

Taking the Precepts, Sewing Buddha's Robe by Taitaku Pat Phelan

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According to Ch'an Master Sheng-yen, a common saying in Mahayana Buddhism is "Having vows to break is the bodhisattva path. Not having vows to break is a non-Buddhist path." I have heard this expressed as "it is better to take the precepts and break them than not to take them at all." Of course, the point isn't to break the precepts but to receive and maintain them. In the time between our arousing the aspiration to receive the precepts and mature our practice, and the actualization of that vow, we can use the precepts to support and clarify our practice. Working with the precepts can be compared to a baby learning to walk. The baby takes a step and falls down, takes another couple of steps and loses his balance. Slowly, by trying over and over, the baby learns to maintain the walking motion longer until, eventually, he can not only walk, but run and dance.

Several people are sewing rakus in preparation for receiving the precepts in the ceremony called Jukai. I would like to talk about the process of receiving the precepts. The Jukai Ceremony is also called the Bodhisattva Initiation or Lay Ordination. The word Jukai is Japanese, and it is written with two characters: the second character, kai, refers to the precepts, and the first character ju means both "to give" and "to receive." Jukai is the ceremony of giving and receiving the precepts. In Zen we use the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts which are given both in priest and lay ordination ceremonies. They are also given in the wedding and funeral ceremonies which, as it turns out, are also a kind of ordination or precepts ceremony.

I would like to talk about how we have come to use these sixteen precepts. The precepts have been developing over the past 2,500 years, since Shakyamuni Buddha's time, as guidelines to help people who are practicing together to live in harmony. They are mostly intended to be practiced in relationship to others. You can't do as much with them if you are living in isolation like a hermit, so the precepts are very much a sangha-oriented practice. The precepts vary from country to country and between different cultures as circumstances vary. In some Buddhist sects there are as many as 348 precepts (the Patimoksha Rules) some of which serve as guidelines for the many details of monastic living, such as, taking off your shoes before entering the zendo, and being sure your feet and clothes are clean. Fully ordained women are given about fifty more precepts than men. But when Shakyamuni Buddha began teaching, and others began joining him in practice, there weren't any precepts. The precepts were created individually as situations arose that put monks and nuns in danger, or that were counterproductive to practice.

During the time Buddha was teaching, about 250 precepts developed called vinaya. The word vinaya means rules of the religious order, or rules of action to discipline the mind. On his deathbed, Buddha told Ananda, "After my Nirvana, if the sangha asks for the nullification of some articles of the petty vinaya, the Tathagata gives you permission to nullify them serially." Ananda was Buddha's first cousin and had been his attendant for many years. He was known for his clear and complete memory. Legend has it that he remembered all of Buddha's sermons perfectly, and, after Buddha's death, he repeated them until others also learned them. Sutras traditionally begin with the phrase, "Thus have I heard...." The "I" referred to is Ananda who is repeating the sermon

he heard Buddha deliver. These teachings remained an oral tradition until they were finally written down as sutras about 200 years after they were delivered.

Three months after Buddha's death or parinirvana, there was a meeting of elders called the First Council of the Order, and Ananda reported to the Council that Buddha had said that the petty vinaya could be disregarded. The members asked which of the vinaya were the petty ones, and Ananda replied that at the time Buddha told him this, he was lost in astonishment that some of the vinaya could be disregarded and forgot to ask.

Many discussions and arguments followed about which of the vinaya rules were great and which were petty. At this time, Mahakasyapa, the elder Arhat, who in Zen is considered to be Buddha's successor, suggested that the vinaya were disciplinary rules to help monks preserve themselves from unwholesome actions and he suggested that none of them be nullified. This was the case for about 100 years until around 443 B.C.E. when a Second Council was held and there was a disagreement between two factions as to whether ten petty vinaya could be nullified. This disagreement led some time later to the two groups splitting up. Eventually, one group became predominant in northern India; they became the Mahayana group, which used Sanskrit as its textual language. The other group became predominant in southern India, used Pali for their written texts, and were called "Hinayana" [lesser vehicle] by the Mahayana [great vehicle] group. The southern school survives today and is referred to now by the more polite name of the Theravada [way of the elders] School.

Jumping ahead about thousand years, Buddhism was introduced into Japan in about the 6th century, and by the 8th century it was established enough to have large monasteries. Saicho, an important abbot of a large Tendai Buddhist monastery and head of the Tendai movement in Japan at that time, petitioned the Emperor in the 8th century asking for permission to ordain monks using only the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts instead of the 227 Patimoksha Precepts that were ordinarily used. I can't remember why he wanted the precepts reduced, but certainly it would be difficult to follow all of the them in the culture and climate of Japan. Actually, some of the original precepts must have been modified in China prior to this. For example, the traditional precepts limit a monk's possessions to something like three robes, one bowl and two needles. In Japan, where it is very hot and humid in the summer and cold and snowy in the winter (especially in the mountains), under robes were added to the traditional ordination robe or okesa.

Other Patimoksha precepts prohibited work, but Zen monks in China and Japan did work in the kitchen, on the grounds, and grew food in fields and gardens, which made their monasteries self sufficient to some extent and less dependent on donations from lay people and the government. This was a factor in the survival of Zen monasteries during the Buddhist persecution in China in about the 10th or 11th century. In Zen Buddhism, working not only was allowed for monks, but it was seen as another vehicle for practice and has come to be known as being characteristic of zen practice.

After petitioning for many years, Saicho died and the Emperor of Japan granted permission posthumously for monks to be ordained receiving sixteen precepts. Eventually the sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts came to be used by all, or nearly all, Japanese Buddhist sects in ordaining monks. Japan is the only Asian country where ordained Buddhist clerics receive only sixteen precepts. After Japanese ports were finally opened to foreign ships in about 1868, the Japanese government mounted a campaign to establish a state religion to help prevent foreign religions

from entering the culture, and the indigenous Shinto religion was chosen over Buddhism. The authority of Buddhist monks at that time was undermined and eventually Buddhist monks were allowed and even encouraged by the government to marry. This is why in Japan today, most Buddhist clerics tend to be priests living as householders taking care of temples where lay people practice rather than living in monasteries as celibate monks. This is some of the cultural history of the precepts we take.

One of the fundamental teachings in Buddhism is the law of cause and effect, or action and the result of action. The word karma means "volitional action" and it is enacted through our body, speech, and thought. The law of causation states that wholesome actions will sooner or later come to fruition as wholesome results or effects, and unwholesome actions will come to fruition as unwholesome results: basically, as you sow, so shall you reap. The effects of these actions may be experienced in the next instant, hours or years later, or in a future life. Our present situation is the result of our past actions, but, in each moment, the activity we choose is determining or contributing to the conditions of what we will experience in the future.

The Western idea of good and evil really doesn't really apply here. Buddhism teaches that we act either out of insight into the truth of cause and effect (or the truth of the interconnectedness of all things) or we act out of ignorance to these truths. Once we realize the relationship between cause and effect, and the true interrelatedness of all things, we act out of insight or wisdom. From the perspective of Zen, we don't need to try to change our behavior as much as we need to try to bring our attention to our actions and the effects they have on ourselves and others. When we really understand, or really realize the unwholesome effects of our unwholesome actions, we will stop doing them. So much of our effort with the precepts is in the realm of mindfulness.

Generally, mental activity carries the weakest karma-result; speech produces a stronger result; and physical actions have the strongest effects both on ourselves and on others. For example, we can think an unwholesome thought and drop it without it having much of an effect. But, if we make a habit of unwholesome thinking-thinking that is rooted in greed, hate, or delusion, which reinforces the idea of the self as a separate entity-then that activity is strengthened through repetition and becomes a kind of frame of reference for the rest of our activity. Our thoughts tend to be more subtle and elusive than our verbal and physical activity, and they happen a lot more quickly. Verbal and physical action is always preceded by a thought or mental impulse. In practice, a lot of emphasis is placed on becoming conscious of our mental activity-our thoughts and emotions, impulses and intentions, and the residual day dreams we slip into when we aren't engaged with what we are doing. As we slow down and pay attention to the details, we begin to get a sense for how our intentions and impulses propel our verbal and physical activity.

Traditional Buddhist teaching describes three areas of practice: morality, meditative concentration and wisdom. These are usually seen as being cultivated in that order. Practicing morality, or right conduct, means maintaining the precepts by abandoning unwholesome activity and developing wholesome activity. This is considered preparation for meditation practice because unwholesome conduct produces agitated, restless states of mind, making it difficult for us to stop and be calm enough to sit still, whereas wholesome conduct supports concentration. The traditional view is that once our conduct is wholesome enough and we are calm enough, then we can meditate, which develops concentration. After we develop some level of concentration, then wisdom or insight will follow-insight into how Buddhist teaching or truth is manifested in our own

experience. This systematic approach tends to be used in earlier Buddhism. In Zen we don't separate these three areas of cultivation but work with them in an integrated way.

For example, the instructions we're given for zazen don't address the precepts directly because when we are sitting zazen, for the most part, we are already maintaining the precepts. When we sit silently, allowing the body to be still and the mind to settle, we are in alignment with the precepts. So practicing zazen is one way to practice with the precepts, and maintaining the precepts allows us to experience the clarity of our being when it is not being directed by our conditioning and habit energy.

