

## “I WILL DO IT!”

*When you say “I will not kill,” at that moment you have Buddha mind. There is no need to think, “I have to keep the vows and observe the precepts forever.”*



Observing the precepts so that you can attain enlightenment is not the true purpose of precepts. We observe precepts and take vows in order to actualize Buddha's spirit.

In the four vows, we say: “Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to save them.” We take the vow this way, but if the sentient beings are numberless, how is it possible to save them? The same applies to keeping precepts.

For example, we should not kill; we should not take life without a reason. “Without a reason” is extra; we should just say “do not kill.” That is enough. When you fall into the more usual, secular understanding of precepts, you say, “without a reason.” “Without a reason” means that when there is some reason, we can kill; by saying so we are making some excuse to kill. You have to make this kind of excuse because you think that the purpose of keeping precepts, and taking vows, is to attain enlightenment. You think that if you kill, or do not observe precepts, or do not take vows, you will not be a Buddhist and you will not attain enlightenment.

But if you understand that the purpose of observing the precepts is to give rise to Buddha mind, then when you say “I will not kill,” at that moment you have Buddha mind. There is no need to think, “I have to keep the vows and observe the precepts forever.” Actually, we don’t know what we will do in the next moment! It is very difficult to know or to be sure about our future. But even though it is so, right now we can say, “I will not kill!” That is enough to give rise to Buddha mind. Even though it is not possible to save all sentient beings, if moment after moment you say, “I must save all sentient beings,” then you have Buddha mind.

As Buddhists, we take vows moment after moment, so it is not necessary to think about whether they are possible or not. When you take vows or keep precepts thinking about whether they are possible or not, your way is already not the Buddhist way. You have fallen into the superficial practice of “you should

do” or “you should not do”; “you should take vows,” or “you should not take vows.”

“Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to save them.” In a way, this means that sentient beings are numberless, and that I vow to save them moment after moment, continuously. But “moment after moment, continuously” is not necessary; “I vow to save them” is strong enough and good enough. Since the sentient beings are numberless, we will take this vow numberless times, that’s all. In this way our feeling has quite a different quality; we feel the eternal practice of our Buddhist way. “Sentient beings are numberless” means that our practice will continue forever.

“Desires are inexhaustible; I vow to put an end to them.” If the purpose of keeping precepts is to annihilate our desires, then this vow is not possible, and is a contradiction. But if the purpose of the vows is to give rise to our Buddha mind, then it makes sense. “Inexhaustible” gives us some encouragement that we can continue our practice forever. We will have firm confidence in our practice that continues forever, and we will be encouraged by this vow forever.

“The Dharma is boundless; I vow to master it.” Because it is “boundless,” our vow will continue forever, and we can believe in our boundless Dharma.

“The Buddha’s way is unsurpassable; I vow to attain it.” The same thing will be true with this vow.

We should take vows and keep our precepts in this way.

When you receive precepts from me, you say, “I will do it.” It is not even a promise: when you say the words, “I will do it,” that is how you keep precepts. “I will do it.” That’s enough.

The right spirit for keeping the precepts is to not be sure whether you will be able to keep the precepts. To say “I will keep them into the future” is not so conscientious. When you receive precepts in that way, you are not receiving precepts in their true sense as Buddha taught. Instead, you should say, “Yes, I will do it!” That is what Buddha wants you to say. That’s all. Whether you can keep it in the next moment or the next day is not the point. Do you understand? It is not difficult at all to receive precepts.

To receive precepts, or to give precepts, is to give rise to Buddha mind at that moment. It is not a matter of keeping precepts literally or not. To give rise to Buddha nature, Buddha mind, we say, “I will do it!” That’s enough.

When you think, “I will not say so because I don’t know whether I can do it or not,” that is a kind of arrogance, and is the enemy of a Buddhist. It is to think, “People who are not so conscientious may say, ‘I will keep it’; but a person like me who is very conscientious will not say, ‘I will keep it.’” Do you see? This is very arrogant. When you say, “I will keep it!” there is no arrogance.

We expect you to have a soft mind when you say, “I will do it; at least I will try to do it.” But even then, “try to do it” is not so good. “I will DO it!” you should say. “I will try to do it” means you are hesitating; “I will do it” is like jumping into the ocean. “I will do it!”—then there is no trouble.

In Japan, when Buddhists receive precepts in the ceremony we call *jukai*, everyone says “I will keep it!” When I was young, I thought this was nonsense. How will they keep the precepts? When they go home, they will have to eat eggs and meat, and even if they just eat rice, that also is a living being. They are killing everything as long as they live. How is it possible for them to say, “I will keep it; I will not kill”? But later I was struck when I heard them say, “I will keep it.” I realized that that is the way to keep precepts.