

The Buddhist Precepts As Practiced In Soto Zen



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The Buddhist Precepts

Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy

(This is part of an article written by Rev. Master Daizui in 2001 on the Noble Eightfold Path. The full article can be found on the OBC website: <https://obcon.org/dharma/buddhism/the-eightfold-path/>)

The Four Noble Truths

The first of these is that life as we normally live it doesn't really make us very happy or peaceful in the long run. First of all, we're never satisfied: if we don't have something, we want it; if we have some, we want more; and if we have lots, we're both afraid of losing it and we also see that there is something even more that we could get, which we then want. This is true not only of material things but also of relationships, reputation, ... most everything. This pull of greed and push of fear leave little room for lasting contentment. Secondly, we actually do lose things, and that hurts: we get sick, we have misfortunes, we are separated from those we love, we die.

The second Noble Truth is that there is a cause for the frustration and suffering: the fact that we hold on to things, grasp after them, are attached to them. What actually hurts is not that we don't have something; it is that we don't have it and we want it. What causes grief is not that we lose something; it is that we are unable to accept the fact and let go.

These observations lead directly to the fact that there is something we can do about all this. We can't stop the way the world

works (although much of what we do seems to be an attempt at just this), but we can change how we relate to it. If we could just find a way to give up our grabbing on to things, find a way to accept life as it actually is, then peace, contentment, and real happiness would naturally be there. This is the third of the Noble Truths, and the fact that there is a way of actually doing this is the fourth. That Way is the Eightfold Path itself. These Four Noble Truths are the core and essence of Buddhism, the very observations which led Shakyamuni Buddha all the way to enlightenment.

The Precepts

The three aspects of the Eightfold Path which are concerned with speech, action, and livelihood form a group, known as Sila. They form a guide to how to live one's life so as to make every action accord with enlightenment. When we practice sila, we train from our outward actions towards inward peace, just as when we practice meditation and mindfulness we train from our inward acts of mind toward outward harmony with the universe. These two approaches complement each other and lead towards a unified Buddhist life. Over the centuries, Zen has taken the various elements originally assigned to the ancient path factors of speech, action, and livelihood, and has developed and reorganized them into sets of precepts. There are a number of ways of expressing these precepts; what follows is but one. While at first glance precepts can appear to be rigid rules of conventional morality, in fact they are guides to liberation. Taken as descriptions of enlightened behavior rather than simply as proscriptions against evil acts, they lead to the signs of wisdom — charity, tenderness, benevolence, and empathy — rather than to guilt, shame, or self-blame. Those who make a life of right speech, action, and livelihood find that they become more aware of their own spiritual heart; those who ignore them find that a coarsening and closing off occurs, both in

their spiritual life and in relation-ships to other people.

The Three Treasures Precept

The Three Refuges, shared by all Buddhists, are the first and most general precept of all.

- “I take refuge in the Buddha.” I entrust my life to the guidance of both the Buddhas who have appeared in this world and the Buddha Nature within.
- “I take refuge in the Dharma.” I go for direction to the teachings of all those who have walked this Way before me.
- “I take refuge in the Sangha.” I seek the advice and wise counsel of those who share the love of truth and commitment to the Eightfold Path.

When taken together as one ongoing precept, as one unified way of life, the Three Refuges will guide and harmonize our understanding of all of the other precepts. If any one of them is left out, our training is like a stool with only two legs: unstable and sure to fall flat.

The Three Pure Precepts

These offer a means of interpretation for the specific precepts to follow and guidance in situations where no specific precept seems to apply, or where precepts seem to conflict.

- “I will cease from evil.” First and foremost, it is my wish to harm no living thing. I will ask in the innermost place of my heart, “Is what I am about to do a harmful thing, a thing

which places any separation between a being and the Un-born? Is it a thing which is to be abstained from, a wrongful thing, an unwise thing?” In one sense, “evil” does not exist: there are only unwise actions, done in ignorance and confusion. I pray that I may not do any such thing, whether to myself, others, or the world.

- “I will do only good.” It is my sincere wish to do only that which accords with the truth. I will ask in the innermost place of my heart, “Is what I am about to do fitting, suitable, a thing to be done? Does it tend towards liberation?” This is the good that goes beyond the opposites of “good” and “evil”.
- “I will do good for others.” I pray that my every act will be of true benefit and that I may never inadvertently create conditions which may lead others to do harm. I will ask in the innermost place of my heart, “Is what I am about to do truly of use? Is it a fit offering? Does it accord with the purification of my heart?”

If we can honestly say that in any matter of importance we have considered carefully these Three Pure Precepts, then we can rest in the knowledge that we have done our best. And that is all which Buddhism ever asks of us. Mistakes will still be made, of course, for we are human. But they will have been made with a pure heart, and in the big perspective, that matters. There are many ways to consult the quiet, still, innermost place of the heart. Each of us must do this honestly, as best we can. There are no formulas, no easy answers. Never trivialize the Three Pure Precepts.

The Ten Great Precepts

These ten are specific guidelines for the Buddhist life, as under-

taken by the Zen trainee. When they become our blood and bones, we are a true child of Buddha. When we deliberately ignore any of them, we create a separation between ourselves and the family of Buddha.

- “I will refrain from killing.” Since all beings are one within the Buddha Mind, how could I willingly cut off the life of any creature?
- “I will refrain from stealing.” Since it is my true wish to give up all attachments, how could I willingly grasp after anything which is not freely given?
- “I will refrain from abusing sexuality.” Since physical affection is a deep expression of love, and love is an aspect of the Unborn, how could I willingly debase this sacred love by merely gratifying my desires in a way which uses, harms, betrays, or abuses anyone?
- “I will refrain from speaking untruthfully.” Since my heart’s desire is to be one with truth, how could I willingly deceive anyone by any means whatsoever?
- “I will refrain from selling the wine of delusion. Since clear awareness is the door to enlightenment, how could I willingly hinder the Way for anyone by enticing them into partaking of substances, ideologies, false beliefs, or anything whatsoever which befuddles or intoxicates?
- “I will refrain from speaking against others.” Since it is my wish to live by the compassion within my heart, how could I willingly speak hurtfully or disparagingly about anyone?
- “I will refrain from being proud of myself and belittling oth-

ers.” Since the false notion of self is the very thing I seek to abandon, how could I willingly inflate it with pride, much less do so through seeking to denigrate others?

- “I will refrain from holding back in giving either Dharma or wealth.” Since charity is the first sign of enlightened action, how could I practice stinginess in any form whatsoever?
- “I will refrain from indulging anger.” Since it is my heart’s wish to let the love within it flow forth unboundedly, how could I hold on to and nourish angers and resentments which may arise, much less act openly upon them to cause harm?
- “I will refrain from defaming the Three Treasures.” Since these are my true refuge and the very Way, how could I turn from them myself, much less cause doubt about them to arise in others?



