

## ZAZEN IS PRECEPTS

*In short, when you observe precepts in the same way that you practice zazen, that is the perfectly transmitted precepts from Buddha to us.*



The real meaning of Zen precepts is that they are not just rules, they are the way of our life, the way that our life goes. When we organize our life, we do so according to some rules. Even though you may not intend to observe some particular rule, the rules are always there. As soon as you get up, in order to wake up completely, you wash your face. You could say that is one of the precepts. Then, at a certain time, or when you become hungry, you eat breakfast—another precept. That is, you are observing rules when you wake up, wash your face, and eat breakfast at a certain time. There is an actual way of life that

you follow naturally. In the same way, when you practice zazen there will be rules.

Zazen practice is one of the precepts and at the same time it is all of the precepts. If you really understand how Buddhists come to the idea of precepts, you will understand the relationship between zazen and the precepts. Precepts are just the way of our life.

As Zen students we emphasize our everyday practice, including zazen. When we think about how to cope with the problems we have in our everyday life, we realize how important it is to practice zazen. The power of practice will help us in a true sense.

For instance, while chanting with a group, when you strike the *mokugyo*, or wooden drum, if you try to control the chanting, thinking, “This is too fast, so I must make the chanting slower,” or “This is too slow, I must make it a little bit faster,” and you try to do so by way of your hand or your thinking, it doesn’t work. Only when you do it from your *hara*, your vital center, can you do it. When you do it just by your thinking or your hand, it doesn’t work—the group will not follow your rhythm. Only when you do it with your zazen power can you control it. When you can control yourself very well without having any idea of controlling anything, you can set the right pace. When you can control yourself in the same way that you sit in zazen posture, you can control the chanting perfectly. This is also true with your everyday practice.

When you do something just through your skill or your thought, you will not be supported by people and so it will not help others. Only when you do it with zazen mind can you help others, and be naturally supported by people. So if the precepts are some moral code that you have in your mind, those precepts will not work at all. When you forget all about the precepts and, without trying to, observe them in the same way that you eat when you are hungry, then naturally the precepts are there. The way to keep the precepts is to forget all about precepts and observe them quite naturally. Precepts are there when you forget all about them.

In your zazen practice you just sit. You have no idea of attaining anything. You just sit. When you just sit you already include everything, and you are not simply a part of this cosmic being—you are one with everything. To say it that way is just an explanation, but the feeling is that you include everything.

This is not true just for zazen. When you drink a cup of tea, that activity includes everything. It is actually so. When you say “this is tea,” and “this is me,” your drinking tea does not include anything: you are here and tea is there, this is just “tea” and it does not include anything. But when you drink tea without thinking about what it is, and are completely one with the tea, then you have no idea of “tea” and no idea of “you,” and this activity includes everything.

Dogen Zenji said that if your everyday activity doesn't include everything, it is not Buddhist activity. It seems almost impossible to feel that way, but actually, if you experience what zazen is, you will understand what your everyday

life is, and how your everyday life should be expressed in each activity. You will realize each activity as zazen.

The way we keep the precepts is the way we organize our life, and the way we organize our life is the same way we practice zazen. This point can be explained in various ways. When we practice zazen, there is nothing outside of us. Everything, every being, is included in our practice. Because there is just one whole being, there is no you and no objective world. The objective world and the subjective world are one and the same in our practice. We explain it in this way, but that is just an explanation of our zazen practice. When you just sit without being involved in the thinking mind or emotional activity, when you just remain on your black cushion, that is the practice we mean and explain in various ways.

If you think, "I have to observe the ten precepts, one by one," that is wrong practice. For a long time, many Buddhists tried to observe our precepts one by one with great effort. But that kind of practice violates the precepts because, when observed in that way, the precepts become dualistic, something outside ourselves. "I have to observe!" is not the way we practice zazen and it is not the way we practice precepts. For Mahayana Buddhists, dualistic practice is a violation of precepts, because when we observe rigidly, we are caught by precepts. There are precepts, but precepts should be observed without any idea of observing. That is how to observe the precepts.

In short, when you observe precepts in the same way that you practice zazen, that is the perfectly transmitted precepts from Buddha to us. So as Mahayana Buddhists, whether or not we know each of the sixteen precepts or the two hundred fifty precepts, we should still be able to observe them.