

Sesshin Lecture: Three Treasures - Shunryu Suzuki Transcript

Sunday, June 11, 1967

[Suzuki seems to be commenting on Shi Sho Ku (?) of Dogen. When this is evident, Dogen's words are in quotation marks.]

Today I will explain Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Originally, Buddha is, of course, the one who attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and became a teacher of all the teachers. Dharma is the teaching which was told by Buddha, and Sangha is the group who studied under Buddha. This way of understanding Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha is called the "manifested three treasures," or as we say in Japanese, Genzen sanbo. Genzen is "to appear." Of course, whether Buddha appeared or not, there is truth. But if there is no one who realizes the truth, the truth means nothing to us. So in this sense we say the manifestation of truth: the manifestation of truth is Sangha.

People who join the practice with harmony and unity are called Sangha. So Sangha means not only his group, but also the state of harmony or unity. Also truth itself is Dharma, and the truth which is not divided into various forms is called Buddha, which is another interpretation of the three treasures. That kind of understanding is called "one body/three treasures." Although there are three treasures, it is an interpretation of the one reality. So we call this kind of interpretation one body/three treasures, ittai sanbo.

But within the social framework of culture we have Buddhist culture. That culture consists of Buddha and his teaching, and the priests or followers of Buddhism. So, this understanding of three treasures in Japanese is called juji sanbo. Juji actually means cultural sanbo. Existing sanbo is what exists in society or within cultural framework. So, beautiful buildings and Buddhist art or Buddha's image are, perhaps, Buddha. Scriptures in beautiful design and literature are Dharma.

And priests in robes are maybe Sangha. Juji sanbo, or cultural sanbo, is closely related to society. The Buddhist organization is also Sangha. So there are three ways of understanding the three treasures, but actually the three are not different. It is one and it is three. This is a very old way of oriental thinking, even before Buddha. Buddha applied this interpretation to our framework of teaching. I think Christianity has the idea of trinity. This is the universal framework of religion. But in Buddhism there are many sects, so Buddhism does not combine many ways of understanding in one school.

Each school is based on some particular understanding or some standpoint. We do not take many standpoints in one school. In Japan, especially, we emphasize this point. This is not sectarianism. Once we take a standpoint, we should develop that standpoint through and through until we can understand various standpoints. At first, each way of understanding has

its own insight. But if your understanding becomes higher and higher, you can see other standpoints with understanding at the same time.

This is how we establish various schools in Buddhism. The Nichiren school takes the standpoint of Dharma. Dharma includes the other two, Buddha and Sangha. So their object of worship is the Lotus Sutra, and they repeat Namu myoho Renge Kyo. Myoho Renge Kyo is the Lotus Sutra. Nam is scripture. Namu Myoho Renge Kyo is the title of the Lotus Scripture (Myoho Renge Kyo). The Shin school repeats Amida Buddha's name: namu Amida Butsu, namu Amida Butsu, namu Amida Butsu.

The Zen school repeats Buddha's name, but the emphasis is on Sangha, and they are not so concerned about the intellectual viewpoint or understanding. So we just repeat the founder's name and say namu Shakyamuni Butsu. When we say namu Shakyamuni Butsu, his scripture is included and his Sangha is also included; and we are a part of the Sangha. And even though we members of the Sangha are not direct disciples of Buddha, we are the descendants of Buddha.

We are successors of Buddha. So, because we emphasize the practice of attaining enlightenment as Buddha did, we naturally put emphasis also on Sangha. By practice we will build our character as Buddha did. So that is why we call Shakyamuni Buddha's name. For us it is natural to repeat Shakyamuni Buddha's name rather than Amida Buddha's name or the name of a scripture. If you repeat the name of some scripture, you are liable to be bound by some teaching which was told by Buddha. But actually, it is impossible to authorize some teaching as the absolute teaching because something which is told by some particular person could not be absolute, even though it was told by Buddha. It may be impossible to authorize the teaching for human beings.