PRECEPTS : THE EVERYDAY ACTS OF BUDDHAS

Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett

(An excerpt from *Roar Of the Tigress*, a compilation of lectures and commentaries by Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett. pp123-137 (SHASTA ABBEY PRESS, MOUNT SHASTA, CALIFORNIA, 2000))

Scripture: “Here is the way in which to make an act of perfect contrition. ‘May all the Buddhas and Ancestors, who have become enlightened, have compassion upon us, free us from the obstacle of suffering which we have inherited from our past existence and lead us in such a way that we may share the merit that fills the universe for they, in the past, were as we are now, and we will be as they in the future. All the evil committed by me is caused by beginningless greed, hate and delusion: all the evil is committed by my body, in my speech and in my thoughts: I now confess everything wholeheartedly.’ By this act of recognition of our past behavior, and our contrition therefore, we open the way for the Buddhas and Ancestors to help us naturally. Bearing this in mind, we should sit up straight in the presence of the Buddha and repeat the above act of contrition, thereby cutting the roots of our evil doing.”

Someone asked me yesterday, “How did you deal with this stuff when it came up for you?” This is the way I deal with it. There is the act of contrition, confession, or “the way to deal with it”, whichever you prefer. The beauty of this particular thing is it says, “They were (these Buddhas and Ancestors) as we are now, and we will be as they in the future.” Nothing can come between you and your own Buddha Nature. Do not allow anyone to put upon you the fact, in their mind, that you can’t make it. Every single living thing can make it! And anyone who tells you that you can’t does not know anything about genuine religion! Sit up straight, face what you’ve done, face the karma that you have inherited which you need to clean up, accept and embrace it, send it to the Eternal, and be done with it. And know that, yes, if after this you do anything really horrendous, you will have to sit up straight again. But if you have done this truly once, the chances of your doing anything big, I would say, are infinitesimally small. You won’t understand this if you do not understand the importance of responsibility: the importance of not making karma that others will suffer from. As we go into this next section, you’ll understand a lot more about that. This lecture is a bit long, by the way. My apologies, but there is no way I can stop that.

Scripture: “Receiving the Precepts. After recognizing our evil acts and being contrite therefor, we should make an act of deep respect to the Three Treasures of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha for they deserve our offerings and respect in whatever life we may be wandering. The Buddhas and Ancestors transmitted respect for the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha from India to China.”

I think there’s a bit in the Bible somewhere which says that a man cleans up his house and comes back (all the demons are out of it), and he comes back and it’s empty and clean, and “Oh, it’s boring: there’s nothing in here.” So he goes out and gets a few more demons to bring in, because there’s nothing there. The instant you

have done this act of contrition we're talking about here, you must take immediate refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Otherwise you will be casting about for something to take the place of all this stuff. Now, you've just got rid of it; who wants to scrub the house twice? Dogen makes it very clear: you've got to get the Buddha in there immediately. Faith, study, trust: they must take the place of the karmic baggage. You must get that in at once.

Scripture: "If they who are unfortunate and lacking in virtue are unable to hear of these Three Treasures, how is it possible for them to take refuge therein? One must not go for refuge to mountain spirits and ghosts, nor must one worship in places of heresy, for such things are contrary to the Truth: one must, instead, take refuge quickly in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha for therein is to be found utter enlightenment as well as freedom from suffering."

The main heresy of which they are speaking is teachers who say that if you find enlightenment (they usually don't say "the Eternal" because that smacks too much of the word "God"), you are totally free to do whatsoever you wish. This is why, when I teach Zen, the most important thing first of all is for me to speak of the Eternal, and the second thing to speak of faith, study and trust, and the third thing, responsibility. You need to talk about these things before somebody's got so involved in meditation that the baggage they've had is starting to come up and they're getting terrified out of their wits as to what happens. We had a lady come to Shasta on one occasion for a retreat, which is a meditation weekend. She was Christian, and she had never meditated before; she learned very fast, and that day a whole bunch of past life stuff popped out. She was terrified, because with her Christian background this could only be a bunch of demons, and what was this

stuff that was coming up? Before anyone sits down to meditate (which is why I spoke to you the way I did yesterday), you must know that everything hidden will come up and that it's normal, and not be scared of it. And that it doesn't alter, it doesn't damage, your belief in God or anything else: you just must do something about realizing it takes place, not get worried about it, and be willing to look at it honestly and make some changes in your life. Okay?

Scripture: "A pure heart is necessary if one would take refuge in the Three Treasures. At any time, whether during the Buddha's lifetime or after His demise, we should repeat the following with bowed heads, making gassho: 'I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sangha.' We take refuge in the Buddha since He is our True Teacher; we take refuge in the Dharma since it is the medicine for all suffering; we take refuge in the Sangha since its members are wise and compassionate."

And the Sangha includes the laity.

Scripture: "If we would follow the Buddhist teachings, we must honor the Three Treasures; this foundation is absolutely essential before receiving the Precepts."

Yes, there has to be faith. You have to know that what you study, the Dharma (which comes forth from the Dharma Cloud, the cloud that hides the Eternal from our sight, as we say), is the medicine for all our ills. Remember: the "Buddha That Was to Come" was the "Doctor Buddha" who had cleaned up all His ills.

We have to know that we can clean up all our ills, and we have to know that there are wise and good people who can help us. So, the taking of the Three Refuges is essential: it is the only thing that is really a formalized “prayer”, if you like, in every school of Buddhism. After that, they all have differing bits and pieces, but this one is common to every single school.

Scripture: “The merit of the Three Treasures bears fruit whenever a trainee and the Buddha are one; whoever experiences this communion will invariably take refuge in the Three Treasures, irrespective of whether he is a god, a demon or an animal.”

Now what they’re talking of there is that whenever the trainee and the Buddha are one, whenever a trainee finds the Eternal, that refuge is immediately cemented.

Scripture: “As one goes from one stage of existence to another, the above-mentioned merit increases, leading eventually to the most perfect enlightenment: the Buddha Himself gave certification to the great merit of the Three Treasures because of their extreme value and unbelievable profundity—it is essential that all living things shall take refuge therein.”

Now, the Three Refuges—taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—are also called the First Three Precepts. Then come the Three Pure Precepts: cease from evil, do only good, and do good for others. Now these are not as obvious as they seem on the surface. Cease from evil: everyone can understand the words of that, but not everyone knows what “evil” is. Ceasing from evil is a collective precept about refraining from harming other beings

that comes about as a result of having “evil” analyzed out into the Ten Precepts, which we will come to later. If you like, these Ten Precepts telescope into “ceasing from evil”. Don’t kill, don’t steal, don’t covet, etc.: these are what bring about “evil”. You have to look at that. So, ceasing from evil, doing only good, and doing good for others are the Three Pure Precepts.

One has to also know what “doing only good” is, because “doing only good” for some is one thing and “doing only good” for others is another thing. Again, you have to take the Ten Precepts and telescope them into that. You then have to take the last one, which is “do good for others”, and that is much more complicated, because what it really means is don’t set up some karmic thing or other that will cause others to do wrong, just because you think it’s good. The example I gave of what was done at the end of World War I is an exact example of that. That is going to bring about horrendous horror. You mustn’t set up a chain of causation that will influence others to cause great harm.

So you have to fit all the Ten Precepts into that one as well. So if you start with the Three (cease from evil, do only good, and do good for others), you can literally turn— telescope—them upwards into the Three Refuges and downwards into the Ten Precepts. Because if you don’t have faith in the Buddha, you’re never going to be able to do this; if you don’t have places where you can find out what “good” is and what “bad” is, and what “evil” is and all the rest of it, which is the Dharma, you won’t have a rule of thumb to go by; and if you just think you are always right and never go and ask anybody, which is to take refuge in the Sangha, you will never get beyond your own opinions about all this. So, the Ten Precepts telescope up into the Three Pure ones, and they, in turn, telescope into the Three Refuges.

