not verbatim. The audio tape is not available.

¹From DC, Crooked Cucumber, p. 28: "Don't commit adultery, Crooked Cucumber!" Shunryu had been admiring an old tea bowl, and that is how So-on told him not to be so attached to fine things. He used that metaphor a lot with the boy, who had good taste in antiques and craftsmanship. Shunryu found it funny, because there were no women living in the temple, but that wasn't the point. It was not that Shunryu shouldn't appreciate beauty, just that he shouldn't be caught by it."