

INTRODUCTION

Those who take up this booklet will, most likely, be considering the step of Jukai; formally taking the precepts and becoming a lay Buddhist. Almost every major transition in Buddhist practice is marked by taking the precepts. When we are first ordained as lay Buddhists, we take the precepts; we take them again as Lay Disciples; we take them yet again at ordination as a monk; we take them once more at Dharma Transmission; they are given again as the core of the funeral ceremony. Clearly, the Precepts are an important expression of commitment in Buddhism.

In the Zen tradition, we have ten basic precepts for both the monk and lay-person. These ten central precepts, often called the Ten Grave Precepts, are injunctions against certain types of behavior: “Don’t kill; don’t steal, don’t lie,” etc. In our tradition, we add six more precepts to this list; the Three Refuges and the Three Pure Precepts. The Three Refuges are preceded by saying a verse of contrition, called the “Sange” verse. Taking refuge in the Three Treasures Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha is observed in all Buddhist traditions. At the most essential level, “Buddha” means awakened mind, “Dharma” refers to the truth itself appearing in events, and “Sangha” means community. Taking refuge in them means to openly acknowledge that there is an awakening to understand, that there is truth in the events of our lives to understand, and that we have a place in this world and cosmos to understand, and that this is as essential to us as air and water.

The precepts are natural and inherent in our lives, whether or not we consider them from a Buddhist perspective. They are not a test or rules imposed by some outer power but are akin to the natural laws of the universe with which we wish to be in harmony. When we begin a spiritual search, it is because a natural instinct has arisen within, and we seek a teaching or practice to help us clarify what this instinct is and where it might lead. When we find a teaching or practice that fits, we seek guidance and the community of others who understand what it is we are trying to do. The instinct that sets us on this search comes from the urging of Buddha Mind itself, and following it wholeheartedly is what we mean by “taking refuge in the Buddha.” Looking for a teaching or practice is seeking the Dharma and looking for a teacher or community is seeking Sangha. In this way, the Three Refuges of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha appear completely naturally regardless to whatever path is taken.

Seeking these Three Treasures and taking refuge in them is the essential first step; after that, the hard part begins. If the practice is real, we come up against our habitual attachments to self. As we comprehend that there is something in our lives we need to change, to work on, and as we seriously confront that, we are taking the first of the Three Pure Precepts: “Cease from Evil.” Evil here simply means self-attachment, with all its variations and subplots. It especially signifies our habit of adhering to the self in opposition to others. “Do only Good,” the second of the Three Pure Precepts, means using our practice to redirect our attention, to cultivate centeredness through zazen (meditation), and to act from an unconditioned place of selflessness. As we do this, the third Pure Precept arises: “Do Good for Others.” This means we allow ourselves to be engaged in life; we let it affect us and practice with it in the same way we practice with our own thoughts and feelings. Our practice embraces everything.

While this may sound great in theory, in practice it is very difficult. Life is pretty messy, and when you really focus on the details of life events, you start to face the Ten Grave Precepts. The Ten Grave Precepts provide a way to look at the details of our lives, and to consider them in light of our aspiration, our “Way-seeking mind.” We examine all the ways we don’t follow through on this aspiration when faced with real-life situations, and by keeping the precepts in mind, we learn to do better. Working with the precepts on this level is following the thread of karma, and learning to step out of conditioned “habit energy.” The precepts help us uncover and face things that we have learned to keep hidden, very cleverly, from ourselves. While we can make great progress in cleaning up our acts, as it were, in time we also must face the paradox inherent in life and the fact that we can’t really keep these precepts at all. We see that we sometimes have to break one precept to keep another; we see that to break one is to break them all. We see that we cannot breathe without killing, and nothing we can do or say is completely without self interest. It’s when we get all tangled up in the Precepts, when we can’t possibly figure it all out, that we really come up against ourselves. When we try very hard to keep the Precepts, then come up against the paradox inherent in them, we come to a place where finally we drop the self and all our struggles completely. Here the Three Pure Precepts and the Three Refuges meet. Dropping self attachment, we go beneath it; this is the next level of “Cease from Evil” where we really do take refuge in the Buddha, our own deeper mind.