Scripture: “The Three Pure, Collective Precepts must be accepted after the Three Treasures; these are:— Cease from Evil, Do Only Good, Do Good for Others. The following ten Precepts should be accepted next:— 1. Do not kill, 2. Do not steal, 3. Do not covet, 4. Do not say that which is untrue, 5. Do not sell the wine of delusion, 6. Do not speak against others, 7. Do not be proud of yourself and devalue others, 8. Do not be mean in giving either Dharma or wealth, 9. Do not be angry, 10. Do not debase the Three Treasures.”

Now, the *Kyojukaimon* (Great Master Dogen, *Kyojukaimon: Giving and Receiving the Teaching of the Precepts in An Introduction to the Tradition of Serene Reflection Meditation*, 5th ed. rev. (Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1997), pp. 32–36.) at the back of the booklet will speak of these in great depth. But the thing that each one telescopes into is very interesting. If you steal, in the end you realize that you stole from yourself. If you kill, you realize that you made yourself less than human. If you covet, you realize you have stolen your own peace of mind, because you are never contented. If you go against any of these precepts, the person who you harm, besides others, is yourself. Why do you make clouds in a clear sky? Do not make clouds in a clear sky. When you realize that all of this is “soap opera” that you have created in what was a very, very clear sky, you can start to see how to deal with these things. The First Noble Truth of Buddhism is that suffering exists: “there is birth and death”, “how do I escape from it”, “I am so frightened”, etc. Suffering exists: pain, grief, illness, misery, family problems— they are all suffering. How do you deal with this, then? Suffering occurs because of a not understanding of the precepts, a non-keeping of the precepts. You take a look at yourself thoroughly as the stuff comes up in meditation, and you deal with it. The end of suffering comes when you find the Eternal and realize that the only way to

live is by keeping the precepts. But you can't keep them in a nice, neat package, because they are always impinging on each other, so the aim has to be to do only good, to cease from evil, and to do good for others by not causing them to do evil.

Now, there are different forms of these precepts in Buddhism, which is something a lot of people misunderstand. For instance, the oldest form is, "I promise to undergo the rule of training to teach myself to refrain from. . . ." Think of the amount of qualifiers on that: there's a tremendous difference between that and "Thou shalt not". "I promise to undergo the rule of training to teach myself to refrain from killing", or ". . . to refrain from stealing", or ". . . from talking against others". Another example of a different form occurs on the precept: don't sell the wine of delusion. Now, one form of this one is to refrain from abusing alcohol or drugs, and a lot of people think this is all it means. It isn't. It is also saying, "If you delude other people with your theories and your opinions, they will become 'drunk' on those theories and will not be able to use their own minds to see what is really going on." If you like, it is a precept against brainwashing. "Do not sell or spread the wine of delusion": a very important piece of Buddhist teaching.

Now, in applying these precepts, you bump into all sorts of complications. Would it be wiser to tell the truth in a certain circumstance and perhaps speak against someone? Would it be wiser not to tell the truth and not hurt them? What is the best way to go? The answer is: absolutely cease from evil; do everything with the best of intentions. That you may or may not make mistakes is another matter. All the Ten Precepts are subject to this very careful scrutiny: what am I doing; am I doing the right thing; am I doing the best thing?

Sometimes we have to break one precept in order not to do something much worse. Whether we break that precept or not, we are going to take the karmic consequences of what we do; we are going to grow some more karmic consequence. If we break one precept, we will take the consequences of breaking that precept, which may be a lot less than the consequences of not breaking it, because we would have then done something much worse. Once again: Buddhism is for spiritual adults; it is not for spiritual children. The Ten Precepts tell you what can cause karma; then you have to work out how to combine them properly so as to cause as little karma as possible. So, there is no such thing as irresponsibility in Buddhism. You have to be a terribly responsible person or you cannot be a true Buddhist. And you have to be willing to take the consequences of every action.

Furthermore, you have to “mix and match” your precepts so that they will telescope nicely into the Three Pure Precepts. When people say to me, “How do I behave? What do I do?” I say, “Well, you ask yourself three questions. First, are you ceasing from evil? If you get a ‘yes’ to that, you can go on and ask the second question: am I doing only good? If you get an answer that says ‘yes’ to that (and you ask these questions in the mind of meditation), go on to the next one: am I doing good for others? And if you get an answer that says ‘yes’ to that, then go ahead and do it. And you could still be wrong.” It’s important to know that you could still be wrong, because you might have got yourself in the way of it. So, because you always could be wrong, you then go and see a member of the Sangha. Whether that is a relative, a friend, or a priest, go and see someone who is outside of the situation and can perhaps help.

There is a saying in Zen, “When we find the source of the Yellow River, it is not pure.” This means that however hard we try, noth-

ing ever comes out quite as clean as we'd like it. (laughter) Keeping this in mind, remember that the person who gets hurt if you break the precepts is always you. If you go through the Kyojukai-mon in detail, you will see how these things can harm you. It is you that gets hurt, along with a lot of other people. In other words, you've made a thunderstorm in a clear sky, which is an awful shame.

Now, how do you start putting these precepts into practice? Sometimes living by the precepts seems like such a daunting task that there's no point in even trying. Well, you start by simply saying, "Okay, for today I am going to try to keep this precept, or that precept." I tell people, if they've never done it before, to pick one, and not pick the hardest, and see how well they can keep it for the day. I learned this from the Chinese; I really admire their practicality. There is a set of ceremonies called "Jukai" (the formal taking of the precepts) in all Buddhist countries, and only in China is it possible for you to take as many precepts during that time as you really feel you can keep. For example, a butcher would not take the precept against killing. A merchant usually does not take the precept against stealing, which I found faintly funny, and you will find prostitutes who will not take the one against sexual indulgence, and that is understood. So start by taking one you can keep and, having discovered the joys that come from keeping one, you work from the known to the unknown. And it is surprising what happens: several of the female monks who were in the monasteries had been former prostitutes who, having suddenly discovered the joy of keeping one or two, said, "I think I'll try to do a few more." Choose one you can go with; don't start the hardest way possible. Look at your character (only you can know your character thoroughly) and choose the one that is best for you, and that's the one you start with, and see how well you can keep it.

I used to love gossip at one time, and I can remember that I decided the one I was going to start with was talking about others, and I discovered that for three days I didn't say a word! (laughter) Which showed me how much wasted breath I'd been coming out with, and then I started thinking about how to talk to people and about what was truly useful conversation. So you start from the known and work to the unknown, and by keeping one precept you end up keeping the whole lot, and you end up knowing the Eternal, and that's really what you're out to do.