You may say that, if it is impossible to authorize even the teaching told by Buddha, then how is it possible to authorize some person as a Buddha [laughs]. This is the point we are studying. This is why we emphasize our practice. And we have a particular understanding of practice. The practice of other schools, for instance the Nichiren school or the Shin school, is quite different from how we need to understand our practice.

This practice is called practice based on original enlightenment. It may look quite unusual to authorize Buddha's Sangha, but this is more adequate and understandable. I'm not trying to explain this point today because I repeat it over and over. So Soto Zen emphasizes transmission from Buddha to us, and we emphasize Sangha, those who have transmission and who are disciples of Buddha.

What I have talked about up to now is, in short, about the three ways of understanding the three treasures. The first is the manifested three treasures. The next is one body/three treasures, or philosophical understanding of the oneness of the three treasures. It is necessary to be concentrated on one thing. If we have three objects of worship, it is difficult to be concentrated; so we have to have some philosophical or intellectual understanding. But, in

fact, what exists here is the actual activity of Buddha. Therefore we emphasize the Sangha. So the third one is the understanding of our daily activity. That is the traditional three treasures or cultural three treasures. But the cultural three treasures are supported by philosophy and Buddha's teaching and Buddha's character. So the cultural three treasures cannot be separated from the other two. When understanding those three treasures, each one will complement the other two and make our understanding complete. This is the Soto way of understanding the three treasures. We have the three treasures and what we do is practice zazen; that is our way. So, our understanding of practice is very different from that of other schools.

Each school has its own particular understanding of the three treasures. If you study each school's understanding of the three treasures, you will have perfect understanding. And you will find out that even though there are many schools, actually what each one means is the same. It must be so because religious life is the expression of our inmost nature which is universal to everybody. So, as Buddha attained enlightenment, we will attain enlightenment. What Buddha was striving for is the same thing we are striving for because we have the same inmost nature as a human being.

When we project our inmost nature into the objective world as Buddha, Dharma, or Sangha, it is nothing but our inmost desire to want to be someone whom you can accept. You strive for something acceptable in its true sense. So it is the same thing. You create God, and you strive for God. It means you are striving for yourself. And as we have the same human nature, your understanding of it must be the same. But if the standpoint is different, the way of explanation should be different, that's all.

Tentatively, I am giving you some explanation of the three treasures. It may be necessary to explain it more, but as we have no time, I will explain the next paragraph.

We should revere the three treasures and make offerings to them. Veneration of the Buddha, the law and the priesthood is in accordance with a precept handed down from the Lord Buddha in India to the patriarchs of China. These are the most important precepts handed down from Buddha to us. We should not worship a genie of the mountains, or call upon the spirit of death for any reason whatsoever, nor should we pay homage to any heretical religion or religious edifice. Such worship does not lead to emancipation. The Three Treasures are not just an idea invented by someone. They are the universal framework of all the advanced religions, not just the framework of the Buddhist religion. But some hasty person, who usually does not pay any attention to religion, finding himself in some difficulty, may worship something like the god of fire, or god of water or some powerful natural spirit without any idea of what the teaching is, what god is, or true practice.

It is quite easy to know our inmost nature if it is related to the right way. And if we express that inmost nature in an appropriate way, it will develop. But if our inmost nature is misled by a hasty idea, a person may go astray and even destroy himself. That is why he says you should not worship the Genie of the mountains or call upon the spirit of death for any reason whatsoever. This is too simple.

Nor should we pay homage to any heretical -- here it says heretical, but heretical is not an adequate translation. I don't know if you have an appropriate word for this. We say gedo. Gedo is "outer way." "Outer way" is just a classification. We call Buddhist scripture "inner scripture," and other, non-Buddhist literature is called "outer." Whether inner or outer, it is the same thing; inside and outside. Outside does not mean bad, and inside is not always good; inside, outside. Gedo means outer religion while Buddhists call our way or our scriptures naiten.