Then, as we take action, we express the precept “Do only Good,” and we begin to see that meeting the moment right in front of us is taking refuge in the Dharma. Choosing to engage in the messiness of life and allowing it to touch us is “Do Good for Others,” and the whole world becomes the refuge of Sangha.

Simply allowing the precepts to enter the mind gives us something to reflect upon, and our actions, reactions, and karmic patterns start to stand out against these principles. Regular reading of the precepts and their commentary, which we call “Kyojukaimon study,” can be a very useful part of your practice, especially before taking the precepts at Jukai. To study this way, read through the booklet of ‘The Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts’ every day in a meditative way, preferably early in the day. Don’t analyze or think too much about the reading; read it as a meditation or like a chant. Let the words enter your mind, notice them, then let them go. Just let them wash over you. In the evening, practice recollection. This is done before any evening meditation; sit in a comfortable chair, relax, take a few deep breaths, then remember your day. From waking, draw to mind every event you can remember without dwelling on too many details. Allow your day to run through your mind and just notice each event in a meditative way, letting each thing arise and pass. Notice all the sensations and reactions that come up as you do this; events may have pleasant or unpleasant feelings associated with them. Often there is a feeling of contraction; a tightening in the throat, chest, stomach, jaws, hands, arms, or elsewhere in your body. Make a mental note of these feelings. As you continue to do your practice of reading through the precepts, you might notice certain phrases that stand out. Quite often, people find there is a connection between the phrases that stand out and the feelings of contraction. The connection may be difficult to see at first; don’t push it. But in keeping your attention on the phrases that speak to you, and on your feelings of contraction, you might recognize certain moments of your day that set off a karmic pattern, moments where your buttons get pushed and set off a whole series of thoughts, feelings, and reactions.

Usually we don’t notice our reactions until they are well under way, or even after the fact. If you keep up this precept study and recollection practice, you will begin to notice your reactions earlier, and before too long, you notice them very quickly, even as they arise. It’s as if you’ve stepped on a banana peel and are hyper-aware as you go down, in slow

motion, into a habitual pattern called “habit energy.” This is where zazen practice and the precepts really intersect; when we are aware of our reactions as they arise, we can remember zazen practice and come back to the breath, letting everything arise and fall without getting caught up in it. The moments of contraction that we are looking for in the practice of recollection mark the formation of a self with hard edges and boundaries in opposition to something. The real teaching of the sixteen Bodhisattva precepts informs us about how we lose our natural openness and connection to whatever is right in front of us and how to resolve the paradoxes that arise naturally in our daily lives.

CONTRITION

*All my past and harmful karma,
Born from beginningless greed, hatred, and delusion,
Through body, speech, and mind,
I now fully avow.*

Contrition is rather like confession, which is simply to acknowledge that there is something to do, something to work on. We acknowledge that we screw up in various ways, that we aren’t perfect, and that there is a long karmic stream that flows through us. In the Kyojukaimon it says:

“The Great Precepts of the Buddhas are kept carefully by the Buddhas. Buddhas give them to Buddhas. Dharma ancestors give them to dharma 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, the buddha of this world, transmitted the precepts to Makakasho and he transmitted them to Ananda. Thus they have been transmitted down through the generations. This is the meaning of the transmission of living wisdom.

“Because of their limitless compassion, the Buddhas and Dharma ancestors have flung wide the gates of compassion to all living things. Although karmic consequence is inevitable at some point in the three periods of time, contrition brings freedom and immaculacy. As this is so, let us be utterly contrite before the Buddhas. May the Buddhas and ancestors have compassion upon us, help us see the obstacle of suffering we have inherited from the limitless past and lead us in such a way that we 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.”

It’s comforting to know that all the great and profoundly enlightened ones were just like us, at some point in the past, and that we can be, if we work at it, just like them, at some point in the future.