The fourth of the Four Noble Truths that the Buddha found was the Eightfold Path. Having got to the state where you've cleaned things up, you've dealt with the cause of suffering, now you come to the cessation of suffering, which is taking the precepts absolutely to the very best you can and being willing to always telescope them into each other and to go for help as needed (whether that be study, faith, or finding someone who can help you). When you've done that, then you can go on to what is called the Eightfold Path. That Path is the fruit of preceptual living: Right Thought, which leads to Right Speech, which leads to Right Action, which leads to Right Activity, and Effort and Determination and so on through the eight. Which comes back in the end to Right Meditation, which is why you need to meditate night and morning even if it's only for a couple of seconds: it "puts your brain in gear" for what goes on elsewhere. If you put your brain in gear for only a few seconds or a few minutes, the day will be much, much better from every angle.

Scripture: "All the Buddhas have received, and carefully preserved, the above Three Treasures, the Three Pure Collective Precepts, and the ten Precepts. If you accept these Precepts wholeheartedly the highest enlightenment will be yours and this is the undestroyable Buddhahood which

was understood, is understood and will be understood in the past, present and future. Is it possible that any truly wise person would refuse the opportunity to attain to such heights? The Buddha has clearly pointed out to all living beings that, whenever these Precepts are Truly accepted, Buddha-hood is reached, every person who accepts them becoming the True Child of Buddha.”

On that note (which I don't need to explain at all because you are then one with the Eternal, at least until you break the precepts again, at which time you have to do something about it and then you are back), we will break for a few minutes. I told you this one was going to take a long time.

[pause for rest break]

Now, can we have the next bit, please?

Scripture: “Within these Precepts dwell the Buddhas, enfolding all things within their unparalleled wisdom: there is no distinction between subject and object for any who dwell herein. All things, earth, trees, wooden posts, bricks, stones, become Buddhas once this refuge is taken. From these Precepts come forth such a wind and fire that all are driven into enlightenment when the flames are fanned by the Buddha's influence: this is the merit of non-action and non-seeking; the awakening to True Wisdom.”

This describes what happens at the time of finding the Eternal: the realization that you are beyond the opposites; there is no-thing that is outside of the Eternal, no-thing in this world that is not part of the Eternal, no-thing in the universe that is not part of the Eter-

nal. And the “wind and fire”, well, if you meditate properly, you’ll find out about the wind and the fire. It is after reaching this viewpoint that we really commence true training. It is when you have reached the realization that everything is doing the finest job it can of being a Buddha that you are open enough and positive enough to be able to do really good training. While you are still nagging and grouching and griping about everything, you are mostly just spinning your wheels. But it is when you start looking positively and saying, “Well, if so-and-so knew better, he’d be doing better, so he is showing his Buddhahood to the best of his ability at the moment” instead of griping about how he is, it is when you start seeing that the carpet is nice and warm for you to sit on rather than seeing the spot that is on it, it is when you start seeing the good, the Buddhahood, in things, that true training can commence in earnest. It is the same with the precepts: while the precepts are only rules that bind, not very much can be done, which is the danger of the “Thou shalt not” idea; but once you have got to the positive side, once you have given up fighting these things and seen the Buddha within them, then true training has well begun.



Kyojukaimon and Commentary

Giving and Receiving the Teaching of the Precepts

Great Master Eihei Dogen

Commentary by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett

(The words of Great Master Dogen's Kyojukaimon have been enclosed in double quotation marks to distinguish them from Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett's commentary. For this reason, within the commentary itself, single quotation marks have been used for material that normally would have been enclosed in double quotation marks.)

Preceptor:—

“The Great Precepts of the Buddhas are kept carefully by the Buddhas; Buddhas give them to Buddhas, Ancestors give them to Ancestors. The Transmission of the Precepts is beyond the three existences of past, present and future; enlightenment ranges from time eternal and is even now. Shakyamuni Buddha, our Lord, Transmitted the Precepts to Makakashyo and he Transmitted them to Ananda; thus the Precepts have been Transmitted to me in the eighty-fourth generation. I am now going to give them to you, in order to show my gratitude for the compassion of the Buddhas, and thus make them the eyes of all sentient beings; this is the meaning of the Transmission of the Living Wisdom of the Buddhas. I am going to pray for the Buddha's guidance and you should make confession and be given the Precepts. Please recite this verse after me:—

Preceptor followed by congregation:—

“All wrong actions, behaviour and karma, perpetrated by me from time immemorial, have been, and are, caused by greed, anger and delusion which have no beginning, born of my body, mouth and will; I now make full and open confession thereof.

Preceptor alone:—

“Now, by the guidance of the Buddhas and Ancestors, we can discard and purify all our karma of body, mouth and will and obtain great immortality; this is by the power of confession.

“You should now be converted to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. In the Three Treasures there are three merits; the first is the true source of the Three Treasures;”— there is an Unborn, Uncreated, Unformed, Undying, Indestructible, the Lord of the House, That which speaks in silence and in stillness, the ‘still, small voice.’

“The second merit is the presence in the past of Shakyamuni Buddha”— all Those Who have truly transmitted Buddhism throughout eternity.

“The third is His presence at the present time,”— all Those Who transmit the Truth, Who live by the Precepts and make them Their blood and bones, the Sangha, the embodiment of the Preceptual Truth of the Buddhas.

“The highest Truth is called the Buddha Treasure,”—the knowledge of That Which Is, the knowledge of the Unformed, Uncreated, Unborn, Undying, Indestructible; the certainty, without doubt, of Its existence, the knowledge of It within oneself, the Buddha living within oneself, the Lord of the House Who directs

all things. If you study true Buddhism you will become as the water wherein the Dragon dwells; it is necessary to know the true Dragon; it is necessary to ask the Dragon, the Lord of the House, at all times to help and to teach. Only if you give all that is required of the price that the Dragon asks will He show you the jewel; you must accept the jewel from the Dragon without doubting its value or querying the price.

“Immaculacy is called the Dharma Treasure,”— one must live with the roots of karma cut away. To do this we must indeed know the housebuilder of this house of ego, know all his tools, know all his building materials; there is no other way that we can know immaculacy. The house builder of the house of ego must be known absolutely, recognised at all times. It is not enough to have a kensho; one must go back to the source of the karmic stream; one must return to that source to find out what set it going. Kensho shows the slate is clean; to find the source of karma cuts its roots and, with constant training, keeps evil karma at a minimum but, since there is nothing from the first, there is nothing clean and nothing that is unclean —we cannot know this, however, until we have first tried to clean it. ‘Most houses can do with a thorough sweeping but even a million sweepings will not clear away the dust completely.’ Thus man remains in his body and accepts it, knowing that nothing matters, that he is immaculate, always was and always will be. This is the immaculacy of the Dharma Treasure; this makes the immaculacy and harmony of the Sangha Treasure possible. It is the knowledge of the True Kesa, that which is immaculate above all dust and dirt, the knowledge that the dust and dirt are indeed a figment of one’s own ego’s imagination as a result of past, accrued karma, that makes possible the Transmission of the Light from the far past to the now and the far future without words. The Scriptures show up blank pages; there is a Transmission that lies beyond them.

“Harmony is the Sangha Treasure”— this is brought about by the knowledge that, no matter what a member of the Sangha may do, he is immaculate from the very beginning; there is nothing from the first. ‘Thus shall ye think of all this fleeting world, a star at dawn, a bubble in a stream, a child’s laugh, a phantasm, a dream.’ Although this is true the members of the Sangha, the Zen Masters, all beings are bound by the law of karma; they will pay the price of what they do. Thus is the mind of the Sangha Treasure.