The first step in working with the precepts is becoming aware of our physical, verbal, mental, and emotional activity, and what about it brings a sense of well-being or uneasiness. The essence of the precepts is non-harming, and to be able to sit still in the first place entails some level of non-harming. So practicing the precepts helps us become calm enough to be able to meditate, and meditation practice upholds the precepts, and meditation and the precepts together help us develop insight (maybe the insight that we need to meditate more!)

In this lineage, before we receive the precepts in an ordination ceremony, we first sew a rakusu, which is the small patched together piece of cloth that is worn around the neck. We treat the rakusu as Buddha's robe. The rakusu comes to us from a tradition based on the way Shakyamuni Buddha made his robe. He gathered discarded rags from the streets and charnel grounds, washed them, dyed them a saffron color, and sewed them together to make his robe. The okesa, the larger ordination robe worn by priests, and the rakusu, the smaller version of it, come to us from this tradition. The pattern of the patches is based on the pattern of rice fields Buddha saw standing on a hill overlooking rice paddies.

To make a rakusu, we start with a large piece of dark fabric which we carefully measure and cut into smaller pieces, some of which are only about a square inch in size. Then we pin these pieces and sew them back together. In doing this, most of us quickly find out how frustrating it can be trying to keep the individual strips parallel to each other and the corners square, particularly on the smaller pieces.

One of the teachings in Zen is "Everything is mind." I've never experienced this quite so vividly as when I was sewing my first rakusu. At some point I realized that what was there before me wasn't just a needle and thread and some cloth, but my state of mind. My state of mind was there facing me. My effort, intention, and concentration, my impatience, frustration, and restlessness, my desire to just get it over with were right there before me. It was as if all the ups and downs and configurations of my mind were there looking back at me. So, when we sew a rakusu, not only do we get a rakusu made, but most of us get a very tangible experience of our state of mind. Then we wear our rakusu on our chest and everyone else can see our rakusu-sewing state of mind.

One of the instructions for sewing the rakusu is to say a refuge silently with each stitch. As I took a stitch I said, "I take refuge in Buddha"; another stitch, "I take refuge in Dharma"; another stitch, "I take refuge in Sangha." This is repeated over and over with the sewing. Doing this brings the refuges to the breath, and the breath to the sewing. This way of sewing, sitting still, trying to bring your complete attention to each stitch, and chanting, brings forth a concentrated state. Sewing is itself a meditation practice which unifies body, breath, and mind. Through the sewing and chanting,

we embody the refuges, we bring Buddha's teaching into our bodies. I think this is the first initiation.

After completing the rakusu, it is given to the preceptor or the person ordaining us. During the ordination ceremony, we are given a new name. This name is written on the back of the rakusu which is given during the ceremony. So although we sew the rakusu, it is not ours until it is given to us. This is also true if you sew a second or third rakusu, or if someone sews a rakusu for you. In this lineage when you sew a rakusu, you don't put your rakusu on and start wearing it right away, but give it to a teacher to give to you. This process recognizes our interconnection, the importance of having a teaching, a group and a teacher to practice with. We don't go off by ourselves to get enlightened; we practice with all beings, for the benefit of all beings.

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Last time, I began talking about the Ceremony for Giving and Receiving the Precepts [Jukai] as a lay person, and the process or preparation for receiving the precepts. I stopped with repentance and today I would like to begin by reviewing repentance.

The repentance verse is, "All my ancient, twisted karma, from beginningless greed, hate, and delusion, born through body, speech, and mind, I now fully avow." Repentance is a kind of purification which is done before receiving precepts. In repentance, we acknowledge our endless and beginningless, our inexhaustible delusion which propels us into birth and death. In the Indian, or Indian Buddhist, world view, there is no beginning or first cause the way we think of it in the West, where time, or the origination of the universe, is considered to have a definite beginning and end, with a long middle in between, which progresses from the past to present to future. The early Buddhist world view considered existence or reality to be more like a spiral without any beginning or end.

In zen we have both formal repentance, in which we repent the concrete activities we have done, as well as formless repentance, which refers to the absolute or non-dual realm. Shohaku Okumura described formless repentance as awakening "to the total interpenetrating reality which is beyond separation of subject and object, self and others. This is our zazen....formless repentance is actually sitting in zazen and letting go of thoughts." In formless repentance, we repent activity that has a self-centered focus or egocentric motivation in it, whether the activity itself is good or bad. Whether we are engaged in wholesome or unwholesome activity, in harming or helping, if we have the idea that we are doing something, it solidifies our sense of self and our sense of separation. In zen, what is emphasized, whether we are working with the precepts, sitting zazen, practicing mindfulness, or working, is returning to original nature before separation.

In Returning to Silence, Katagiri Roshi said that repentance in Buddhism means perfect openness of heart. If we open ourselves completely, we are ready to listen to the voiceless voice of the universe. He explained that, "The ritual of repentance is not to ask forgiveness from someone for what one has done. Repentance is not a preliminary stage to enter Buddha's world or to become a good person." He said, "If repentance is understood in this way, we fall...into the trap of dualism, a big gap is created between us and whatever object we try to make repentance to.... Real repentance cannot be found in dualism....[Repentance in Buddhism] is the perfect openness of our hearts that allows us to hear the voice of the universe beyond the irritation of our consciousness."

When he said, "The ritual of repentance is not to ask forgiveness from someone..." and so on, sometimes I think he was referring to formless repentance and other times I think he meant formal repentance. In either case, in Zen we don't come together as a community to confess and repent as was done on the full moon and new moon in early Buddhist monastic communities. But this doesn't mean that when you do something hurtful, you don't need to apologize. Since the realm of our human relationships is the realm of the conventional world of duality, I recommend apologizing to the person involved in whatever happened. But in Zen we don't have a ritual of apologizing in front of a third party. In Buddhism, feeling regret or remorse is considered an important dharma, or factor of mind, but this shouldn't be confused with the added burden of

guilt. When you cause harm, knowingly or unknowingly, as we all do, and when you realize it, I think it is healthy to feel regret and to express that by apologizing.

In the Precepts Ceremony, after repentance, the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts are given, which are described as the Three Refuges, the Three Pure Precepts, and the Ten Clear Mind Precepts. One aspect of the precepts ceremony is public acknowledgment or confirmation that we are Buddhists. But what is a Buddhist? What does it mean to be a Buddhist, or what is the mark or characteristic of a Buddhist? Is a Buddhist someone who views life as impermanent, or is it someone who views existence as being marked with dissatisfaction or suffering? Is it someone who chants the name of Amida Buddha or the name of the Lotus Sutra? Or is it someone who practices bowing or mindfulness or zazen? I have a much clearer idea of what it means for someone to be a Christian. It has to do with a belief in God, Jesus, and the teachings of the Bible. But in Buddhism, there is no God, there is no Savior, and there isn't even a single text that all Buddhists refer to. I've heard that only about 5-10% of all Buddhist sutras have been translated into English. I think asking or examining this question can be helpful, "What does it mean to be a Buddhist?" or "What is the fundamental characteristic of a Buddhist?" but not so much from the point of view of giving a definition or label to what you are or what you are doing, but as a way to look at less conscious assumptions.

Although the precepts themselves vary from culture to culture and between different schools of Buddhism, taking refuge is one of the few practices that is common to all the different schools and sects of Buddhism. We take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

People have been taking the refuges since Shakyamuni Buddha's time, and it is one of the oldest Buddhist practices, and it may be the only practice that is common to all the different schools and sects of Buddhism in all the different countries that Buddhism has taken root in over the last 2,500 years. The refuges are also called the Three Treasures, or the Triple Treasure, the Three Jewels, and the Three Gems, which all refer to the refuges as something precious. Because the Refuges have been practiced in so many different cultures and languages over such a long period, they are rich in connotation and meaning.

In early Indian Buddhism, the meaning of "refuge" was similar to the way we use it in English. It meant to shelter or to protect, or a sanctuary or an asylum. Taking refuge in the Buddha meant either the historical Buddha or the enlightened one. Dharma meant the teachings of Buddha, such as the Four Noble Truths and the Eight Fold Path. Sangha originally meant the order of nuns and monks who practiced with Shakyamuni Buddha, but later it came to mean any group of Buddhist practitioners. In this context the Refuges could be said this way: "I go to the fully enlightened one for refuge. I go to Buddha's teachings for refuge. I go to the Buddhist community for refuge."

In Tibetan Buddhism, refuge has two aspects, inner refuge and outer refuge. In outer refuge, "Buddha" refers to the enlightened state itself and to those who have attained enlightenment. Outer dharma refers to the realizations from our actual experience on the path to enlightenment. "Sangha" refers to the spiritual community, to those who have wisdom and who give us inspiration and support.