*“All my past and harmful karma,
Born from beginningless greed, hatred, and delusion,
Through body, speech, and mind,
I now fully avow.”*

In this verse we own up to our karma in saying “all my past and harmful karma,” and not just recently, but all of it “born from beginningless greed, hatred, and delusion.” We are a part of this universe from the beginning. It is born “through body, speech, and mind.” But we don’t take too much personal responsibility. When it says “beginningless” it’s like that old saying that “by accident someone started the course of karma.” Think about how we’re conditioned by our parents and our society, and how our parents were conditioned by their parents before, and so on, back and back and back. It’s like a row of dominos falling over. The word “beginningless” says that, in a very deep way, there is no one to blame. This karma is just causality moving through everyone over time, like a wave. But with this verse we say “O.K., I take responsibility for what is moving through me now, and the buck stops here.” Also, notice that it says born from “greed, hatred and delusion, through body, speech, and mind.” This being that I am is the medium through which it is moving. It’s not born OF it. That is a mistake in translation that’s still being used sometimes. If you say “born of,” it’s as if the body, mouth and will are the cause of the karma, which they are not. They are the medium through which it moves. So, we just acknowledge that all this is so, and that yes, there have been a lot of mistakes and suffering, some pretty bad things have happened from time immemorial, and yes, it continues even now. With this verse we just acknowledge that this is so, and we acknowledge our part in continuing it in whatever way we have done so, and then let it go. And, what’s important in this too, is that it says “A contrite heart is open to the Dharma and finds the gateway to the precepts clear and unobstructed. Bearing this in mind, we should sit up straight in the presence of the Buddha and make this act of contrition wholeheartedly.” Sit up straight. When I read that, it really changed my whole understanding of what contrition is about. It’s not self-flagellation. Rather, it is sitting up straight with complete dignity while fully acknowledging everything. That is what is wanted; complete

openness, complete openhanded acknowledgement of short comings, of wholeness, of everything. In contrition we begin to let go of our defenses, the hard shell of self. This hard shell is what feels itself in opposition to whatever arises around us. Contrition is the way we say “Oh I don’t really need that, I’ll let that go.” With that the armor begins to drop away.

Buddhism teaches that a being exists for exactly one thought moment — that’s it. Right now, the choices we’re making, the way we’re reacting, are creating the being that will be born in the next moment. Predisposition means that if we left something undone yesterday — an unresolved anger or hurt — the moment we come into contact with the condition again (like seeing the person we’re angry with), the anger will appear again in the present. The fact that anger or other feelings arise again is not something that we choose or make happen, so until we act, no additional karma is generated. Volition is the doer of karma; the fact that you have a sensation, that somebody presses your button, is not a volitional act but simply karma arising from the past and appearing in the present. However, what you do with it in the present matters. When you can see karma arise and just accept it without being caught in it, you create a little gap so that the domino falls short and doesn’t just carry on endlessly into the future.

Question/Comment: Contrition is being willing to look clear-eyed at your own karma all the way back — see that it’s still there, that it’s irrevocable — and not be paralyzed. Sange means you look at it, see it, hold it, embrace it, and move on — all at once. So we confess wholeheartedly.

Q/C: But part of what you accept is that you will continue to make mistakes.

Kyogen: Right. It’s a deep perception of the First Noble Truth that suffering/imperfection exists and how that applies to us. There can be no absolute perfection in anything we do or say; as soon as you open your mouth, it’s only part of the truth. We drop our opposition to the fact that we’re imperfect; coming to terms with that brings a kind of gentleness — contrition brings grace. This connects to the Kyojukaimon commentary that says: “Bearing this in mind, we should sit up straight in the presence of the Buddha and make this act of contrition wholeheartedly.” We can be wholehearted and honest about our own imperfection. Somehow, this confers grace and dignity.

Q/C: I’m seeing patterns now, reactions to things that upset me or piss me off or make me feel victimized or angry, and in some situations I’m getting a little distance. So I may not spin off into these scenarios about how I’m being victimized or how I should do this or that; I just look at it and try and let it go. But these things keep coming back. I’m learning to deal with them, but why are they still there?

K: We can use the illustration of eating dust. If you’re driving down a dirt road, kicking up lots of dust, then realize you’re going in the wrong direction, you can put on the brakes, stop and turn around. But in going back the other way, you have to go back through all that dust you are no longer raising. This can feel discouraging. And, unfortunately, it’s true that we never completely get rid of our karmic traces. In other words, we will always kick up a little dust.

There’s a beautiful description from one of the Theravadin scriptures; it says we have this bag of filth, called “klesha,” which means defilements. The first part of practice is to recognize we have the filth and dump it out. Then we start washing the bag; it gets cleaner and cleaner, but there’s still a stain. That’s called impregnation, or klesa-vasana, the stain left in the material. These are the marks of who you are, and in this scripture, they form the colors of the Buddha’s halo.

