



American Precepts

Sesshin Lecture by Shunryu Suzuki-roshi

City Center, November 1969

11/22/69

I am so grateful to have a chance to practice zazen with you in this magnificent building. I think we must be very grateful for Buddha and for our successive patriarchs. First, I want to express my confidence in practicing with you. To ask whether we will be successful or not is, for me, out of the question. If we are bothered by that kind of idea we cannot do anything, because our practice is

always concentrated on the present moment. If our practice in this moment is good, then, next moment we will have good practice. If we continue in this way we will naturally have good practice forever. That is how, as you know, we create confidence in our practice.

We have many students here. When Hyakujo-zenji established monastic life in China, many people came to the monastery and wanted to practice with him. So the *Hyakujo Shingi* was set up. Because Hyakujo established the monastic rules, they are called *Hyakujo Shingi*. *Shingi* are the pure monastic rules. Since then, in China, Zen Buddhists have practiced zazen, mostly according to the *Hyakujo Shingi*. In India the Buddhists had precepts, but in China, before Hyakujo, Zen Buddhists did not have special precepts for themselves.

Precepts have two sides. One is the negative, prohibitory side, and the other side is generating our spirit—doing something good or positive. The positive side is called *shuzen bugyō*, to do something good, and the negative side is *shoaku makusa*. *Shoaku makusa* is to do no evil. There are these two sides. I think we will naturally need some way of life as a group. It may be difficult to set up all at once, but if we try hard, we will find our precepts which include both sides. This is a very important point in practice, for our practice to help others and to help others to help themselves.

Having our own way of life will encourage people to have a more spiritual and more adequate way of life for themselves. We must study our way not only for ourselves, but for all people. It is something which we must create or establish starting from our own situation as it is, because our rules are actually for ourselves, as human beings. As a Chinese, Hyakujo established the *Hyakujo Shingi*, and as Americans, I feel, we must establish an American *shingi*. I'm not saying this jokingly. I'm pretty serious, but I don't want to be too serious. If you become too serious you will lose your way. On the other hand, if we're playing games with it, we will lose our way. So little by little, with patience and endurance, we must find our way for ourselves.

On this occasion, I want to introduce to you some words of Hyakujo. A monk asked Hyakujo, "What is the most special practice?" And Hyakujo said, "To sit on the top of Mt. Daiuo." Daiuo. (or Sublime Peak) is the name of his mountain. After all, all the various ways of practice are just sitting on the top of Mount Daiuo. If you want to sit well, you must organize your life. So Hyakujo tries to help people organize their lives so that they can sit on the top of Mt. Daiuo with him. Let's practice hard, let's concentrate our life on zazen practice, and organize our life so that we can sit well. Thank you very much.