"Inner refuge is refuge in ourselves." According to Tibetan Buddhism, the inner buddha is the seed of enlightenment that exists in the minds of all sentient beings. Actually, I've read that in the Tibetan language, "there is no word that means a Buddhist. The word that refers to a Buddhist actually means inner being....inner dharma is our own natural wisdom that can distinguish real

from false; the inner sangha is the guidance and inspiration that we can give others." (K. McDonald, How to Meditate, p. 144)

In Tibetan Buddhism, "Refuge [has been described as] the attitude of relying on, or turning to something for guidance and help" (McDonald, p. 145) and it is considered that "When we do this sincerely and consistently from the depths of our heart, this is the actual taking of refuge." (Meaningful to Behold, p. 58) I think of taking refuge as turning away from my own point of view which is naturally limited by my experience and conditioning, preferences and desires, and turning toward the unconditioned, or that which is sometimes described as space or spaciousness.

The Jewel Ornament of Liberation, a Tibetan Buddhist text, asks, "What is taking refuge with a mind free from the hustle and bustle of the world?" and it answers, "By knowing all entities to be non-existent, to see them as incapable of being given form,...of being taken as entities in themselves, but to see them as being perfect Buddhahood, is taking refuge in the Buddha. To see all entities follow the way of the Dharmadhatu [the Dharma realm], is taking refuge in the Dharma. To see the conditioned and unconditioned as not...split into a duality, is taking refuge in Sangha."

In Japanese Buddhism, the meaning of "refuge" goes in a different direction. The word for refuge, *kie*, is made up of two characters. According to Dogen, the first means "to unreservedly throw oneself into." The second is "to rely upon." Together they mean having enough faith in what we rely upon to be able to unreservedly throw ourselves into it. Dogen taught that "the way that a child leaps into its father's arms, we should leap into the Three Treasures. ["Kie Buppo So Bo"] In Japan this attitude is used in bowing-leaping into the bow, abandoning reservations and self-clinging. I think of bowing, or doing prostrations, as a way of physically taking refuge. When we do a floor bow, we physically drop or let go. We stop holding our position. In one of his talks, Ch'an Master Sheng-yen referred to doing formless prostrations, but he didn't explain what he meant by this. I wonder if a formless prostration would be mentally letting go of our position or point of view. Pema Chodron talks about the activity of taking refuge as becoming a refugee, one who is homeless and without any position.

American zen teachers give "refuge" the additional meanings of "going out and returning," or "constantly returning." So we could say, "I return to Buddha or unconditioned nature." Another meaning of refuge is recalling, in the sense of remembering, the way we use it in mindfulness as remembering to stay in the present. A third meaning is "to find one's source or origin in." We could say: "I find my source in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha."

In zen, the word "Buddha" has the meaning of our true self, our unconditioned nature, original nature, our enlightened nature, and the enlightened nature of all beings. Dharma is the teaching of how to come back to our true self, or the methods and practices we use for coming back. Aitken Roshi said, "Sangha is the kinship of all things, every entity of this universe and of all universes, past, present, and future....It is to the enlightenment of this total Sangha that we are dedicated in our vows." (Taking the Path of Zen, p. 72) I've heard that Maezumi Roshi gave the Refuges in this form: "Be one with the Buddha. Be one with the Dharma. Be one with the Sangha." And then he simplified this to "Be Buddha."

The Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts begin with the Three Refuges, which act as an aspiration for receiving the Three Pure Precepts, and together they prepare us for receiving the Ten Clear Mind Precepts. Maezumi Roshi said "all sixteen precepts boil down to the first. Be one with Buddha....In a way the [rest of the precepts] are just different ways of talking about the first."

One way to practice taking refuge is to look at what we actually take refuge in. We might find that we take refuge in eating, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, watching television, or in our inner dialog or storyline, in our anger or self-justification. By looking at where we turn for relief, we can get a sense for how we distract ourselves and how we can come back.

Another way to practice with the refuges is by taking refuge, by turning away from small mind, from our preferences, our fears and expectations, and instead turning toward enlightened mind or the unconditioned. One way I began practicing with the refuges was by saying the refuges before going to bed at night and when waking up in the morning, and sometimes when I began work and at other transitions. I also find it helpful to say the refuges when I walk. This may sound like some kind of mind control or self hypnosis, but my attention has such a strong habit of dispersing that doing this simple practice helps keep my consciousness with my walking and breathing.

Katagiri Roshi said, "...total devotion to the Triple Treasure turns into the motive power or energy of everyday life." By fostering our intention or "motive power," we strengthen our intention, mature our intention, into a vow.

"Only by taking refuge in the Triple Treasure can we become disciples of Buddha....Being a child of Buddha means that we have to accept completely the universe where all sentient beings exist. There is no excuse for ignoring anything in this world. If we accept ourselves, we have to accept all sentient beings, not as separate from our life, but as the contents of our life....To be a disciple...of Buddha means we are people who accept the lives of all sentient beings as the contents of our life...." He said, "The universe completely accepts us, accepts our lives as the contents of the universe. The universe never separates its life from our lives. The tree's life, the bird's life, our life, winter's life, spring's life are all accepted as the content or quality of the universe." He added, "This is why the universe is Buddha." This is why there is nothing we can do that doesn't matter, or that we can do carelessly. This is why there is no place where we can spit, no place that we can just disregard. Everything is within this universe that is Buddha.

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There is a story about a Chinese Zen master who was called Bird's Nest Roshi. He got this name because he often meditated in a tree. One day an eminent man, who was both a governor and well-known poet, paid him a visit, arriving while he was up in his tree. When the governor found him, he said, "What a dangerous seat you have up there in the tree." Bird's Nest Roshi replied, "Yours is more dangerous than mine." The governor said, "I am the governor of this province and I don't see what danger there is in this." Bird's Nest responded, "Then, sir, you don't know yourself very well. When passions burn and mind is unsteady, this is the greatest danger." The governor then asked, "What is the teaching of Buddhism?", and Bird's Nest Roshi recited a verse from the Dhammapada, "Not to commit wrong actions, But to do all good ones, And keep the heart pure, This is the teaching of all Buddhas." When the governor heard this, he was not impressed and said, "Any child of three years knows that." Bird's Nest Roshi said, "Any three-year-old child may know it, but even an eighty-year-old man cannot do it."

I would like to continue talking about the process of receiving the precepts as a lay person. In Zen, we use the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts to work with the activity of our body, speech and mind. These precepts are described as Three Refuges, Three Pure Precepts, and Ten Clear Mind Precepts. In the ceremony, after taking refuge, we are given the Three Pure Precepts, or Three Collective Precepts, which I would like to talk about today. The Pure Precepts developed from the verse that Bird's Nest Roshi quoted from the Dhammapada, which is one of the very earliest Buddhist texts. The traditional version of the Pure Precepts is "Renounce all evil, Practice all good, Keep the mind pure, Thus have all Buddhas taught." At the San Francisco Zen Center, and in Chapel Hill, we say the pure precepts as: "I vow to refrain from all action that creates attachment. I vow to make every effort to live in enlightenment. I vow to live to benefit all beings." Actually, the Three Pure Precepts aren't precepts in the sense of being prohibitions against a particular behavior. They are much more like vows, with the same kind of immeasurable scope that the Four Bodhisattva Vows have. Suzuki Roshi described them as "embracing good behavior, embracing good deeds, and embracing all beings and saving them." One way that Suzuki-Roshi translated them was, "With purity of heart, I vow to refrain from ignorance. With purity of heart, I vow to reveal beginner's mind. With purity of heart, I vow to live, and be lived, for the benefit of all beings."

In Suzuki Roshi's biography, *Crooked Cucumber*, David Chadwick recalls that Suzuki Roshi was sometimes hard to pin down on the precepts or other rules for practice. I think he may not have wanted to give too clear a definition because of the human tendency we have to compare ourselves to a standard in order to measure our progress.

My guess is that the version of the precepts that was used at the San Francisco Zen Center developed from Dogen Zenji's 13th century commentary on them. I would like to go back over these precepts, comparing the different versions to Dogen's commentary. The first precept is, "avoid all evil" or "not to commit wrong actions," which we say as "refrain from all action that creates attachment." This has the meaning of non-harming or keeping the precepts. Dogen's commentary is, "Ceasing from evil: this is the abiding place of laws and rules of all Buddhas, this is the very source of laws and rules of all Buddhas." I think Dogen's influence is easier to see in the Meal Chant, and we will look at that in a few minutes. The second is, "Practice all good," which we say as "I vow to make every effort to live in enlightenment." Dogen's commentary is "Doing good:

This is the Dharma of Annutara Samyak Sambodhi; this is the Way of all beings." This Sanskrit phrase Annutara Samyak Sambodhi means an "Unsurpassed, Complete and Perfect Enlightenment." It is one of the types of enlightenment-one of the more thorough types-and it is noted in the Heart Sutra. If we replace the Sanskrit with English, we can say Dogen's verse as "Doing good: This is the Truth of Unsurpassed, Complete and Perfect Enlightenment."

The third pure precept is, "keep your mind pure," and it reflects the emphasis in early Buddhism on working for individual enlightenment. When Mahayana Buddhism developed the notion of the Bodhisattva Vow, emphasizing the importance of practicing for the liberation all beings rather than for one's individual enlightenment, this line was changed to "save the many beings," or, as we say it here, "I vow to live to benefit all beings." Dogen's commentary is, "Doing good for others: This is to transcend the distinction between ordinary beings and sages; this is to liberate oneself and others." In Hotsu Bodai Shin, Dogen said, "Benefitting living beings means causing living beings to arouse the thought of liberating all others even before oneself is liberated."

