

EVENING LECTURE by Reverend Suzuki, Roshi

Buddhism has many annual layers like a big tree. It is our tradition to respect those efforts which our patriarchs have made for more than 2000 years. There has been a great effort, we have made a great effort to develop Buddha's way. This is a very important point for Buddhism as a religion. Without appreciation for the efforts of our patriarchs it is difficult to have religious feeling in Buddhism.

This temple was founded in 1934. At that time there were not many priests in America and the founder made a great effort to collect the donations to buy this building. He

was able to raise only part of the cost and the Japanese members year after year paid on the mortgage. Even when they were in detention camps during the war they collected money for the mortgage. This was an important effort they made in the camps, but it is nothing compared to the effort and devotion of our ancestors and patriarchs in India, in China, and in Japan in preserving and developing Buddhism. Even one line of a gatha or scripture is the result of their actual effort. That is not just teaching. We should continue these efforts generation after generation forever. Our responsibility as a Buddhist is to continue this effort wherever we are.

As I said this afternoon, it is necessary to have an aim in our life. The most important aim of a Buddhist is to be a successor of the patriarchs. If you do not understand this aim you are studying Buddhism from the outside. For outsiders Buddhism is nothing. When you accept Buddhism as your own and try to develop it as your own, then Buddhism will have tremendous meaning to us.

Intellectual study of Buddhism is of course necessary, but you should not stay at the edge of Buddhism. Intellectually, Patriarchs made a great effort. Even though they were often treated as heretics, they studied from a pure intellectual point of view and tried not to ignore the smallest illogical point of Buddhism. Historically there is some doubt about our lineage especially before Bodhidharma. Today everyone knows that the names and connections are not historically perfect, but we also know that Buddhism has been transmitted from warm hand to warm hand from Buddha's time until our own day. The fact and spirit of the teaching have been transmitted. Historical or scientific studies are not perfect. There is a limit to scientific truth.

The artistic expression of Buddhism is also not perfect. But that which is painted may be more real to us. It is the same with our teaching which is more human than actual human nature. The precepts which are most difficult to follow are the ones which appeal more directly to us, encourage us more, and help us more, than worldly rules which it is possible to observe.

The usual meaning of rules and law is that we observe them to protect citizens for the benefit of society. But Buddhist precepts are for each one of us and not for some one else. The precepts which look unreal and idealistic are really more practical for each human being and better satisfy our inmost request.

It looks like a very impractical waste of time to sit here all day on your cushion; but if you understand yourself you will understand why we practice zazen. The necessity of zazen and the precepts is within yourself and not outside.

I am a priest and you are laymen. You may say that Buddhism written in a book is for some particular persons; and you as laymen can ignore the precepts. But if you realize that religion is for everyone and should be observed as our way of life, you will know that book-precepts that cannot be actualized, cannot be part of our everyday practice. When we are sincere about our everyday life and about the meaning of religion, we will not be able to live with precepts which were set up for some other people. We should have our own precepts. In this way Hyakujo, Zenji (720-814) established Mahayana precepts for the first time for Mahayana Buddhists. Mahayana was introduced into China in the beginning of the first century; and for many hundreds of years they observed the Hinayana Indian precepts. Probably just the priests observed the Hinayana precepts ignoring the life of the ordinary Chinese people. The Zen Buddhists were very serious about their own and the people's way of life and they renewed the Indian Hinayana precepts. In India the monks were supported entirely by other people, while in China the monks had to support themselves and so could not sit all day long. Whatever they did they felt should be Zen. So Chinese Zen was more practical.

A single piece of thread is not useful until we make a beautiful cloth with it. So each single school of Buddhism is meaningful as part of the overall religious life. In this sense our way has two faces. One is how to find the true meaning of religion through our own way, and the other is how we remain one of the schools of Buddhism. I belong to the Soto School. I am just a piece of thread, but we know how to make ourselves a useful piece of material. This is the Soto way.

Without knowing how to make ourselves useful, to observe some lofty way of practice does not make much sense. So as Dogen says, "That we move ourselves and understand all things is ignorance." He gives the definition of ignorance. This is red, this is pink, this is blue. Then what is enlightenment? Enlightenment is, "that things advance and understand themselves." The whole cloth. Who is Buddha? Someone who understands ignorance. Who are the people? Those who are ignorant of enlightenment. "When

7) Buddhas are truly Buddha, they are not necessarily aware of themselves as Buddhas. But they are enlightened ones. They advance in enlightenment." We are not necessarily just Soto priests, we are Buddhists. We cannot practice all the ways of practice. Although we practice just the Soto way we are nevertheless Buddhists.

Everyone knows zazen is very difficult. You cannot practice it completely. But we should not give up. There are enough reasons why we should continue. Zen was developed in this way; and in a busy country like America there must be some time to spare for zazen. We should have more composure in our life and we should respect our tradition, both Buddhist and Christian.

Thank you very much. Will you just stand up and bow to Buddha from your standing posture.