So, as Buddhists, we should not take absolute refuge in outer religious scriptures or organizations. It is not because they are bad, but because we should not mix up our viewpoint. If you try to discover something good, like a monkey in a cage, you will not find out anything. All you will find is radishes. And your stomach will be hurt [laugh]. That is not our way. We should make some human effort always. That is why he says we should not pay homage to outer religious edifices. Such worship does not lead to emancipation. If we have only an idea of the Three Treasures, the Three Treasures will be the goal. If you just have an idea of God without a teaching of the way to God, you will be lost. You will be discouraged. If there is a God, there should be a way to God. But God is the absolute one. So it is a perpetual idea we have which cannot be attained. This point should be understood by people.

It is necessary to have some way to enjoy Buddhahood. Someone who enjoys or rejoices in Buddha nature is the perfect one, or Buddha. This kind of framework is very important. And there must be some practice. There must be some understanding of life. For us, our everyday life is practice itself. So in our everyday life we have religion, if you understand Buddhism. Of course, you will reach Buddhahood through your activity in everyday life. But if you worship some god just because of fear, in what way can you appeal to your inmost request? You will be lost. You will not be lead to emancipation.

Before Buddhism became popular in Japan, Prince Shotoku¹ set up our Constitution for the Japanese people. In the second chapter he said, "Respect the Three Treasures." He said that to follow the Three Treasures is the supreme way of attaining liberation for everyone. Because we use the terminology of Buddhism, it looks like what we are talking about is just Buddhism, but it is not actually so. That is why he says that if you worship some immature religion you will not attain enlightenment. To take refuge in the Triple Treasure it is necessary to have a pure faith. Whether it be at the time of the Tathagata or after his disappearance from the world, we should repeat his formula with clasped hands and bowed head: I take refuge in the Buddha. I take refuge in the Dharma. I take refuge in the Sangha.

Pure faith includes our mental, physical and verbal effort. It is not enough to just think something or say something superficial. So pure faith means, not just faith in something, but real action, reality, realized action. It is necessary to have real practice.

You should take refuge in the Triple Treasure with real effort, not false effort. And it doesn't matter whether it is in the time of the Buddha Tathagata or not. In Dogen's time, almost

everyone believed in the Three Periods of Buddhism. They said that in the last period the people will not believe in him and Buddhism will fade away into some other religion. But Dogen did not believe in it. So there is no difference in our practice, whether Buddha is here or not. This was his belief.

We take refuge in the Buddha because he is the great teacher. We take refuge in the Law because it is our medicine and points the way. We take refuge in the Sangha because the members are our wise friends. Although the Three Treasures are one, the understanding, or the way they help us is different. It is through this triple adoration that we become the disciples of Buddha. Without the Triple Treasure, or if one of them is missing, we cannot be a disciple of the Buddha. It is on the basis of this adoration that all the moral precepts of Buddhism rest.

We say "adoration," but just to adore Buddha is like a dream. It means nothing. So adoration should follow some actual practice or guidance. Without guidance, God means nothing. Even though you believe in a God, it will not help you, actually, if your everyday life is cut off from God. In that way God means nothing. So all the great religions have their teachings and followers. And where there are followers, there should be a way to attain enlightenment. Not in the next life, but in this moment. This is Buddhism.

To take refuge in the Triple Treasure it is necessary to have pure faith, whether it be in the time of the Tathagata or after his disappearance from the world. We should repeat this formula with clasped hands and bowed head. D. T. Suzuki's translation is: "I take refuge in the Buddha, the incomparable honored one. I take refuge in the Dharma, honorable for its purity. I take refuge in the Sangha, honorable for its harmonious life. I have finished taking refuge in the Buddha. I have finished taking refuge in the Dharma. I have finished taking refuge in the Sangha."

In Japanese it is simpler:

Namu kie Butsu,
namu kie Ho,
namu kie So.

Kie Butsu myo sam,
kie Ho rijin sam,
kie So wago som.

Kie Bu kyo,
kie Ho kyo,
kie So kyo.