The Pure Precepts also are related to Right Effort, the sixth aspect of the Eight-fold Path. The traditional meaning of Right Effort is one's endeavor or energetic will to abandon unwholesome states and to develop wholesome states. Wholesome states are those which have what in Buddhism is referred to as wholesome roots. The three unwholesome roots are greed, hate, and delusion, and so their opposites, non-greed or generosity, non-hate or lovingkindness, and non-delusion or wisdom are the roots of wholesome states. In Buddhism, volition, or the mind with which we act, determines whether an action is "good" or "bad," wholesome or unwholesome, rather than the activity itself being inherently good or bad. States of consciousness are regarded as karmically wholesome if they are the causes of wholesome karma results.

These Three Pure Precepts are pretty simple, but fundamental, and, therefore, pervasive in Buddhist teaching. In addition to being related to the verse in the Dhammapada, and to the Eight-fold Path, they are also used in our Meal Chant. Just before eating we say, "The first portion is for the precepts. The second is for the practice of samadhi. The third is to save all beings. Thus, we eat this food and awaken with everyone." Again, I think this wording reflects Dogen's commentary pretty directly. The literal meaning of this verse is something like. "The first bite or mouthful is to stop all evil. The second mouthful is to practice all good." I don't find the terms "good" and "evil" helpful, myself, not only because they sound so fixed and create a sense of polarization, but also because of their connotations in our culture. When I think of "evil," I think of some really extreme situation like Hitler or a fairy tale-like evil stepmother. If our vow is to "Renounce all evil," it is pretty easy to think, "Of course I renounce Hitler, or I renounce evil"; but if our vow is to abandon unwholesome activity or to refrain from actions leading to attachment, this suggests much more subtle and pervasive activity. We really have to look at, and be present with, our actions and intentions in order to find how attachment and defensiveness set in, and to be aware of self-centered motivation. If I try to refrain from evil, it seems pretty easy since almost nothing I have ever done do I consider "evil." On the other hand, if I try to refrain from action that is motivated by greed, aversion, or delusion, i.e., unwholesome activity, I need to pay a lot of attention to what I am doing and thinking.

When we understand the nature of the precepts, we realize that harming anything is the same as harming ourselves, actually it is harming ourselves. An obituary I read some years ago for James Baldwin quoted him as saying, "It is a terrible, an inexorable law that one cannot deny the

humanity of another without diminishing one's own." I think this gets to the heart of our real interconnectedness. In Zen practice, the ultimate function of the precepts is the realization of non-duality: the realization that we really are not separate, that there is no way we can harm anything without harming ourselves, just as there is no way we can benefit something without that benefit extending to all of us.

Traditional Buddhism holds that working with the precepts will lead to concentration, and meditative concentration leads to insight. But in Zen, working with the precepts includes concentration and insight, making the precepts fundamentally a discipline of the mind or mindfulness. Bringing our attention to the present activity of our body, speech, and mind is how we practice with the precepts. Trying to observe or obey the traditional commandments of not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to lie, not to become intoxicated, and so on, may lead to wholesome conduct, but, as Thich Nhat Hanh points out, it is not sufficient for the development of concentration and insight.

I think Katagiri Roshi was expressing this in his book, *Returning to Silence*, when he said, "Buddhist precepts are not moral or ethical imperatives...given by someone that people must follow. They are the ground of Buddha's world, through which we can manifest ourselves as buddhas. We are already enlightened and the precepts are already enlightened words. Each word is Buddha's mind completely beyond our speculation." He said, "If we take the precepts as Buddha's mind, Buddha's teaching, we can each behave as a buddha. But if we take them in the moral sense we become moral people." When we put together a list of precepts or commandments, and then try to conform our behavior to them, we create duality between our activity and the standard that we are trying to achieve. In Zen our challenge is to find how to practice involving our whole presence but without a "me" at the center.

Zen Buddhism describes three ways of practicing with the precepts. The first way is to take the precepts literally by using them to regulate outward behavior, regardless of whatever mental activity or intention may accompany this behavior. Zen is critical of this approach and ascribes it to early Buddhist practice. At this level, if thoughts aren't expressed outwardly through our actions or speech, they are not a consideration. Although this may seem like a superficial way of approaching the precepts, I think it's helpful as a way to begin to define the precepts to ourselves; and, actually, since body and mind cannot be separated, as we develop our awareness of our physical activity, we also become aware of mental and emotional activity as well.

The second way of practice emphasizes intention by following the spirit of the precepts, which is non-harming or the mind of compassion. Actions that express a compassionate, reverent mind uphold the precepts, whereas actions that betray this mind break the precepts. Honoring the spirit of the precepts, or the mind of compassion, is emphasized in Mahayana Buddhism. Again, most actions in themselves aren't good or bad. We need to be present with each situation we are in to find what causes the least harm.

The third way of practicing with the precepts is hard to talk about but even harder to understand. It is called the way of the Buddha Nature Precepts, or the Bodhidharma One-Mind Precepts, which approaches the precepts from the position of the Absolute or unconditioned. The experience of Buddha Nature is non-dual: there's no splitting things up into subject and object. In reference to this way, it is said that the three wheels are empty: the doer, the deed, and the

person who is "done to." To follow the Buddha Nature Precepts means to act from enlightenment. Yasutani Roshi said that living in accord with the absolute truth is, in itself, maintaining the Buddha Nature Precepts. But because living in accord with the absolute truth is such a specialized condition, it can be dangerous to try to incorporate this attitude before enlightenment. We could say, sitting zazen is living in accord with the absolute truth; but when we aren't sitting zazen, we have the precepts to help us live in the conditioned world, our everyday activity.

[4]

Unwholesome conduct tends to produce agitated, restless states of mind which make it difficult to be calm enough to sit down and sit still, whereas wholesome conduct supports concentration. Working with the precepts and meditation practice mutually support each other. Zazen helps us slow down so that we can get in touch with our habitual, unconscious activity, and practicing with the precepts is the way we extend our meditation practice into everyday life. Suzuki Roshi said that the way to receive the precepts is just to practice zazen. However, when we work more specifically with the precepts, we need to be careful not to externalize or objectify them by turning them into a moral code or standard to which we compare ourselves since this would create duality between us and the precepts. In Zen, creating such dualities is a kind of violation of true practice. The first precept is "A disciple of the Buddha does not kill."

When I hear "Do not kill" as one of the Ten Commandments, I feel fairly clear about its meaning: do not kill other people. But when I hear "Do not kill" in a Buddhist context, the question comes up for me, do not kill what? People, animals, cockroaches, the enthusiasm, or generosity, or investigative nature of others? Exactly what are we not to kill?

Harming, not to mention killing, produces fear in others, and, according to Buddhism, it destroys our seed of compassion. In Buddhism, compassion means wishing to relieve the suffering of others, and I think that, for a long time, we tend to work in both directions by harming in less conscious ways while at the same time fostering the intention to relieve suffering.

According to Roshi Philip Kapleau, "To willfully take life means to disrupt and destroy our inherent wholeness and to blunt our feelings of reverence and compassion arising from our Buddha Nature." We cannot intentionally harm others or ourselves without harming our own wholeness, including our capacity for compassion.

James Baldwin said, "It is a terrible, an inexorable law that one cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing one's own." My first teacher said: "You've seen people with hands or arms or legs missing. Whenever you hate anything, you are cutting off a part of yourself." Both of these ideas resonate with the Buddhist teaching of interconnectedness, or the interdependence of all beings and all things. What that means is that no one thing can exist by itself apart from causes or conditions. According to the teaching of interdependence, nothing comes into existence without a cause and every cause has an effect on everything else.

Living beings are the result of many factors and conditions. Some of these are the presence of sperm, an egg, the condition of fertility, and the presence of a being desiring a form. Once living beings are created, there are other conditions necessary for their survival, such as sunshine, warmth, air (or the absence of these) as well as water and food. Many of the things that make up our world were once alive and depended on these same conditions, like wood, paper, cotton, wool, and oil products. Even stones and diamonds, and the planet itself, are the result of many related factors. All causes and conditions are interrelated. Yet, because of our conditioning and our delusions, we are easily confused and distracted from seeing our true relationship to all things. I think the nature of delusion is that it makes us feel separate, giving the illusion of duality.

In Taking the Path of Zen, Aitken Roshi writes, "There is fundamentally no birth and no death as we die and are born. When we kill the spirit that may realize this fact, we are violating this precept. We kill that spirit in ourselves and in others when we brutalize human potential, animal potential, earth potential..."

Dogen taught that we have the precept "Do not kill" because we cannot kill. When we look into the nature of birth and death, we see we do not have the power to create life force or to destroy it. By life force, I mean the karmic propensity or drive, the energy that propels us into the next moment, or into the next situation, or into the next realm of existence. Some of us are parents, and, according to the laws of nature, we are responsible for creating our children. If there had been no procreation, there would be no children; but from the position of the absolute, we cannot create life. Life force is beginningless.