Q/C: In working with the precept of being jealous of nothing, I’ve discovered that I’ve been driven by jealousy all my life. If I weren’t looking for a way out, I wouldn’t be sitting here right now. How can I even be sorry about screwing up on this precept for so long? It’s part of my character that I’ve reframed a little bit, but it’s still there.

K: In the beginning, we train for the sake of self, then we train for the sake of self and other, and eventually we train for the sake of Dharma. Whatever blocks us or makes us suffer in some way is what impels us toward the Dharma. Every obstacle is eventually a doorway of some sort. The phrase “Hindrance is hindered by hindrance” puzzled the hell out of me until I realized that everything that blocked me was a door.

THE THREE REFUGES

*I take refuge in the Buddha
I take refuge in the Dharma
I take refuge in the Sangha*

After contrition we are ready to take refuge, which is an important concept in Buddhism. We often think of a refuge as rather like a safe

harbor, a place of shelter, and so it is. But, people sometimes get the Buddhist sense of it upside down. Buddhist refuge is not for oneself, but rather from one's self. We have a basic instinct to protect the self, and this is not a bad thing. But the self we're talking about taking refuge from is the sense of self in its separateness, its opposition to other. This opposition arises because of the three fires of greed, hatred and delusion. These are sometimes called the winds of defiling passion. It is greed, hatred and delusion that cause the separate self to arise, and taking refuge from these is an apt metaphor. The sheltering refuge of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is from these three winds, and it brings great peace. When we understand that this "self in opposition" is painful, we are ready to take refuge. When we drop this opposition, which we do in contrition, we can take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha

The text says that in the three treasures there are three merits. That is significant. "At the source, the highest truth is called the Buddha treasure. Immaculacy is called the dharma treasure, harmony is called the sangha treasure."

"Buddha" means "awakened one." The Sanskrit root "budd" means "awaken." "Bodhi" is the word we usually translate as enlightenment, and it means, literally, "awakening." So, "buddha" is "awakened one" or "awakened mind." It's not just an awakened person, but the quality of being awake and aware. So for us "Buddha" means great awakened mind. The historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, represents the possibility of a human being to fully awaken in this lifetime. Shakyamuni is an archetypal representation of our own potential.

"Dharma" usually refers to the teachings. The "Dharma" is all the sutras and other teachings of the Buddha, and also the teachings of all the great teachers in the different lineages. So, in the past Shakyamuni is Buddha Treasure and all those who have awakened in the same way are the "Buddha Treasure." The Truth realized and taught is called "Dharma Treasure." All those who have helped to transmit this Dharma are called Sangha treasure. In the present, whenever someone does something that teaches devas and humans, "Buddha" is manifesting in that moment. Looked at this way, the quality we call "Buddha" manifests in a particular person at a particular time, but it isn't permanently associated with that person. This is how it's seen in

the zen tradition. "Buddha" is always manifesting, and people who practice are the "stuff" through which this happens, to a greater or lesser degree, depending on circumstances. There are times when any one of us can teach devas and humans, but we need to really raise the mind of Bodhi and practice diligently before this will move through us in an unobstructed way. "Those who teach devas and humans in the sky and in the world are called the Buddha treasure. That which appears in the world and in the scriptures, becoming good for others is called the Dharma treasure." "Dharma" is similar in that while it refers to all the scriptures and the formal teachings, "Dharma" in the present is actually Truth manifesting through events in the present moment. Therefore, your life, just as it is, is Dharma, when you see it clearly. Everything that happens is a finger pointing to the truth. Everything.

"They who release their suffering and embrace all things and conditions are called the Sangha treasure." To release suffering is to open up. When you do that, then you are unobstructed to others and you become a part of "Sangha Treasure."

"The three merits mean that when we are converted to the three treasures we can have the precepts of the Buddha completely. This merit bears fruit whenever a trainee and the Buddha are one. We should make the Buddha our teacher and not follow wrong ways."