“The person who has realised the Truth really is called the Buddha Treasure;”— he is the embodiment of the Truth, he is Nirvana, he is the Embodiment of Enlightenment, he is the Treasure of the Buddha for, in him, can be seen fully-digested, Preceptual Truth.

“The Truth that is realised by Buddha is called the Dharma Treasure;”— that is the knowledge of the Unborn, Uncreated, Unformed, Undying, Indestructible; the living with this knowledge without doubt, the trusting eternally of the Lord of the House, the certainty of the Treasure House within oneself at the gate of which sits the True Dragon Who is indeed the Lord of the House.

“The people who study that which lies within the Treasure House are called the Treasure of the Sangha;”— the Dharma and the Sangha are one and the same thing, being the embodiment each of the other, if fully-digested, Preceptual Truth is their rule of life. If you ask, ‘What is a monk?’ you know that it is his Kesa.

“He who teaches devas and humans is called the Buddha Treasure;”— he who gives true teaching, being beyond praise and

blame, the holy and the unholy, right and wrong, without fear or favor, he who becomes ‘good’ for others.

“That which appears in the world in the Scriptures and is ‘good’ for others is called the Dharma Treasure,”—anything may teach. However infinitesimally small, however large, no matter what, all things may teach the Dharma when they live by fully-digested, Preceptual Truth, when they have cut away the roots of karma, when they know the housebuilder of the house of ego and are constantly keeping him from rebuilding again as a result of practising fully-digested Preceptual Truth.

“He who is released from all suffering and is beyond the world is called the Sangha Treasure;”— he for whom no longer desires burn, wherein wants and cravings no longer exist; he who gets up in the morning and goes to sleep at night, eats when he is hungry, sleeps when he is tired, is satisfied with that which he is given and does not ask for more than he can absolutely use in the immediate now. When someone is converted to the Three Treasures thus, he can have the Precepts of the Buddhas absolutely.

In this manner you should make the True Buddha your teacher and not follow wrong ways. The True Buddha that is your Teacher is indeed the Lord of the House, the True Dragon. Do not hold on to your tiny kensho; trust the Lord of the House, hold fast by Him no matter what state you may be in, whether you are well or sick, brightly alive or dying, hold fast by the Lord of the House.

The Three Pure Precepts

“Cease from evil.

This is the house of all the laws of Buddha; this is the

source of all the laws of Buddha.” The law of karma is one of the five laws of the universe; it is absolute, it is inescapable. All are bound by the law of karma once it is set in motion. By accident someone made the course of karma; it is not intentionally set in motion; what happens, or happened, or will happen to you or to anyone else is caused by karma; by accident the wheel rolled the wrong way. Do not continue the rolling of the wheel in the wrong direction by dwelling on the past or fearing the future; live now without evil. Stop the wheel now by cutting the roots of karma, by knowing the housebuilder of the house of ego; if you do not, karma will go on endlessly. The only difference between you and another being is that you have the opportunity of knowing the Lord of the House right now, having heard the teachings of the Buddha. Others may have less opportunity than you but, when they hear it, who knows which will be first at the gate of the Treasure House? ‘Cease from evil’ is absolute, in thought, in word, in deed, in body, in spirit. All are bound by the law of karma; do not doubt this. You will pay for everything you do if you do not cut the roots now and live by fully-digested, Preceptual Truth. Do not worry about the karma of others; each man his karma makes.

“Do only good.

The Dharma of Shakyamuni Buddha’s Enlightenment is the Dharma of all existence.” Do not do anything unless it is ‘good;’ do not do anything unless you have first asked the Lord of the House if it is good for you to do it. Do nothing whatsoever in a hurry; do nothing whatsoever on the spur of the moment unless you know the certainty given by the Lord of the House; know that you must take the consequences of what you do if it is not a fully-digested act for you know What lies beyond good and evil, right

and wrong; you know That which lies beyond morality; you know the Lord of the House. Ask the Lord of the House at all times before you do anything whatsoever. 'Is it good? Is it Your will?' If you do not ask the Lord of the House, the housebuilder of the house of ego will again pick up his tools and, before you know it, there will be a great structure from which you must again escape. If a thing is 'good' in this way it may be done; if it is not 'good' in this way it should not be done; I am not speaking here of good and evil; I am speaking of 'good' in the sense of if it is right; this is beyond right and wrong; if it is good is beyond good and evil. This teaching is indeed the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment for there was not one of His acts that was not the result of fully-digested, Preceptual Truth. If you live thus, doing that only which is 'good' after you have asked the Lord of the House, after you know the true Lord of the House, then you can know the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment and know that His enlightenment and yours are identically the same; but this is only if you know who the Lord of the House is and do not suffer from the idea that you are the Lord of the House. Always you must ask the Lord of the House; always you must be humble in His presence. 'Please teach me that which it is good for me to do this day. Please show me that which it is good for me to teach this day. Please give me the certainty that I teach the Truth and know, indeed, that when the still, small voice within my mind and heart says "Yes," I must obey that teaching. When it says "No," I must not disobey that teaching.' When the Lord speaks, spring up joyfully to answer; then, indeed, it is good to do anything whatsoever He asks; know that the Lord will never break the Precepts.

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“Do good for others.

Be beyond both the holy and the unholy. Let us rescue ourselves and others.” Do not set up a chain of causation that will cause others to do wrong; do not do that which will cause another to grieve; do not do that which will result in your creating karma for another being; do not accidentally set the wheel of karma in motion. Do not let yourself hear the words, ‘What demon allowed you to become a priest? From what demon did you learn Buddhism?’ To be beyond both the holy and the unholy, to be beyond praise and blame, to act only from what the Lord of the House teaches without worrying whatsoever what the world may think is indeed to have understood the Three Pure Precepts. Before any act is performed you must ask yourself, ‘Am I ceasing from evil in doing this act? Is it good in the sight of the Lord of the House? Shall I cause another being to do harm either to himself or to others? I cannot stop him doing harm, for each man his karma makes and must carry for himself, but I can do that about myself which will prevent me from accidentally starting the course of karma. I must think carefully of my every act. I may not cause another to make a mistake in Buddhism.’ By so doing we rescue both ourselves and others for, in cutting the roots of karma for ourselves, we help to cut the roots of karma for others also.

“These three are called the Three Pure Precepts.” Without them one cannot live the Buddhist life.

The Ten Great Precepts

“Do not kill.

No life can be cut off for the Life of Buddha is increasing.

Continue the Life of Buddha and do not kill Buddha.” Above all, do not turn your face away from Buddha, the Lord of the House, for this is indeed to commit spiritual suicide; to kill Buddha is to turn away from Buddha. ‘Man stands in his own shadow and wonders why it is dark and only he can turn round.’ To turn away from Buddha is to say, ‘My ego is greater than the Lord of the House; my opinions are more right; my wishes are more important.’ It is you whom you kill. If you do not listen to the Lord of the House in this life, in what life will you listen to the Lord of the House? Will you for eternity attempt to commit real suicide? If you always face the Buddha you will always know Buddha; if you always listen to the Lord of the House there is no possibility of your ever killing anything.

“Do not steal.