The repentance verse begins, "All my ancient twisted karma, From beginningless greed, hate, and delusion...." Life force or karmic energy isn't something that is created at birth and destroyed at death. When the necessary causes and conditions come together a living being is created, and, when they change, the living being dies, but not the karmic energy. Something cannot be made from nothing, nor can some thing be turned into nothing. So Dogen said that we must not kill because in actuality we cannot kill, and by not giving the "appearance" of killing, we are honoring this actuality.

Precepts have been developing since Buddha's time as a way for people practicing together to live in harmony. There are many versions of the precepts. Generally there are five to ten precepts that are considered major, and then a number of minor precepts, ranging from forty-eight to about two hundred. Some of the minor precepts are directed to the many details of monastic living. These precepts regulating monastic conduct are similar to the forms we follow here, such as taking off your shoes when entering the meditation hall, and making sure your feet and clothes are clean. At the San Francisco Zen Center, there are small altars in the halls outside the bathrooms. This is based on the Japanese monastic model. The practice is to bow before entering the bathroom (and if you are wearing an ordination robe, a rakusu or okesa, to take it off) and then bow again when leaving. Stopping and bowing helps us acknowledge our present activity.

Other monastic practices, such as taking care to complete each action, can be applied in our everyday activity. For example, when you take a break at work, after you are through with your coffee or tea, complete the action by washing your cup and putting it away, rather than abandoning it wherever you are when you take your last swallow. It's traditional when walking to and from the zendo, to walk with the hands in the shashu position. This position helps us collect and focus our attention so we start collecting our mind before we sit down. When we carry our cushion (or eating bowls), we try to carry it with two hands, so that we can bring our presence to the act of carrying the cushion, rather than casually holding it with one hand dangling by our side as if carrying the zafu really had nothing to do with our present activity. These kinds of details are practical and they also foster mindfulness, so we make use of them. But in Zen when we refer to the precepts, we usually mean the Ten Major Precepts.

The essence of the precepts, and especially the first precept, is "non-harming." One way to practice with the precepts is to look closely at what you are doing: in this moment, are your actions encouraging life? Or throughout the day ask yourself, right now, what does it mean to not

kill? Another way to practice with the precepts is to look at your motive or intention as you begin each action of body, speech, and mind: is it wholesome or unwholesome? If it is unwholesome, do not continue it into further activity. This doesn't mean you must stop and think before each thing you do. It means being aware of your intention before you act on it. I think of it as developing an internal barometer that helps clarify my intention. The more we become aware of our activity and its effects, the more we begin to realize that we can't live without harming. On the gross level, simple things like using coffee and chocolate, or furniture made from teak, and using petroleum products directly affect the way people in other countries live their lives. The common activities of flushing toilets, cutting trees, paving roads and parking lots, and growing vegetables with pesticides have effects on beings around us, and when we do these things on a collective basis, the effects are profound. The precepts help us acknowledge what we are actually doing, and the more we become aware of what we are doing and its effects, the better chance we have to minimize the suffering we are causing.

In his book, *Returning To Silence*, Katagiri Roshi expressed Dogen's teaching on this precept saying, "In Buddha's world, to refrain from taking life means that we cannot take life. We cannot take life because in order to 'take life' there would have to be before life and after life and in Buddha's world there is no room to let our intellect poke around with these dualistic ideas. There is just energy in motion, life itself in dynamic motion. We simply are not able to take life. How can we know this?" he asks. "All we can do is just go through it. Life energy is present before birth and after death whether we can see it or locate it or not."

In a different talk, Katagiri Roshi gave another description of not killing from the position of the absolute saying that we shouldn't see things from the perspective of our conditioning, projections, or our needs, which he compared to a telescope through which we see the world. He said, in the relative world of comparisons, there are emotions, memories and lots of complications. In this realm we are immediately separated from everything else, and he used a table as an example. He said, "the table itself is really a certain being rooted at the bottom of the ocean, [he explained this expression "rooted at the bottom of the ocean" as] so-called eternity, timelessness." Our usual experience is of being the subject looking outward at a table as an object. Katagiri Roshi continued,

"All we have to do is manifest the table as eternal time. At that time the table as an object is really rooted at the bottom of the ocean, so-called eternal time, buddha-nature, truth whatever you say....This is to animate the life of the table. But if you see the table according to your telescope you kill the life of the table, that is you kill the buddha-life....Not to kill life doesn't just mean [not] to physically kill people or animals; you have to deeply understand the meaning of 'not to kill'. Not to kill the life of the table is not to handle the table according to our telescope which separates us from others....If we handle this table according to our telescope we may end up breaking it and using it as firewood....We have to deal with the table as a manifestation of eternity, eternal time. This is really the life of the table, the life of toilet paper, the life of your suit, the life of your boots. At that time this is called oneness between subject and object-exactly one, no gap between them....This is to animate the life of the table as buddha."

This doesn't mean that we give life to the table. Rather, to practice with the table we need to let go of our conceptualizations that categorize the table according to our needs, and instead be open to the table from the table's perspective or from a universal perspective.

When we treat people and things as objects out there, as something we can use or manipulate, we have already separated ourselves. We can kill the enemy or cows or termites or trees because we see them as separate from us.

The Bodhidharma One-Mind Precepts express the nondual nature of reality through the precepts. The first of these is, "Self Nature is subtle and profound. In the midst of the everlasting dharma, not producing a view of extinction is called the precept of not taking life."

In Suzuki Roshi's teaching on the precepts, and in his teaching in general, he emphasized nonduality above all—using the precepts in such a way that they lead to nonduality. Suzuki Roshi said,

"If you think 'I have to observe the ten precepts, one by one,' that is wrong practice. The foundation...of precepts is based on the various ways of understanding the one reality which is always with you. The reality is not divisible into three [refuges] or sixteen [bodhisattva precepts] or ten [prohibitory precepts]. Tentatively we divide [the precepts into ten] and we explain them from various angles, but those are just words. Real precepts are beyond words. So if you think the meaning of precepts is just to observe various rules, your understanding is very far from true understanding of real precepts. So the first of the...precepts we observe is one reality which cannot be divided into three or sixteen. The precepts of one reality—you may call it emptiness or you may call it the absolute. This is the first precept we observe....Without understanding this precept, our precepts don't make any sense."

Traditionally in Zen training, the precepts aren't taught as a separate practice. Our effort in zazen, our effort to realize unconditioned nature, includes maintaining the precepts. These aren't two different practices. Suzuki Roshi said, "'Do not kill' means do, do realize your true nature."

[5]

In Chinese Buddhism, there are ten precepts that are considered Major Precepts and forty-eight others which are considered Minor Precepts. For example, the first Major Precept is not to kill; not eating meat, on the other hand, is one of the Minor Precepts. This system of Ten Major Precepts and forty-eight Minor Precepts is taught in the Brahma Net Sutra, which is the Chinese Brahmajala Sutra. But in Japanese Zen, we emphasize the Ten Major Precepts, which are also called the Grave or Heavy Precepts, as well as the Ten Wholesome Paths and Ten Clear Mind Precepts.

Today I want to talk about the second Major Precept, "A disciple of Buddha does not steal," or as we often say it, "does not take what is not given." Traditionally this precept referred to appropriating anything belonging to someone else without first getting their permission, and it includes acquiring things through fraud or deception. Aitken Roshi considers carelessness with precious things as a kind of stealing, as well as using time foolishly, including wasting time in zazen by spacing out, indulging in fantasies, or through goal-oriented practice.

I find it helpful to look at the way the precepts are expressed in different Buddhist traditions. The Brahma Net Sutra says:

"The second Major Precept prohibits stealing. A disciple of the Buddha must not steal by oneself, encourage others to steal, facilitate stealing, steal with mantras, or involve oneself in the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of stealing, to the extent that one must not deliberately steal the possessions of ghosts, spirits, or any other beings—all valuables and possessions, including such objects as small as a needle or a blade of grass. A Bodhisattva should give rise to a mind of filial compliance, kindness, and compassion toward the Buddha nature....If instead a Bodhisattva steals another's valuables or possessions, a Bodhisattva Parajika (major) offense is committed."

In addition to getting a different slant on the precept, we also get a sense for some of the cultural differences between our culture and earlier Chinese culture.

The first ten precepts have been pretty much in their present form for over a thousand years, but Thich Nhat Hanh's order, the Tiep Hien Order, or Order of Interbeing, created another set of precepts in the 1960's which addresses 20th century culture and which emphasizes social responsibility. The version of this precept that the Order of Interbeing uses is, "Possess nothing that should belong to others. Respect the property of others, but prevent others from enriching themselves from human suffering or the suffering of other beings."

The Bodhidharma One-Mind Precepts present the precepts from the position of non-duality as, "Self-nature is subtle and profound, in the realm of the unattainable Dharma, not having a thought of attainment is called the precept of refraining from stealing."

The state of mind of wanting, wanting something that we think we don't already have, is characterized by grasping. Seeing the world as if it were separate from ourselves is the view that propels us into wanting and taking. The state of not stealing, or not having a thought of attainment, is characterized by contentment. One way to practice with this precept is to look at your state of mind: do you find an underlying quality of dissatisfaction and wanting, or is it

characterized by contentment? In either case, look at the source of it. This underlying state of dissatisfaction is the basis of all suffering and the basis of the Four Noble Truths.