"Make the Buddha your teacher." That little phrase has many layers of meaning. If you're going to become a Buddhist, then you look to those examples which really point you to what this means, and we use Shakyamuni as an example in this way. However, since "Buddha" means "awakened mind," it also refers to your own deeper nature. More than anything else this is what "make the Buddha your teacher" means; be true to your own deeper nature. So "not following wrong ways" means don't get distracted. It means we should be wary of teachings that draw us away from the inherent enlightenment of our own minds. We should be wary of worshipping something external, something other.

THE THREE PURE PRECEPTS

Cease From Evil — Release All Self-Attachment. This is the house of all the ways of Buddha; this is the source of all the laws of Buddhahood.

Do Only Good — Take Selfless Action. The Dharma of the Samyaku Sambodai is the Dharma of all existence, never apart from the present moment.

Do Good For Others — Embrace All Things and Conditions. Leap beyond the holy and the unholy. Let us rescue ourselves together with all beings.

After taking refuge we come to the three pure precepts. “Cease from evil, release all self attachment. This is the house of all the ways of buddha, this is the source of all the laws of Buddha.” Cease from evil... this means to come back to zero, to let go, to just give it up. Cessation. To drop the struggle against this and that. It’s complete openhandedness. In fact, you just take the word “cease.” You don’t really need the “evil.” Just stop. This place of zero “... is the house of all the ways of Buddha. ... is the source of all the laws of Buddha.” When all the struggling of the small “I” comes to stop, you come to back to center. But it’s like a beginning, it’s the seed position.

“Do only good — take selfless action” When you drop your self attachment and then act, that’s doing good. Action arising from a place beyond self attachment is “selfless.” Sometimes if we just stop for a moment, drop any position or opinion, clarity arises. Then act.

“The Dharma of the samyaku sambodai is the dharma of all existence, never apart from the present moment.” “Samyaku sambodai” is the Japanese way of saying “anutara samyak sambodhi.” The Sanskrit means “unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment.” It’s a way of describing Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment which leaves nothing out. The dharma of this samyak sambodhi is the dharma of all existence. This means that this very moment of your life right now, in fact everything you do and experience, is part of anutara samyak sambodhi. But we don’t realize it until we awaken to it. We have a tendency to separate ourselves from this experience as beyond our mortal ken. We think it belongs to something “other,” to some great enlightened being very different from us. This statement says, no, just look at your life really clearly. THIS IS IT.

“Do good for others. Embrace all things and conditions. Leap beyond the holy and the unholy. Let us rescue ourselves together with all living beings.” There is a progression from cessation, where we step out of our habit energies and impulses, to learning to move unbound by them in some freedom. But always there will be some things that are

dangerous to get into, that could pull us into habit energy again. What this section is saying is that we should not become too attached to our own equanimity. There’s a point at which you should be able to move back into the messiness of life. Now we want to be careful, we don’t want to bite off more than we can chew. But we don’t turn our backs on the world. Instead we let it affect us, embracing it in our practice. That is doing good for others. In time we realize the whole universe is just our own mind. Everything that happens in this universe is mine to practice with, just like my own thoughts and impulses. When I treat it that way, my daily life is “doing good for others.” Shut nothing out, simply allow it to affect you, and say “yes” to affecting all things with your actions, and give up worrying too much about whether your actions meet some perfect standard. This is simply to be engaged in life to the best of our abilities. Sometimes what needs our attention turns out to be ourselves. There’s only so much we can do, and we should include ourselves in the formula.

Q/C: It seems to me that looking at the three pure precepts, you can take any one and you’re looking at all of them. When you cease from evil you are doing good. They’re all folded up together.

K: Yes, we shouldn’t underestimate the power of an action not taken, especially in habitual patterns. Just stopping, not doing one little thing can have an enormous impact. Cessation means just to accept things. But what often makes a difference is the next part: doing good. To take a step that is outside the pattern. Suddenly there’s the option of a totally new way of doing something. That’s what “doing good” is. Choose. Cease from the pattern. Do something new.