But if we translate it into English, we cannot arrange the words in this way. Anyway, whether in English or Japanese, we have to repeat those precepts.

Buddha is said to be the supreme world honored one. There are many names for him. We have ten names for Buddha. By Buddha we do not mean just Shakyamuni Buddha. At the same time we mean various Buddhas. So sometimes we say the Buddhas in the three periods of time: past, future and present. *Namu sanze Shobutsu*, we say: I take refuge in all Buddhas in the three worlds. *Namu* is to take refuge. *Sanze* means the three worlds. *Shobutsu* means all the Buddhas, or we say, *Ji ho san shi I shi hu*. *Ji ho* means ten directions. *San shi* means three worlds. *I shi* means all. *Hu* means Buddha. *Ji ho san shi I shi hu, shi son bu sa mo ko sa* means: *Shi san* is the supreme one, *bu sa* is *Bosatsu*, that's *bodhisattva*. *Mo ko sa* is great *Bodhisattvas*. That is actually Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Dharma is *mo ko ho ja ho ro mi*. *Moko* is *maha* or *moka*: great. *Ho ja ho ro mi* is *Prajna Paramita*. That is the teaching. So when we say *ji ho san shi I shi hu, shi son bu sa mo ko sa, mo ko ho ja ho ro mi*, that means that we are taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. That is why we say: *Ji ho san shi I shi hu*. That is the old Chinese pronunciation, but the meaning is the same.

The Buddha is supposed to be the supreme one. The Dharma is called Dharma because it is truth itself. It is impersonal so it is pure. There is no dust on it [laughing]. If there is any dust on the law, you will be put in jail, rules or Dharma should always be clean. So Dharma is something which is honored for its purity. I take refuge in the Sangha which is honored for its harmonious life.

You know, we human beings should be always harmonious and we should work in unity. So we call a Buddhist group "harmonious Sangha." Sangha means *sang* or *sogya* in Japanese. So means priest and *ga* is plural; so *sangha* means priest group, or group of followers.

Here he says, "We take refuge in the Buddha because he is the great teacher. We take refuge in the Law because it is our medicine and points the way. It is law or rule. We take refuge in the priesthood because its members are our wise friends. It is through this triple adoration that we become disciples of Buddha. We should respect the Three Treasures before we receive any further precepts. This is the fundamental precept, since it is on the basis of this adoration that all the moral precepts of Buddhism rest, from beginning to end. Buddhism starts from these three refuges and ends with these three refuges.

"A responsive communication between the refugee and the preceptor makes the maturity of the merit of the triple refuges." "Responsive communication" is the translation of *kan no do ko*. This is a very difficult work to translate. *Kan no* means to respond to each other. And *do ko* means true relationship. *Do* is *dao*. *Ko* is interrelationship. Here we say *Kan no do ko*. In terms of consciousness it happens in this way to us: we feel some coherence, or interrelationship, or correspondence between Buddha and us. But, originally, there is no difference between Buddha nature and human nature. So this is more than responsive communication or relationship. But it happens in this way, so "a responsive communion between the refugee and the preceptor," or "protector" (not "protector," okay, maybe "Buddha") "marks the maturity of the merit of the triple treasure."

When we become one with Buddha, it means the Triple Treasure, or refuge, is completed. So, to take refuge in Buddha means to become one with Buddha or to find our true nature which is not different from Buddha. "Be he a devil or man, dwell in the lower regions, demon or animal; whoever experiences the responsive communion is sure to take refuge in the Triple Treasure." By nature, everything has Buddha nature. So when beings have this experience, they can attain the perfection and they can take the Triple Treasure. "The merit of having taken the three refuges continually increases through the various stages of existence and ultimately calls forth the highest right universal enlightenment." "Highest right universal enlightenment" is Buddhahood. If you repeat this experience, you will attain the highest Buddhahood. "This excellent and inconceivably deep merit has been proved by the Tathagata himself; therefore, all living beings should take this refuge."