Near Halloween, we have the Segaki Ceremony, the Ceremony of Feeding the Hungry Ghosts. The Japanese word, "gaki," means hungry ghost; these are beings who have large bellies swollen from malnourishment and tiny throats, like the thinnest of straws, who are always hungry. Sometimes they are depicted as being able to swallow only tiny portions of food, so they are never satisfied. At other times, they are described as having food around, but when they bring it to their lips, it turns into blood or hot coals. Another way they are depicted is being at a large banquet table loaded with food. When they sit down to eat, they discover that the handles of their utensils are three or four feet long, so long that they can't reach their own mouths. They would, however, be able to reach across the table and feed each other, but they are so consumed with their own desire that it never occurs to them. The hungry ghost also refers to the human condition which is never satisfied with who we are or what we have.

Suzuki Roshi said, "When we think we do not possess something, then we want to steal. But actually everything in the world belongs to us so there is no need to steal." He took his glasses as an example. "They do not belong to me or to you, or they belong to all of us. But you know about my tired old eyes so you let me use them." This attitude of just using whatever we have without identifying it as mine, or belonging to me, is helpful in loosening up the solidity or fixedness of what we think of as the self. When we treat our possessions and even our body as something we have been given temporarily to take care of and use, then we won't have such a strong tendency to define who we are by what we have. In the book *Death and Dying*, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross said that people who were the most successful and powerful by conventional standards often had the hardest time when they became weak and helpless and were facing death. It's almost as if the more you have, the harder it is to let it go and move on.

The antidote to attachment and greed is renunciation. The Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Pema Chodron, said that the most fundamental form of renunciation is renouncing our "storyline." The storyline is the story of our lives that we are continually, consciously or less consciously, spinning out, in which we explain the world to ourselves and how we fit into it. Simultaneously, we may also be explaining who we are to the world. Recently someone described this storyline as the story of me, written by me, directed by me, starring me. The realization that this storyline acts as an intermediary between our direct experience and our consciousness is the first step in being able to work with it.

Jack Kornfield, a Vipassana meditation teacher, suggests practicing with not stealing by acting on every impulse of generosity that spontaneously arises in our heart for one week. In doing this, he links the precept of refraining from stealing to the practice of generosity. Giving, being the opposite of taking, is also considered an antidote for stealing and grasping. The development of generosity or giving, called *dana* in Sanskrit, is one of the fundamental practices in Mahayana Buddhism. The basis for the Bodhisattva's practice is the Six Paramitas, or Perfections, and they begin with *Dana Paramita*, the perfection of giving. Buddhism teaches that even compassion, the quality which we associate with the Bodhisattva, is practiced and developed chiefly by giving.

Some of the aspects of generosity that are emphasized in Buddhism are liberality, open-handedness, the warm-hearted readiness to give which is indicative of an unattached, spontaneous

mind. The readiness to give has a lot to do with flexibility, the ability to let go of our train of thought or the object of our attention, and to be ready for whatever we encounter. An essential condition for true giving is that we are happy and joyful when we give.

The Diamond Sutra, which is held in high regard in Zen, teaches that the highest form of giving is done without depending on any motive or object. It says, "...a Bodhisattva who gives a gift should not be supported by a thing, nor should he be supported anywhere. When he gives gifts, he should not be supported by sight-objects, nor by smells, tastes, touchables, or mind-objects." To be "supported" means that we are resting on something-something we can touch, hear, smell, taste-or resting on an idea or concept. Being involved in the idea of giving, with thoughts such as "I am giving something," or "giving is good," or "I am helping others by giving," are examples of being supported by a mind-object. The idea becomes a support or motive for acting, and what it is supporting is a sense of self.

Sangharakshita, the founder of the Western Buddhist Order, says that "The way to avoid 'being supported' in this way is not to allow our thinking to be totally determined by the immediate subject matter of our perception. We are not being expected to do without concepts of things altogether, but we should not treat those concepts as anything more than provisional. We should use concepts but not settle down in them." He describes the Perfection of Giving as giving without any concept of giving so that giving becomes a natural response like a reflex.

The practice of giving is also included in the Bodhisattva's Four Methods of Guidance, which is a teaching on how to live harmony. Dogen wrote a commentary on these four methods which is translated in *Moon in a Dewdrop*, and Suzuki Roshi and Katagiri Roshi both express this teaching. In *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* Suzuki Roshi said, "To give is nonattachment....just not to attach to anything is to give. Not to be attached to something is to be aware of its absolute value. Everything you do should be based on such awareness...then whatever you do is true giving."

If we take the phrase, "Just not to attach to anything is to give," we can use it to practice with our breath. When we feel threatened, the breath tends to become tense or restricted, as if by holding our breath we can hold back what we fear. Sometimes we use our breath for protection, but usually we breathe without attachment to the breath. We may not be present with our breath, but usually it's because our attention is wandering somewhere else, rather than because we are grasping some breath from the past, which we associate with great pleasure, the memory of which we are trying to hold onto so we can repeat it in the future. This is the way conditioning works: it is human nature to try to repeat what is pleasant. As we inhale and exhale without attachment, we can let this be a model for letting our thoughts come and go in zazen without attachment.

Non-attachment is the attitude of being ready to let go, or to move, or to open. It's the basic willingness to change. When we don't give, when we hold back or hold on, we impoverish ourselves. Commentaries on this precept say that if one is poor, a poor spirited or a mean spirited person cannot become rich by taking another's possessions. Likewise, someone who is full-spirited, or rich, cannot become poor through being deprived of his possessions by a thief.

In *Returning to Silence*, Katagiri Roshi said, "All beings that exist in this world manifest themselves as the practice of giving just by being whoever they are....When we do zazen we have to completely give away our body-mind to zazen. This doesn't mean to destroy our body-mind...."

This means that we give our body-mind completely to zazen without holding back or measuring our progress; and when the bell rings, zazen gives us back. This is also the way to practice with activity, to give our body-mind completely to whatever we are doing.

In his commentary on the Bodhisattva's Four Methods of Guidance, Dogen wrote, "Giving means non-greed. Non-greed means not to covet. Non-greed is to give away unneeded belongings to someone you don't know, to offer flowers blooming on a distant mountain to the Tathagata, or to offer treasures you had in your former life to sentient beings....Even if the gift is not your own, that does not hinder giving. The principle is that the effort must be genuine." And he says, "When you learn giving well, you see that to accept a body (or to be born) and to give up a body (or to die) are both forms of giving. All productive labor is fundamentally giving. Entrusting flower petals to the wind, birds to the season, also must be meritorious acts of giving....The mind of living beings is difficult to transform. In the beginning it must be done through giving." He adds, "Mind is beyond measure. Things given are beyond measure. Moreover, in giving, mind transforms the gift and the gift transforms mind."

To practice with not taking what is not given, look at the mind of attachment or the mind of accumulation, get to know its weight. Whether the attachment is to material possessions, to states of mind or experiences, or to what we hold onto as our identity, it is a burden; and its antidote is giving. What is the most fundamental thing we can give?

[6]

I have been talking about the precepts and the process of receiving the precepts as a lay person, and today I would like to finish up these talks. So far we have talked about five of the Ten Major Precepts: not killing, not taking what is not given, and the three precepts regarding speech. Today I would like to go over the remaining five: not misusing sexuality, not intoxicating self or others, not being possessive, not harboring ill-will, and not ignoring the Three Treasures.

The third precept is "A disciple of Buddha does not misuse sexuality."

Originally this was a prohibition against any sexual activity for monks. The Chinese Brahma Net Sutra, which addresses the precepts, lists everything considered to be sexual misconduct. For monks this is any kind of sexual activity-with the opposite sex, with animals, with gods, goddesses, ghosts or spirits, and other forms of lustful behavior, as well as all "perverse" types of sexual conduct. Later when lay people began taking the precepts, this precept had the meaning of not committing adultery. However, I think the core of this precept is attachment to sensuality, i.e., attachment to anything we experience with our senses, sights, sounds, smells, taste, as well as touch.

Suzuki Roshi said that this precept especially emphasizes attaching to a particular thing in the way we attach to a man or woman. Crooked Cucumber, his biography, relates how Suzuki Roshi had a soft spot for Japanese antiques. Suzuki Roshi said, "I was scolded by my master many times, 'you are committing adultery.' In my temple, there was no female but still he said, don't commit adultery. He was right, I think." This precept refers to lustful or sticky desire whether it is for sex or some other object of the senses.

In Seeking the Heart of Wisdom, Jack Kornfield describes working with this precept as conscious sexuality by observing how often thoughts and feelings of sexuality arise and by noting what particular states are associated with them such as love, tension, compulsion, caring, loneliness, desire for communication, greed, pleasure, aggression, and so on.