The mind and its object are one. The gateway to enlightenment stands open wide.” There is nothing whatsoever that can be stolen. ‘Preserve well for you now have,’ says the Scripture; each of us possesses the Treasure House. All we have to do is ask the Dragon for permission to enter, ask the Dragon if we may see the jewel and it will be given to us. He who tries to rob himself, he who tries to steal from the Treasure House can never have the Treasure; erudition is as this; taking drugs is as this. All you have to do is ask the Lord of the House and you may know and possess all things. The gateway to enlightenment does indeed stand open wide for the true mind of the Buddha and the jewel are one and the same; ask the Lord of the House at all times. Remember that ‘he who counts another’s treasure can never have his own;’ he who steals can only ever rob himself.

“Do not covet.

The doer, the doing and that which has the doing done to it are immaculate therefore there is no desire. It is the same doing as that of the Buddhas.” Thus there is nothing to be coveted and no one that covets. ‘Preserve well for you now have,’ says the Scripture. Since there is nothing from the first, how can there be anything to preserve well? ‘The white snow falls upon the silver plate; the snowy heron in the bright moon hides; resembles each the other yet these two are not the same.’ Thus we think there is a difference; thus we think there is an ability to covet and something to covet; thus man makes mistakes. Indeed there is nothing from the first.

“Do not say that which is not true.

The Wheel of the Dharma rolls constantly and lacks for nothing yet needs something.” The Dharma is Truth itself but it needs expression. He who lies does not allow the Dharma to show itself, he does not allow the Dharma to be expressed, he does not allow the world to see the Dharma Wheel in action. And still the sweet dew covers the whole world, including those who lie, and within that dew lies the Truth.

“Do not sell the wine of delusion.

There is nothing to be deluded about. If we realise this we are enlightenment itself.” ‘Thus shall ye think of all this fleeting world, a star at dawn, a bubble in a stream, a child’s laugh, a phantasm, a dream.’ If you hold on to nothing whatsoever there can be no delusion nor can there be enlightenment; then there are no opposites. Thus, in-

deed, we are enlightenment itself—yet always we will have the form and figure of old monks.

“Do not speak against others.”

Do not speak against the Lord of the House. Every person, every being is the Temple of the Lord wherein the Lord dwells, the still water wherein the Dragon lives. If you speak against others you speak against the Lord of the House. Do not try to divide the Lord of the House; do not try to cause war within the Lord; do not try to make the Lord make war upon Himself. “In Buddhism, the Truth and everything are the same; the same law, the same enlightenment and the same behaviour. Do not allow anyone to speak of another’s faults.” Do not find fault with the Lord of the House. “Do not allow anyone to make a mistake in Buddhism.” To speak against the Lord of the House is the gravest mistake of which I know.

“Do not be proud of yourself and devalue others.”

It is enough for me to know the Lord of the House, to know that He dwells within all things. How can there be devaluation of others if they are the Temple of the Lord? How can there be pride if all possess equally within the Lord? “Every Buddha and every Ancestor realises that he is the same as the limitless sky and as great as the universe. When they realise their true body there is nothing within or without; when they realise their true body they are nowhere more upon the earth.” There is nothing to be proud of and nothing to be devalued.

“Do not be mean in giving either Dharma or wealth.”

Since all possess the Lord, there is nothing to be given and nothing to be taken away, and still all things must be given, all things offered at all times and in all places. “One phrase, one verse, the hundred grasses,”— all contain the Lord, all express the Lord— each in its own way and each perfectly. “One Dharma, one enlightenment, every Buddha, every Ancestor.” No difference, nothing greater, nothing smaller; nothing truer, nothing less true. When all is within the Lord, all stand straight together, a million Buddhas stand in one straight line. Out of gratitude to the Buddhas and Ancestors we give Dharma, we give wealth, we give life itself— strength, youth, beauty, wealth, everything that we have and, even then, we cannot give thanks enough for one second of their true training; we can never repay their kindness to us. Only by our own true training is this possible and then, again, there is no repayment; it is just the work of a Buddha.

“Do not be angry.

There is no retiring, no going, no Truth, no lie; there is a brilliant sea of clouds, there is a dignified sea of clouds.” Just there is that going on which causes us to see unclearly; but if we truly look, if we look with care, we will see that the true and beautiful sky is shining behind the clouds; we may see the Lord of the House. No matter how angry the person is who is with us, we may see in him, too, the Lord if we are truly looking, if our own ego is out of the way and, in seeing the Lord in him, he can see the Lord in us. The depth of the ocean is still even when there is a great storm upon its surface; thus should we be when there is anger, knowing that nothing whatsoever can touch the Truth.

“Do not defame the Three Treasures.

To do something by ourselves, without copying others, is to become an example to the world and the merit of doing such a thing becomes the source of all wisdom. Do not criticise but accept everything.” The Lord of the House does not always do things in the normally accepted ways, nor do the Buddhas and Ancestors; they are not individual and they are not the same as each other. Each expresses the Truth in his own way as do all things; they do that which they do in their way and express the Lord within it. Do not criticise the way of another, do not call it into question; look within it and see the Lord. Look with the mind of a Buddha and you will see the heart of a Buddha. To criticise is to defame the Lord of the House. Love the Lord of the House at all times — know Him, talk to Him; never let a day go by when you do not consult with Him even on the slightest matter. Then you will never, as long as you live, defame the Three Treasures.

“These sixteen Precepts are thus. Be obedient to the teaching and its giving; accept it with bows.”

Note

1. When one ‘asks the Lord’, one should know that the Lord will never tell you to break the Precepts—any of them; if you hear to the contrary, the voice you are hearing is the voice of self and not the voice of the Lord. The teaching given in this paragraph must not be taken out of context and either made into a quick and easy substitute for full Preceptual inquiry or applied to trivial things. There are brief periods in training when a Preceptual review of every action is advisable in order to deepen one’s understanding of the Precepts; at such times the teaching of this chapter is ap-

plied to every act one does. At all other times it is important that one be willing to apply it to all things and at the same time be both practical and spiritually mature in reserving this type of inquiry for truly important matters, while accepting the responsibility for using the Ten Precepts and one's wise discernment to guide one's behaviour in everyday matters.

Whenever one does 'ask the Lord', one must also do all of the other aspects mentioned in this chapter, including carefully considering the likely consequences of one's proposed actions, comparing those actions to the Ten Precepts and other Scriptures and, especially, consulting and following the advice of the Sangha. To do only part of this is to fail to take Refuge in the Three Treasures; such a course of action is contrary to Buddhist teaching. Be



Reading the “Kyojukaiimon and Commentary”

David Powers, Lay Minister

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One of the most useful and powerful parts of my training is the daily reading of the *Kyojukaiimon and Commentary*, the sixteen Precepts, together with the commentary of Great Master Dogen and of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. When I first began reading the *Kyojukaiimon and Commentary*, I must say I had only a very foggy idea of what it was about. But as I continued to read it and meditate, things began to become more clear. Sometimes one of the Precepts has seemed to come to life and stand out in relief as I went about my daily business. The two particular Precepts with which this has happened are:

“Do not speak against others.”