Buddha himself experienced it and Buddha has the same nature that we have. This means it is possible to have the same experience.

This is not some particular experience when we realize our true nature or some occasion. So here we emphasize the universality of the three refuges. Here he just emphasizes the precepts, but precepts and Zen are not different. Both Zen and precepts are the expression of our true nature; the experience of finding or realizing our true nature. In this sense there is no difference. So the way to practice Zen is the way we take refuge in the precepts.

So, by mutual communion, or kan no do ko, we mean the true experience of Zen. It is not some ecstasy or some mysterious state of mind, but it is a deep joy that is even more than joy. You may have this true experience through some change in your mental state. But a change of mental state is not, strictly speaking, enlightenment. Enlightenment is more than that. That comes with it, but it is more than that. What we experience is joy or mysterious experience, but something follows. That something which follows, besides this experience, is true enlightenment. So we should not suppose that enlightenment will always be experienced in terms of consciousness. Even though you don't know, you know, that enlightenment is there. And by repeating various activities with this subtle caution, the experience becomes deeper and your consciousness will become more and more mature and smooth. So you may say that enlightenment is the maturity of your experience of everyday life. When enlightenment does not follow, your experience is black and white. But when true experience follows your conscious activity or conscious experience, the way you accept it is more natural, smooth, and deep.

It is not just joy. It is something more than joy. It may not be possible to experience enlightenment just in terms of consciousness. But what you do experience is much deeper. This point should always be remembered. If you remember this point, all the precepts are there. You will not be attached to some particular experience; you will not be caught by the dualistic experience of good or bad, or myself or others. When we violate the precepts, we attach to some particular experience.

When you have something, you will have some joy of possession. To do that is, you know, to break the precept of not stealing, (laughs) or not being greedy about giving either spiritual or material help to others. So when those three precepts are kept in the right way, all the precepts will be kept. In short, when you do everything as you do zazen, then all the precepts will be there. We say that we have to just sit. Our mind is clear. You have no experience whatsoever. Maybe the only experience you will have is sleepiness or pain in your legs [laughs]. No particular experience.

But when you attain enlightenment, when some sudden change of mental state comes to you-- happens to you-- even that experience is not true enlightenment. You will see something, or realize something, in terms of consciousness, but that means you saw something, that's all. It may not be yours. You saw something there, something beautiful. That is the experience, that's all. It is a true experience, but that is not enough. We should obtain the truth. We should become one with the truth. That is taking refuge in Buddha or Truth. When we become one with it, there is no communion or interrelationship because it is just one. That is completely taking refuge in its true sense. That is the experience we have in our practice. But when you practice become dualistic because of your, you know, weak way-seeking mind then your practice...(tape over)

... [Laughter] ... So he said, _____ said, quickly or immediately, immediately is not ... [Laughter.] When we say immediately, we are not good enough. [Laughter.] I will go immediately. [Laughter.] I will come over immediately. [Laughter.] But but he-he, you know, repeat immediately or deeply. But by deeply or immediately he means, always means oneness.

Namu in Japanese means "to plunge into something." We say, "you cannot skim over the water in a basket." But if you dip the basket in it, the basket will be full of water. That is the way. As long as you are making (laughter) a dualistic effort, you cannot do anything because you are a basket. You are full of holes. Holes are you. We say, muro-chi. Muro-chi means "no-hole wisdom." [Laughter.] Our wisdom is hole wisdom. Wisdom with holes. Muro-chi means "no-holes wisdom." But for us, no holes wisdom is just dipping a basket in the water. Then there is no hole [laughter]. That is taking refuge, and that is how we practice zazen. This is the interpretation of precepts and the understanding of our zazen.

Thank you very much.

This transcript is a retyping of the existing City Center transcript. It is not verbatim. No tape is available. The end of this lecture was transferred from SR-67-06-12U to a separate file on 3-13-2015 (see "More Files"). The City Center transcript was entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. It was reformatted by Bill Redican (2/19/02).

¹Shotoku Taishi (574–622).