So much of the heart and sense of the precepts is in the commentary. “This is the house of all the ways of Buddha; this is the source of all the laws of Buddha.” This means coming back to center, taking refuge in the Buddha. “The Dharma of the Samyaku Sambodai is the Dharma of all existence, never apart from the present moment.” This means that your life today is the same as the Shakyamuni’s life. When Dogen writes “Our effort at practice should be like that of Shakyamuni when lifting his foot,” we have the startling realization that living our life is no different than Shakyamuni living his. “Leap beyond the holy and the unholy. Let us rescue ourselves together with all beings.” This is the reminder that you cannot cut anything off from practice; all events rise and fall within the mind of meditation. There isn’t anyplace other than right here, and there isn’t anything other than mind and practice.

Q/C: I can't see any difference between "Do only good" and "Do good for others." It seem like one includes the other and I don't understand why they're made into two precepts.

K: There is a progression. "Cease from evil" has to do with cessation, with halting action, halting habituated response. You arrive at non-action and come back to center. "Doing good" means to act from this place; you step out of your conditioning and act in a way informed by your centered mind. "Do good for others" means allowing the world to affect you; the suffering of the world becomes part of your own mind of zazen. It takes our practice to the Bodhisattva level, which is to hold the condition of the world in your own mind, to some degree. We can't do this all the time; it would kill us. But be open to it, accept it. We choose to stay engaged, and cultivating this choice is doing good for others. The choosing is the important part.

TEN GREAT PRECEPTS

Now we come to the Ten Grave Precepts, sometimes called the ten prohibitory precepts. These are "do not kill, do not steal," etc. Each prohibition is paired with an encouragement to positive action, sometimes called the "Clear Mind Precepts." This pairing goes back to the earliest expression of the ten precepts, found in the Pali Cannon and early Mahayana as the "ten wholesome actions" (kushalakarmapatha). Although many people are attracted most strongly by the positive statements, the "do-nots," or the prohibitive expressions, come first and cannot be ignored. They challenge us to look at where we might not be carrying out the precept. For example, if someone is raising animals for slaughter, and the precept says only "Cultivate and encourage life," that person can think that they are providing food for other people, taking care of their livestock, and participating in the great chain of life. But the same precept also says "Do not kill," and this makes it very hard to avoid looking at the hard fact of all those slaughtered beings. Consider both the prohibitive and the positive as you study the precepts.

The Soto Zen tradition expresses the precepts in the Kyojukaimon, where each precept includes two brief commentaries; the first attributed to Bodhidharma, the second to Dogen, with some variations by Keizan. The first comment has to do with absolute mind: "In the realm of the everlasting Dharma," "In the realm of the unattainable Dharma," and so on. These are comments about what the precepts mean in terms of absolute mind, which is rather like no-thought samadhi. In

this state, when you are in complete unity with your situation, no thought of killing, or of anything else, arises. The second comment on each precept has to do with harmonizing this absolute view with circumstances by means of action in this complex world.

When we work with the precepts by reading the Kyojukaimon in the morning, and then reflecting on the day in the evening, it is often a phrase from the commentary that begins to stand out as important. The Zen view is that we are naturally enlightened from the very start, and the mind is originally without barriers to Big Mind, universal truth. But because of karma and habit energy, we fall into patterns that obscure this from us. We lose site of it in the dust we kick up in our daily lives. Still, the natural mind of enlightenment is with us a good deal of the time, even if we are not aware of it, as fascinated as we often are by our own suffering. When we begin to practice, we may feel close to it sometimes. We may sit zazen in the morning, and feel calm, centered, and at peace with the world. We go about our day, into work and normal activity, then return home to sit zazen again only to find our minds a beehive of agitation, irritation, injury, and opinions. What happened? Where did it all come from? Drawing the day through the mind, recalling the events as best we can, we find "points of departure," moments when something is said or done that triggers karmic predisposition. We react in old learned ways, and from that comes the habit energy of reactivity. These are well rehearsed patterns of thinking and acting that come into play on cue, with old story lines for props, and big cans of emotional pigment to splash all over the place. As we draw these moments of departure to mind in recollection practice, we might also remember a line from the Kyojukaimon, and a glimmer of understanding appears.

Do Not Kill — Cultivate and Encourage Life

In the realm of the everlasting Dharma, holding no thought of killing is the Precept of Not Killing.