Do not speak against the Lord of the House. Every person, every being is the Temple of the Lord wherein the Lord dwells, the still water wherein the Dragon lives. If you speak against others you speak against the Lord of the House. Do not try to divide the Lord of the House; do not try to cause war within the Lord; do not try to make the Lord make war upon Himself. “In Buddhism, the Truth and everything are the same; the same law, the same enlightenment and the same behaviour. Do not allow anyone to speak of another’s faults.” Do not find fault with the

Lord of the House. “Do not allow anyone to make a mistake in Buddhism.” To speak against the Lord of the House is the gravest mistake of which I know.

“Do not be proud of yourself and devalue others.”

It is enough for me to know the Lord of the House, to know that He dwells within all things. How can there be devaluation of others if they are the Temple of the Lord? How can there be pride if all possess equally within the Lord? “Every Buddha and every Ancestor realises that He is the same as the limitless sky and as great as the universe. When They realise Their true body there is nothing within or without; when They realise Their true body They are nowhere more upon the earth.” There is nothing to be proud of and nothing to be devalued. ¹

One day I began to realize that I was breaking these Precepts time after time during the day, so I started to make an effort to keep them. The first thing that happened was that I found I had about twenty-five to fifty percent less to say during my normal conversations when I quit judging, criticizing or making fun of others. Although dramatic, this change was not too difficult, once I made the effort. However, the next level in keeping the first of these Precepts was much more subtle and difficult. I would find myself listening to others criticize someone else and to some extent supporting them just by nodding my head slightly or rolling my eyes or with a facial expression that indicated consent. These little gestures of consent would frequently result in two or three minutes of breaking the Precepts with criticism. When I began to stop doing this the effect it had on my interactions was surprising, and after a while people tended not to run someone or something down when I was around.

Reading the *Kyojukaimon and Commentary* has also had other effects. For example, there have been times when I was just about to do something (or in the middle of it) when one of the Precepts would come to mind, like, “Cease from evil.” At these times the Precepts have kept me out of a fair amount of trouble. At other times I have been pondering over a decision (like, should I write off this lunch as a business expense or was it social?), when I just stop and turn to the Precepts. There is “Do not steal,” and the decision is suddenly easier. I do not have to think, “Will I be audited by the IRS, and if so can I prove that we talked about business?” The truth is it was just a friendly lunch, not business, and the decision is that simple.

It is important when putting the Precepts into practice to use them as a guide to avoid mistakes and not to use them to be unnecessarily harsh with oneself. For example, in the above case it is useful to recognize that declaring a lunch as a business expense, when it is not, would be making a mistake. However there is no benefit in going beyond this and saying that I am training poorly because I almost broke the Precepts and therefore I am bad. It can be a very severe mistake to misuse the Precepts in this way, and in fact one is actually breaking the Precepts by so doing. I have found the Precepts to be most helpful when used as a gentle guide to point the way when faced with the decisions and problems of everyday life. It is not possible to keep all of the Precepts literally at all times, but we must do the very best we can.

One of the things that surprised me about trying to keep the Precepts was that some of them actually get a little easier with practice. A good example is anger. When I started out trying not to get angry it seemed almost impossible. This was because when I realized that I was angry, the anger was already overwhelming. It was like trying to stop Niagara Falls. But with some persistence, I be-

gan to notice my anger as it started to arise. When I was able to see the anger arising, it also became easier not to get caught up in it. The anger did not disappear, but I did not necessarily have to do anything with it, such as yell at someone or defend myself. Sometimes the anger just comes and goes very quickly when I recognize it and do not get tangled up in it and feed energy into it. This is like a large boulder sitting at the top of a hill. Once the boulder starts to roll down the hill it gathers momentum and becomes more and more difficult to stop. But if you watch the boulder very carefully at the top of the hill and see when it just begins to teeter, you can steady it without too much effort. Trying to keep the Precepts is like carefully watching the boulder. The more you practice, the better you get at keeping the boulder balanced and seeing when it starts to teeter. In this way one of the big problems that comes up for me is now much easier to train with than it was when I first started.

The thing that is most helpful to me about reading and taking the Precepts is that I can do it now. I do not have to wait until I have more faith, or until I decide if I want to be a monk, or until I go to a meditation retreat or until everything is just right. The Precepts are something that I can put into my every day training now and they get straight to the heart of what I am trying to do. Reading the *Kyōjukaimon and Commentary* takes me about twenty to thirty minutes. It is important to read in a place where there is as little distraction as possible and to give yourself fully to reading without the diversion of a cup of coffee or conversation. Reading just before meditation, or just after, also seems to be helpful. I try to read the *Kyōjukaimon and Commentary* every day, or half one day and half the next if there is not time all at once. I am sure that it would also be helpful to read it twice a week or once a week if that is all the time one can find. The benefit seems to come from reading and practicing on a regular basis so that the Precepts weave themselves into the fabric of our everyday life in the same

way that daily meditation does.

Note

1. See Great Master Dogen and Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, *Kyojukaimon and Commentary*, in this publication.



The Ceremonies of the Keeping of the Ten Precepts Retreat.

Rev. Master Daishin Morgan

(This article is an excerpt from a longer *Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives* article entitled *The Precepts of the Buddhās*, published in the spring 1990 issue of the *Journal*. Used by permission.)

The chief feature of the Keeping of the Ten Precepts retreat is the searching of the heart that takes place during the meditation periods. If one wishes to take the Precepts, it is necessary to come to know oneself. Through meditation, it is possible to confront all that one is without condemnation or excuses. One cannot begin to keep the Precepts without the insight that grows out of meditation. One must be willing to look at oneself and make whatever changes are necessary. The ceremonies that take place at intervals throughout the retreat embody this process of cleansing and help all who take part to find the heart of compassion, which is both the source of the Precepts and the true nature of all beings.

The ceremonies begin on the first evening of the retreat with the reading of the Precepts. Everyone gathers in the ceremony hall after dusk where the Preceptor reads the Precepts and a short commentary on them written by Great Master Keizan (1267—1325), under whose guidance the Church of Serene Reflection Meditation flourished in Japan. The Precepts are read so that all attending the retreat may undertake to keep them for the coming week. Those who wish to make a lifetime commitment will do so during the ceremony of lay ordination, which usually takes place one or two days later.

Lay ordination is for those who wish to make a formal commitment to becoming a Buddhist. During this ceremony each of the ordainees bows to the ordination master who asks, “Is it your

wish to become a Buddhist?” The ordainee replies that it is, whereupon the master sprinkles their head with water and symbolically shaves them. The master does this by touching the razor to the crown of the disciple’s head whilst reciting the Three Treasures. Lay Buddhists do not shave their heads as the monks do; however all who take the Precepts must be willing to cut their attachments to the world if they are to be successful in their training. The symbolic shaving is a symbol of this willingness. The master then places a token Kesa round the neck of the disciple whilst all recite:

“How great and wondrous are the clothes of enlightenment,
Formless yet embracing every treasure;
I wish to unfold the Buddha’s teaching
That I may help all living things.”

The Kesa is the symbol of the Precepts since it is the robe of Shakyamuni Buddha. We clothe ourselves in the Precepts since from now on it is our wish never to depart from them. Our outer actions must be guided by the Buddha Nature within; the Kesa is the outward symbol of the Buddha Nature.