I don't want to slip into moralizing about this, or conceptualizing good and bad behavior, because working with the precepts in Zen is fundamentally a way of working with our state of mind. Katagiri Roshi said, "Buddhist precepts are not moral or ethical imperatives...given by someone that people must follow." He said, "If we take the precepts as Buddha's mind, Buddha's teaching, we can each behave as a buddha. But if we take them in the moral sense we become moral people." I think the distinction he is making is between modifying one's behavior to conform to a way that we have conceptualized as "good" and developing insight-not that these two are always separate, but they often are. Rather than moralizing, I think it is more helpful to look at our self-centered desire and how it shuts us off from others. By looking at self-centered desire, we get a sense for how breaking this precept of not misusing sexuality works in concert with other precepts. For example, sexual misconduct is often facilitated by misusing speech to manipulate others, and self-centeredness leads to treating people like possessions or objects.

Another way we misuse sexuality is by indulging in intoxicating fantasies about sex or being carried away by euphoric feelings. Most of us do this, sometimes, but I'm referring to a fantasy that is indulged in to the point that it replaces larger and larger portions of our life-real life. Again,

I am not saying people receiving the precepts should not have sexual fantasies or dreams, or that they should not get angry and so on. This is the stuff we practice with. It is said that there are 84,000 delusive paths, and each path, or each delusion, if we practice with it, may become a path to realization. To practice with delusions, first notice the impermanence of these states, i.e., that they come and go, that they are not "us" but something that arises and passes through us. We can also practice with our emotional states by trying to be aware of how a particular state effects us, and how we react or respond to it, and by being aware of what preceded it and how one state leads into the next. The point of the precepts isn't to keep us from having fun, but to help us be aware of how we separate ourselves from everything else, and, in regard to this precept, by not misusing the original intimacy of relationship between self and other.

Bodhidharma's commentary on this precept is "Self Nature is subtle and profound. In the midst of the unstained Dharma, not creating a veneer of attachment is called the precept of not misusing sexuality."

The fifth precept is "A disciple of Buddha does not intoxicate mind or body of self or others." The literal meaning of this precept is not using or selling intoxicants. Aitken Roshi said that "this precept encompasses everything that clouds the mind. It is really about greed, hate and delusion; self centered delusions that cloud and darken the mind...not just alcohol, drugs, tobacco, coffee, television, but our thought patterns-our own delusive patterns of thinking. Things in the world are not drugs of themselves, they become drugs by our use of them." He added, "When we direct phenomena to justify ourselves, that is delusion....not giving rise to delusion is called the precept of not giving or taking drugs." Thich Nhat Hanh brings up the related issue of the production of alcohol. The large quantities of grain and fruit that are used in making alcohol could, instead, be used to reduce the number of starving people in the world. So, when we drink alcohol, we are decreasing the amount of food available to the world-wide community.

Suzuki Roshi gives a different slant on this precept. He said it also means not influencing others to give rise to upside-down thinking. He said, "Do not sell liquor means not to boast or emphasize the advantages of things....If you boast about the profundity of Buddhist teaching, you are selling a kind of liquor to the people. Any spiritual teaching by which we are intoxicated is liquor. Do not sell liquor means absolute freedom from all teachings." The Bodhidharma One-Mind Precept is "Self Nature is subtle and profound. In the midst of the intrinsically pure Dharma, not being blinded by ignorance is called the precept of not intoxicating oneself or others."

The eighth precept is "A disciple of Buddha is not possessive of anything, not even the teaching." This precept is directed to stinginess, to withholding material aid or Buddhist teaching or dharma. The state of mind of stinginess, or possessiveness, is indicative of mental tightness, holding onto our view or our position which doesn't allow us to let go, or give up, or relax our grip on reality. This is similar to the mind of wanting or taking. The Bodhidharma One-Mind precept is "Self Nature is subtle and profound. In the midst of the all-pervading truth, not attaching to one form is called the precept of not attaching anything, not even the teaching." Any way we can find to let go relates to this precept, whether it is letting go of the exhalation at the end of our breath, letting go of our compulsive mental activity, or letting go of our point of view, each of these allows for some ease or movement.

The ninth precept is "A disciple of Buddha does not harbor ill will." In zen this precept isn't a prohibition against the mental state of anger, it refers to holding onto anger, indulging in it, letting it fester, or bearing a grudge. Anger often serves the purpose of helping us uphold our position by justifying it, by formulating how something is unfair or undeserved. This justification solidifies not only our point of view but our sense of separate self. Thich Nhat Hanh said, "Treat your anger with the utmost respect and tenderness, for it is no other than yourself. Do not suppress it—simply be aware of it....When you are aware that you are angry, your anger is transformed. If you destroy anger, you destroy the Buddha, for Buddha and Mara are of the same essence." The Bodhidharma One-Mind precept is "Self Nature is subtle and profound. In the midst of the selfless Dharma, not contriving reality for the self is called the precept of not harboring ill will."

The tenth precept is "I vow not to ignore the Three Treasures, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, my own True Nature." The Bodhidharma One Mind precept is, "Within the Dharma which is undivided reality, not arousing a dualistic view of sentient beings and Buddha is called the precept of not turning away from the Three Treasures." The way we abuse the Three Treasures is to view them as separate from ourselves or by forgetting about them. Keeping our connection with Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is taking refuge, returning to our source.

In the ordination ceremony, the initiates are asked, "Will you receive these precepts?" and after the precepts have been given they are asked, "Will you continuously observe them?" Maezumi Roshi said, "...there is nothing to be defiled, nothing to be maintained; yet, because we are constantly creating separation, through our body, speech, and mind, there is something to defile, something to maintain....When we are given the precepts, we are not given something that exists outside ourselves. In receiving the kai [precepts], we reveal our life as the very body, form, and functioning of the enlightened state itself."

The Sanskrit word used for precepts or right conduct is *sila* and it is derived from the word meaning "to exercise, or to practice." In *Returning to Silence*, Katagiri Roshi said that *sila* means to form a habit. "Forming a habit of living in a way that is based on Buddha's teaching is ...called vow....We have to put this vow into practice in our everyday life....Every day, constantly, we have to form the habit of living in the way that is based on Buddha's teaching. The deep meaning of precept is that it is Buddha-nature or Truth." He said, "To receive the precepts is to awaken to the Buddha-nature. Even though we don't understand what Buddha-nature or truth is, to receive the precepts is awareness." "The main purpose of Buddhism is to form the habit of practice as a vow forever....It is like walking in a mist. We don't know what the mist is, we don't know where we are walking or why; all we have to do is just walk. This is Buddha's practice."

Not knowing "where we are walking or why" may seem rather abstract or not relevant to working with the precepts. What I appreciate in this is the way it leads away from the literal meaning of the precepts, which is so easy to conceptualize as good or bad behavior, and, instead, the way Katagiri Roshi directs us toward non-duality, going beyond our ideas of how we should be. Our work in Zen, including the precepts, is to push beyond the limits of what we know through our thinking and to learn to trust something else, something wider.

Receiving the precepts in ordination is like an intentional rebirth. When people are ordained, they receive a new name. They receive lineage papers which show their new family tree, which ends with the name of the new ordainee, linking them back through their teacher and their teacher's

teacher all the way back to Shakyamuni Buddha. They also receive new clothes, a rakusu which they have sewn.

Suzuki Roshi said: "The dualistic idea of whether to observe or not observe the precepts takes place within your mind when you practice Zen. There are no precepts to break and there is no one who is violating the precepts. To make up your mind to make the very best effort to observe the precepts constantly, forever, whether your effort is complete or not, is Buddha's, Buddha Mind's effort."

For me the work involved in practicing with the precepts is actually about realizing our deepest intention, our most fundamental intention; Suzuki Roshi called this our inmost request. Aligning ourselves with, staying in connection with, our inmost request is how we fulfill the precepts.

[7]

In my last talk, I mentioned the Bodhisattva's Four Methods of Guidance which are taught in the Avatamsaka Sutra, and Dogen wrote about these in a fascicle which is in Moon in a Dewdrop. The Bodhisattva's Four Methods of Guidance giving, kind speech, beneficial action and identity action. These are methods for living in harmony with others. In his commentary on kind speech, Dogen wrote, "'Kind speech' means that when you see sentient beings you arouse the mind of compassion and offer words of loving care. It is contrary to cruel or violent speech.... You should be willing to practice it for this entire present life; do not give up, world after world, life after life. Kind speech is the basis for reconciling rulers and subduing enemies. ...You should know that kind speech arises from kind mind, and kind mind from the seed of compassionate mind.... kind speech is not just praising the merit of others; it has the power to turn the destiny of the nation."

In Returning to Silence Katagiri Roshi discusses Dogen's teaching on this saying, "Kind speech is not merely speaking with an ingratiating voice, like a cat purring...[this] very naturally, consciously or unconsciously, is trying to get a favor by fawning or flattering. This is not kind speech. Kind speech is not the usual sense of kindness. It can appear in various ways, but ...we should remember that it must constantly be based on compassion.... Under all circumstances that compassion is always giving somebody support or help or a chance to grow." Here he expands the scope of kind speech to include that which gives a person a "chance to grow". He referred to his own teacher who he said always looked down on him, used rough language and belittled whatever he did. But Katagiri Roshi said when he was older, he appreciated his teacher's attitude because it was based on compassion. He said "sometimes rough language is a great help, but don't use rough language recklessly, be careful." (p. 163) In the Zen tradition, there are many examples of monks who when they were training felt like their teachers were very difficult or critical, but later they appreciated the kind intention behind their teachers' strictness.

