

The following section is compiled from Roshi Suzuki's sesshin and Sunday lectures to complete this discussion of Buddhist precepts.

The secret of the entire teaching of Buddhism is how to live on each moment. Moment after moment we have to obtain absolute freedom, and moment after moment we exist interdependent with the past, future, and other existences. In short, if you practice zazen concentrating on your breathing moment after moment that is how to keep the precepts, to have an actual understanding of Buddhist teaching, to help others, yourself, and to attain liberation.

In India there was an Indian way of life, in China a Chinese, and in Japan a Japanese. To keep the precepts is not to keep an Indian way of life. When you are here, you should eat here. You cannot eat in India all the time. If you want to keep the precepts literally you have to go to India. There is a story about an Indian monk who came to China, but who had to return because he could not keep the Indian precepts in China where the customs were different. If you know how to keep the precepts, Buddhism will continue to develop as Zen developed in China.

Time is originally one with being. Twelve hours is the duration from sunrise to sunset. The sun needs twelve hours for its rising from the east and setting in the west. When your mind follows your breathing, it means your mind drives your breathing as water follows waves. Your breathing and mind are one. Here we have absolute freedom. We become one independent being. We should not say firewood becomes ash. Ash is ash, firewood is firewood. But ash includes firewood with everything and firewood includes ash with everything. So one breath after another you attain absolute freedom when you practice, when you are concentrated on each exhale and inhale.

When Dogen speaks about the evanescence of life, he speaks of exhaling and inhaling. After all what is inhaling and exhaling? When you are completely absorbed in your breathing there is no self. What is your breathing? That breathing is not you, nor air. What is it? It is not self at all. When there is no self you have absolute freedom. Because you have a silly idea of self you have a lot of problems. So I say your problems are homemade. It may be very delicious. That is why you like them. On the other hand, if you like them, as long as you LIKE them, it is all right.

Dogen Zenji says, "It is specifically taught in Buddhism that life does not become death. For this reason life is called no-life. It is also taught that death does not become life. Therefore death is called no-death." It is not a matter of life or death. When death is accepted through and through, it is not death anymore. Because you compare death with life it is something. But when death is understood completely as death, it is not death anymore; life is not life anymore. Dogen Zenji says, "Flowers fall with our attachment and weeds grow with our detachment."

In the Genjo Koan Dogen says, "When we first seek the truth we are far away from its environs. When we discover that truth has already been correctly transmitted to us, we are ourselves at that moment. If we watch the shore from a boat, it seems that the shore is moving. But when we watch the boat itself directly, we know that it is the boat that is moving. If we examine all things with a confused body and mind, we will suppose that our self is permanent. But if we practice closely and return to our present location, it will be clear that nothing at all is permanent. Life is a period of itself and death is a period of itself. It is like winter and spring. We do not call winter the future spring, nor spring the future summer." So when you practice zazen even for a moment, the

whole universe is reflected in you as the moon in a drop of dew in the grass. This is a fact you may say. The period of reflection long or short will prove the vastness of the dewdrop and the vastness of the moonlit sky. Dogen says, "When the truth does not fill our body and mind, we think that we have enough. When the truth fills our body and mind, we know that something is missing. For example, when we view the world from a boat on the ocean it looks circular and nothing else. But the ocean is neither round nor square, and its features are infinite in variety. It is like a palace. It is like a jewel."

You say you attained some stage in your practice. But that is just a trivial event in your long life. It is like saying the ocean is round, or like a jewel, or palace. For a hungry ghost the ocean is a pool of blood; for a dragon the ocean is a palace; for a fish it is his house; for a human being it is water. There must be various understandings. When the ocean is a palace it is a palace. You cannot say it is not a palace. For a dragon it is actually a palace. If you laugh at a fish who says it is a palace, Buddha will laugh at you who say it is two o'clock, three o'clock. It is the same thing.

Eternity is in mortality. When you become a mortal being through and through you will acquire immortality. When you are absorbed in sheer ignorant practice, you have enlightenment. So in order to be a true Buddhist, you must find the meaning of life in your limited activity. There is no need for you to be a great man. In your limited activity you should find out the true meaning of yourself. If you pick up even a small stone you have the whole universe. But if you try to pick up the tail of a comet you will be crazy. People will sympathize with you.

For this limited activity we need such precepts as: Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not commit adultery. Do not lie. Do not sell liquor. Do not bring up the faults of others. Do not boast and blame others. Do not withhold material and spiritual possessions. Do not become angry. Do not debase the triple treasure.

I cannot explain them all at this time, but I will explain a few.

Do not kill means to realize our true nature. It does not mean just to have mercy. It is deeper than that. Of course it does mean we should not kill even an insect or an ant, but that is not the real meaning.

Do not steal. 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. For example my glasses. They are just glasses. They do not belong to me or to you, or they belong to all of us. But you know about my tired old eyes and so you let me use them.

Do not commit adultery means do not be attached. This precept emphasizes especially our attachment to particular things as we attach to a woman or man.

Do not sell liquor means not to boast or emphasize the advantages of things. Liquor may be medicine if taken in the right way, but we should take into consideration that by nature we are very susceptible to temptation. 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. We should keep the precepts and yet not be bound by them. That is our way.

"When a fish swims in the water there is no end," says Dogen, Zenji. It is very interesting that there is no end. Because there is no end to our practice it is good. Don't you think so? Usually you expect our practice to be effective enough to put an end to our hard practice. If I say just practice hard for two years, then you will be interested in our practice. If I say you have to practice your whole lifetime then you will be disappointed. You will say, "O Zen is not for me." But if you understand that the reasons you are interested in this practice is because our practice is endless, that is true understanding. That is why I am interested in Buddhism. There is no end. If there were an end, I would not think Buddhism was so good. Even if human beings vanish from this earth, Buddhism exists. Buddhism is always imperfect. Because it is not perfect, I like it. If it were perfect someone would do it. Many people will be interested and there would be no need for me to work on it. Because people are very much discouraged with Buddhism, I feel someone must practice Buddhism.

A while ago when we had Wesak service with all the Buddhists in the First Unitarian Church I thought it might be better to bow in the way we usually do at Zen Center. But someone said if we bow in that way people may be discouraged. It is true, very true. I know people will be discouraged. I know we are causing a lot of discouragement for American people when we bow nine times, when they bow only three times in Japan. I know that very well. So I bow nine times here in America. Buddhism needs our continual effort eternally. Until you are interested in this point you cannot understand Buddhism.

9) Mortality makes eternity, eternity makes mortality. Enlightenment makes practice, practice makes enlightenment. Dogen Zenji says, "Birds make the sky, and the sky makes birds. Fish make birds, birds make fish. In this way there must be further and further analogies to illustrate our practice." In short, if you do one thing with sincerity that is enough. There is no need to try to know the vastness of the sky or depths of the sea.

You may say, now realization of the truth takes place through my activity. But it is not so. Or you may say it is a process of realization. It is not so. For you, the realization of the truth you have now is the absolute realization of the truth. You cannot compare your realization with other things. Each one who realizes this fact and who practises in his own way has absolute freedom. This is how we live in each moment, moment after moment. Thus all things are made possible: the observation of the precepts, the attainment of enlightenment, freedom from the various sects, and perfect satisfaction in our life. Your realization of the truth is the same as Buddha's realization of the truth. There is no difference at all.

Excuse me, it is too late.

Thank you very much.