Once all have received the Kesa, the master gives the Precepts. This begins with the confession verse which is recited three times by all:

“All the evil committed by me is caused by
beginningless greed, hate and delusion.
All the evil is committed by our body, speech and mind;
I now confess everything wholeheartedly.”

After this the Three Treasures are given. As explained earlier, these are the essence of Buddhism and no matter of what school or tradition, all Buddhists take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. All repeat the following after the master, as to do so is to make the Buddha and the truest enlightenment your teacher.

“Homage to the Buddha,
Homage to the Dharma,

Homage to the Sangha,
Homage to the highest Buddha,
Homage to the most immaculate Dharma,
Homage to the harmonious Sangha,
Homage to the Buddha,
Homage to the Dharma,
Homage to the Sangha.”

The Three Pure Precepts and the Ten Great Precepts are given next. After each Precept is read the master asks, “From this present human state to that of becoming Buddha will you keep this Precept or not?” Everyone, even those who have taken the Precepts before, all reply, “I will.”

By publicly making a commitment to the Three Treasures and to the Precepts, you acknowledge the desire within your own heart to reach Buddhahood. Whenever we make a sincere commitment, the Buddhas and Ancestors respond with infinite help and compassion. Even if you subsequently lose the Way, the merit of having taken the Precepts will never be lost. Always you will be able to find your way back. Having once touched the Source, you will never lose the memory of where It lies. If you continue your training, your understanding of the Precepts will deepen and you will come to the realisation that they are your blood and bones.

All beings make mistakes in the course of their training, even though they are sincere. It is essential that we learn from our mistakes and let them go without hindering ourselves further with guilt. Having taken the Precepts and been publicly recognised as worthy Buddhists, we can now have the confidence to look clearly at ourselves and know that whatever we may see, at root we are “void, unstained and pure”¹ and that beneath the ignorance lies a truth and purity that nothing can destroy. The Ceremony of Contrition and Conversion expresses this teaching.

The preparation for the ceremony begins in the morning when all take part in cleaning the monastery from top to bottom, after which all bathe themselves and continue to meditate deeply. This outward cleansing is a vehicle through which the inner cleansing is given expression. One must be willing to seek out the dirt even in the most obscure corners so that no obstacles are held on to.

The ceremony takes place after nightfall and begins with a procession in which everyone takes up a chant that is sung in a slow rhythm:

“Hail, Shakyamuni Buddha.”

The procession winds its way along the darkened corridors of the monastery that have been specially draped with red hangings. Red is a colour of celebration in Buddhism: although one is entering a way that may be dark, there is a deep sense of relief and joy underneath the sadness and grief because one is now entering the true way and will surely cleanse one’s karma. The procession winds onward and a small shrine is reached in which sits a monk who represents Avalokiteshwara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. He or she holds out a small paper to each person as they bow before the shrine. This paper has the confession verse written upon it and, by reaching forward to receive it, the disciple acknowledges all his or her past mistakes. It is with compassion that we must recognise and embrace our past, for when we do so we can offer it up and find the freedom to go on.

A second shrine is reached some way further on where there sits a monk who represents the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, the embodiment of the Love of the Buddha. He or she holds an alms bowl into which everyone places their paper as an offering within the loving acceptance of the Buddha.

Whilst continuing the chant, the procession leads towards the entrance of the ceremony hall where there is a third shrine in which the ordination master, the Preceptor, sits as the representative of Shakyamuni Buddha. A chaplain reads the confession verse on behalf of each individual as they bow before the shrine. The ordination master, as Shakyamuni, offers incense and bows to each person in recognition of their Buddha Nature and the sincerity with which they have offered up their past mistakes.

Having leapt beyond fear, one now enters the ceremony hall, which represents the land of the Eternal, where the statue of the Cosmic Buddha is visible in the candlelight. The world of enlightenment is entered through the path of contrition and conversion, for should we try to hide from our mistakes or from the

Buddha Nature, which embraces those mistakes, we cannot enter enlightenment and we will never be at peace.

Once everyone has taken their seats within the hall, the chant ends and the priests from the three shrines enter and take their places in front of the statue of the Cosmic Buddha. A cauldron is brought and each of the papers is burnt within it. When all have been consumed in the fire of immaculacy the three priests give a great shout that drives away any lingering doubts. The ordination master then says,

“Now, by the guidance of the Buddhas and Ancestors, you have discarded and purified all your karma of body, mouth and will and have obtained great immaculacy. This is by the power of confession.”

After we have taken the Precepts and learned how to free ourselves of the chains of karma, the next step is to understand how to continue to train ourselves throughout the remainder of life. To do this we must be willing to follow wherever the Precepts lead. It is not enough to see what we need to do, we have to put that into practice. We must also develop the humility to follow the Precepts and not our own opinions. The source of the Precepts is the source of all the Buddhas. That which comes forth from this source is known as the Blood of the Buddhas. It courses within all beings although only those who are willing to train themselves can know it. This is the Bloodline or lineage of all the Buddhas and Ancestors from the limitless past, through Shakyamuni Buddha and on down through the unbroken succession of master and disciple to the present day. Now the new disciple is joining this lineage through his or her willingness to follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before.

The ceremony begins with a procession, only this time there is no knowing where it may lead or exactly when it will commence. One must be willing to follow whenever the call comes. The ordination master begins the procession by intoning the chant that is the last line of *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*. As soon as the chant is heard, all rise up and follow wherever the master leads. Eventually, after many twists and turns, the procession enters the ceremony hall where the master ascends the altar, and when all

are seated, he or she gives a short explanation of the Bloodline certificate which is about to be given to all those who have taken the Precepts for the first time.

This certificate is in the form of a graph that depicts a red line flowing from an empty circle through the names of all the Buddhas and Ancestors down to the name of the ordination master followed by that of the new disciple. Space is left below the disciple's name for other names to follow, thus signifying the necessity of passing on the Life of Buddha—the necessity of endless training. The empty circle is the symbol of the immaculate emptiness from which the Precepts come. The red line is the "Blood of the Buddhas," the Precepts on their deepest level. This line flows through the name of the disciple and then continues back up to the empty circle. Thus all the names are linked by the Blood of the Buddhas. It is by keeping the Precepts that we can know our unity with all life and that the Blood of the Buddhas flows through us at all times, as it does through all beings.

After the explanation is over, each new ordainee ascends the altar to receive their own copy of the certificate. Each of us must climb the altar to receive it since one must always be willing to ascend to the level of the Buddhas.

On the last night of the retreat the final ceremony of Recognition takes place. Since all who have undertaken the retreat have received the Precepts and looked into their true nature, there is nothing hindering them from going on to become Buddha. All are Buddha at heart and it is this inherent Buddha Nature that is recognised during the ceremony. Everyone is led up in small groups to sit upon the altar from where they can see the three priests, who represent Compassion, Love and Buddhahood, seated behind the altar in the Founder's Shrine. The priests bow to those on the altar saying, "Buddha recognises Buddha and Buddha bows to Buddha." They then rise and circumambulate the altar three times.

After all have been recognised in this way, all the senior monks join in a procession round the congregation as all the bells and

gongs are sounded and conch shells are blown in celebration. This joyful finale marks the end of the retreat.

Note

1. *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*. See Rev. Master P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, M.O.B.C., *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity* (ML. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1987), p. 78.



