

## JUST BEING YOURSELF

*Even if you keep all of the many written precepts, you may not be completely a person. The best way to observe precepts is just to be you yourself, and then the precepts are always with you.*



When I say “ethical precepts,” you may think of the Ten Commandments or the grave prohibitory precepts, but Zen precepts are not like that. To begin with, the phrase “Zen precepts” means zazen. The precepts are an interpretation of zazen.

Using the words of the precepts, we explain what Zen actually is. The purpose of receiving the precepts is not just to remember what you should or shouldn't do. Rather, the way we observe precepts is by practicing Zen, by

extending our practice to our daily life. In this way our understanding of ethical precepts is completely different from the usual idea of ethical precepts.

The precepts are various ways of understanding the one reality that is always with us, the reality that is not divisible into three, or sixteen, or ten. Tentatively, we divide the one reality, and we explain it from various angles using the three, ten, or sixteen precepts, but that is just words. Real precepts are beyond words; we cannot talk about them. If we talk about them, already they are no longer the precepts. So if you think the meaning of the precepts is just to observe various rules, your understanding is very far from the true understanding of the real precepts.

This one reality, which cannot be divided into three or sixteen, is the first precept we observe: the precept of one reality, emptiness, or the absolute. All of the precepts start from this precept. Without understanding this precept, our sixteen precepts don't make any sense.

Therefore, the way to receive precepts is just to practice zazen. Just being yourself is the way to observe the precepts.

It sounds like I am talking about something abstract, but it is not so. I'm talking about each one of you, and myself, and about water, and about stuff. When stuff is really stuff, stuff includes everything.

When you just practice zazen on your black cushion, your practice includes everything and you practice zazen with Buddha, with the ancestors, and with all sentient beings. This is what I always repeat, over and over. It doesn't mat-

ter whether your practice is good or bad. If you accept your practice as your own, then that practice includes everything. At that time, you have the precepts that include everything, just as absolute being includes everything.

We say that the absolute is that which includes everything, but actually it is more than that. It is beyond our understanding. You may think that if you add up all the beings that exist in this universe, that is the absolute. But it is not so, because the absolute cannot be understood by your mind. That which you understand is already not absolute, because your mind limits the real understanding of the absolute. When you don't understand, and you just sit, you become a stone, or stuff, and you include everything. That is our zazen practice.

If you lose this point, you will easily be caught by some idea or experience in your practice: "My practice is very good. Recently I saw Buddha in zazen! All the Buddhas came to me and admired my practice." It is funny, but some people practice that kind of practice very sincerely. To just sit is much better than to see all of the Buddhas in the world. Do you understand why? The point is to know what an important practice it is just to be yourself.

When my English wasn't good enough to read Alan Watts's book on Zen, he expressed its point to me like this: "When a stone is completely a stone, that is a real stone." That is how he put our Zen into words.

When a stone is completely a stone—that is, when a stone is completely a stone through and through—that is really a stone. Not only is it really a stone, but when it is really a stone, it includes everything. When the stone is really a

stone, it cannot be picked up by anyone. When it is not a stone, someone may pick it up, but when it is really a stone, no one can. No one can do anything with it. When a stone is really a stone, even if you think you are picking it up, you cannot. It is part of the universe, and you cannot pick up the whole universe. To pick up that stone or to pick up the whole universe, you would be outside of the universe; you would be a ghost. Nothing exists outside of the universe. All that exists is within the universe. To think that you can pick up a stone is a big delusion.

The way to receive the precepts is to understand this point and sit zazen. That is the only way to observe perfect precepts. There is no other way to observe the precepts.

We are not interested in explaining the two hundred fifty or more precepts, because the point is not to observe those precepts one by one, one after another. The point is to learn how to be yourself, how to be a person in the way that a stone is completely a stone. When you are just a person, you will have the complete precepts. Even if you keep all of the many written precepts, you may not be completely a person. The best way to observe precepts is just to be you yourself, and then the precepts are always with you.

In short, to be yourself is the purpose of our practice and is the way to keep the Buddha's precepts.