Katagiri went on to say, "Compassion is a little difficult to understand. Kindness is part of compassion, friendliness is also part of compassion, but as a whole, compassion is rooted more deeply in the human mind. Everyone has this compassion. Buddhism always focuses on the ultimate nature of existence, which is manifested as compassion." This kind of compassion may be different from what we ordinarily think of as compassion. It doesn't always look like compassion. In working with the precepts, Mahayana Buddhism tends to emphasize this spirit of compassion rather than adhering to the literal meaning of the precept.

I would like to focus on speech as practice and its relationship to concentration. Three of the ten major precepts address speech, not to speak falsely; not to slander; and not to praise self while putting others down. The Pali word that is translated as slander has the literal meaning of "breaking up fellowship." Causing disharmony in the Sangha is considered one of the most serious offenses in Buddhist monasticism, and it's one of the few offenses for which someone can be expelled from the Sangha.

Right Speech or speech as practice is also one of the aspects of the Eight-Fold Path. In addition to not lying, not slandering and not praising self, Right Speech includes avoiding idle chatter and gossip and not speaking harshly or using abusive speech. The "Right" of Right Speech has the meaning of completed or perfected. Through Right Speech, by not indulging in or listening to such things as lying, back-biting, harsh speech or gossip, we can establish a link between our mental

activity and our conduct or between Right Thought and Right Action, two other aspects of the Eight-Fold Path.

When Buddhism was established, communication was almost exclusively through the spoken word. But, in our culture Right Speech really means "Right Communication" and it includes all forms of communication such as television, movies, radio, newspapers, magazines, advertising and, of course, the internet. So, Right Speech means using communication as a way to further our understanding of ourselves and others and as a way to develop insight.

In *Seeking the Heart of Wisdom*, Jack Kornfield suggests practicing with Right Speech by trying to speak from the heart, and by avoiding gossip both negative and positive. This means not talking about people or talking behind their backs, but speaking directly to them. Sometimes this is called as no third party information. If you are irritated or having a problem with someone or even when you have something positive to express, the practice is to speak directly with the person involved, not to talk about it to someone else.

I think one of the characteristics of speech is that by talking to others about someone else, we have a tendency to reduce the fullness of that person to a category. So, the person becomes "that" kind of person. You know, "what would you expect from someone like that?" It is sort of like taking one frame from a movie and using the picture of that instant to be the whole person, freezing both our opinion of them as well as the way we respond to them. I think the more we talk about someone with a third party, the more our opinion becomes solidified, and we mistake this solidity for reality. So, speech can be a conditioning agent whereby we lose our freedom of both perception and response. We, ourselves, become fixed and unable to grow out of a particular opinion of and response to another person. I think this is how our long-term relationships become so conditioned and predictable.

Of course, speech takes place in the field of relationships. Another way to work with speech is to try to express your feelings or experience in such a way that doesn't assign blame or judgement. For example, instead of saying something like, "you made me angry" or "you made me angry" or "that makes me angry or sad or depressed or whatever" which almost carries the assumption that whatever was done, was done with the intention of making you feel a certain way; instead this can be expressed as, "when you do such and such or when such and such happens, I feel hurt or angry" which communicates how you are feeling. This way you can express what you are experiencing without holding others responsible for your state of mind. When we are able to do this, something shifts-there is a kind of independence from our emotional states. They are still there but not so dominating because their source no longer seems like something external or outside our control.

Another meaning of right speech is speech which is free of dogmatic assertions or hypnotic suggestions (which actually sounds like a good description of advertising). Suzuki Roshi spoke about this in reference to the fifth precept dealing with intoxication. He said, "Do not sell liquor means not to boast or emphasize the advantages of things....If you boast about the profundity of Buddhist teaching, you are selling a kind of liquor to the people. Any spiritual teaching by which we are intoxicated is liquor. Do not sell alcohol means absolute freedom from all teachings. We should keep the precepts and yet not be bound by them." (6/12/67)

During my first year in Chapel Hill, we had our first Lay Ordination led by Sojun Roshi, and eight people in the group sewed rakusus in preparation. The rakusu is a patched together cloth that is worn around the neck and it is a small version of Buddha's robe. At that time, the zendo was in the house where my family and I lived, and we met for rakusu sewing a couple of times a week. My daughter was nine and, I think, wanted to be included in the adult activity and she decided she wanted to sew a rakusu too. I tried to explain that sewing a rakusu was a way to prepare for receiving the precepts, but she still wanted to sew a rakusu and Sojun gave her permission. So we went through the precepts together, one by one. I read the first precept, "A disciple of Buddha does not kill." She immediately responded, "Oh I know what that means-no problem." And after each precept, she had the same response. Until we came to "A disciple of the Buddha does not slander." She hesitated and said, "wait a minute, does that mean if someone is being mean to me or hurting my feelings, and if I go and tell my friends how mean that person is, that's slander? I don't think I can keep that one."

I mentioned this to a friend, and she said that she thought that the precepts dealing with speech were the most difficult and I agree. Although, I don't know if it is actually harder to maintain Right Speech, or if I make less effort in that area. So much of speech is unconscious or a continuation of our stream of thought. I find that I use speech more than anything else to justify my actions and elicit support for my point of view.

The Lankavatara Sutra was a popular text in 6th century China at the time of Bodhidharma when Zen was first taking form. According to the Lankavatara Sutra, words rise with discrimination as their cause. I'd like to emphasize this, words come into being with discrimination as their basis. Language or words arise with conceptualization or discrimination. This means that anytime we are engaged in language whether thinking, speaking, reading, writing or hearing others talk, our discriminative consciousness is automatically engaged. And language can never be separated from discrimination. I think this is one of the reasons we have the guideline during sesshin of no reading, no writing, and no unnecessary talking. During sesshin when we sit period after period of zazen, we have a greater opportunity to disengage from discursive thinking; and thinking, reading, speaking, or hearing others talk immediately brings us back to discrimination. This is why it is so important to maintain silence during sesshin both for ourselves and for others.

Several years ago, my mother-in-law died at her home in Virginia. Although she had been deteriorating both mentally and physically for more than two years, it seemed that she suddenly got worse. When we heard that she was dying, we went to be with her. At that point, she was already "out of her senses," by that I mean that I had no idea what she was seeing and hearing and feeling except it was clear to me that it wasn't what I was seeing and hearing. I sat with her on her last afternoon through the night until she died the next morning.

During the time I practiced at the San Francisco Zen Center several people came there to die. The custom was for students to take turns doing zazen or sitting calmly, attending to the dying person until they died, and then continue sitting zazen in the room with the deceased for 24 to 72 hours after their death, ideally for three days. The idea being that by calling up our own clarity of mind and calmness, that this supports clarity and calmness in the being making the transition from this life.

In this life and death situation, there is an intensity that displaces the usual trivia and comparative thinking that I find in my ordinary mental landscape. The intensity is the fullness and completeness of each breath and each moment that replaces the gaps of inattentiveness where the mind races for something interesting or stimulating to catch hold of. To be able to engage in the present hinges on an unconditional acceptance of just this person, just the situation as it is. As a witness or support to someone's death, there is a feeling of how little can really be done to help or adjust the situation. The help to be given is to accept the situation with as little squirming and avoidance as possible. To be able to open to our own pain and the pain around us, makes it easier for the dying person to deal with his pain.

This whole-hearted acceptance of the full condition we find ourselves in reminds me of sesshin. In daily zazen, there is too much room to squirm physically and emotionally, to continue comparing and to continue filling the gaps with whatever the mind can find to grab onto. My mental habits are too fixed to be able to set them aside for 40 minutes once a day. For me it takes 40 minutes repeated 10 or 12 times a day for a couple of days to really change the momentum of my mental activity. To accept the fullness of each breath, of each moment even when it is characterized with failing patience and discomfort takes a lot of practice and reinforcement, just like anything else. To be present with another's death takes the same unconditional acceptance needed to be fully present in zazen. Unconditional acceptance is outside the capacity of our usual thinking, outside our judgment and comparing mind, and outside verbal consciousness.

The concentration I felt while I sat with my mother-in-law lasted an hour and a half after she took her last breath, until the Funeral Director arrived and the family began discussing the funeral arrangements and all the details and finances which that involves. I found as soon as we began talking, all at once, everything was back to normal with all of the usual distractions and conditioned interactions.

In addition to speech being linked to discriminative consciousness, speech is also an outflow. The Sanskrit word is *ásrava*, and Thich Nhat Hanh translates it as energy leak. When we begin to develop concentration during a longer sitting, our concentrative energy will leak through speech. Not that we should be clinging to our concentration, but you can watch it and feel it dissipate with chatter. This is also true in our daily activity. Speech requires energy. Conscious speech is a rich practice, where we not only practice awareness of what we say and how we say it; but at a deeper level we can begin to notice the impulse, the driving force that propels us into speech and how our state of mind and our energy are effected before, during, and after speaking. This practice shifts the precepts from being a standard used to modify our behavior to a way of working with our state of mind, the source of all speech.