*The life of Buddha increases with life; no life can be cut off.
Continue the life of Buddha; do not kill Buddha.*

"In the realm of the everlasting Dharma..." With this phrase, Bodhidharma points past the ephemeral world, to the space through which all phenomena moves, arising and falling. When our own minds are completely clear and calm, we can be aware of this space. The thought of killing is what separates us from this awareness. Dogen's

comment in the second line, "... no life can be cut off. Continue the life of Buddha; do not kill Buddha," indicates the futility of killing in that no life can be cut off from original Buddha Nature. The thought of killing is utterly deluded in that it is a desire to cut off some part of the Buddha Body, which cannot be done. The thought only obscures our own awareness of this Buddha Body, so it is we ourselves who seemingly lose the life of Buddha.

In talking about this whole cycle of killing and eating that goes on, Robert Aitken says: "Animals and plants are mortal beings of the ordinary world, but they are also archetypes that enrich our process of maturing when we are children and populate our dreams when we are adults. This dream-time is the true world, traditional people tell us. As human animals we are nightmare figures in that dream-time for wolves and most other wild creatures." I love that description; it says we're part of this grand consciousness. We're part of their dreams and they're part of ours.

Q/C: You said that the precepts all refer back to each other. In thinking about "Do not kill," I realized that in trying to be present in a loving relationship, you can kill love as it arises in the moment with suspicion, with paranoia. You can kill creativity as it arises with jealousy or heartless criticism. It really is a constant thing.

Q/C: Maybe I'm oversimplifying, but it seems pretty simple. It's not a question of whether killing is good or bad, right or wrong. It simply is. That's what we do; it's part of our nature.

K: I like the Zuni customs performed after killing a deer. They hold its muzzle up to their face and inhale, then say a prayer to draw the life from the deer, honoring the life they've taken. Then they make a medicine bundle using specific parts of the animal to bury with honor on the spot. While life may be taken, it's not cut off. We may have to take a life to sustain our own; if we honor it, then I think we're doing the best we can with this precept. "No life can be cut off. I take this life to continue life."

Q/C: All the precepts are impossible to keep. You intend not to kill, but can you turn over every rock to see what's under it before you walk? You can't live and completely uphold the precept. "Do not kill" often seems to convey the meaning of all the precepts to me. They can all be summed up by "no-self" or "non-separation."

K: We're actually in interdependent relationship with everything, even the bacteria in our bodies. Antibodies are working against viruses; killing and eating are always occurring.

Q/C: If it's in the nature of animals to kill things, then what's the big deal? It eludes me why we make a monumental thing out of this. To get all bent out of shape because you happen to chop a worm in half while gardening — I guess I just don't understand it.

K: There comes a time when the meaning of the precepts is very powerful. It has to do with increasing your powers of empathy; as you drop your defenses to your own suffering and the suffering around you, your ability to really understand the suffering of something like a worm increases. This isn't necessarily a place to stay — fussing about every little microbe — because you end up paralyzed. But it is a virtue to be able to touch that place.

Part of the way Buddhism works is from the inside out. We can start with the immediate sensation "I don't want to die." The next feeling is "I don't want to kill my parents, my children, my brothers, my sisters." Then, "I don't want to kill my neighbors, my community." We keep increasing the meaning of what is "us." Then, if you take it further, you look into the eyes of a warm-blooded animal and perceive the suffering there. You have to harden yourself to cut its throat. Something really profound goes on internally. We keep the precept not so much for the absolute rule of not killing but because it opens us to empathy and connection. Our main concern is for our own spiritual sanity, and when we cultivate that, the whole cosmos benefits.

Do Not Steal — Honor the Gift Not Yet Given

In the realm of the unattainable Dharma, holding no thought of gain is the Precept of Not Stealing.

The self and the things of the world are just as they are; the mind and its object are one. The gateway to Enlightenment stands wide open.

Bodhidharma's comment on the "realm of the unattainable Dharma" points past gain and loss to original completeness. What could be gained or lost? Dogen's comment, "... the mind and its object are one. The gateway to Enlightenment stands open wide" eloquently depicts how we hold the whole universe in open hands. Grasping at this or that, we lose original completeness. All we need to do is open our hands.

Q/C: I've tried to keep this precept concretely. I work 40 hours a week, but my job is independent. Sometimes I might go home early or visit a friend, stuff like that; I find myself cutting corners. It's a high stress job, so I justify it all kinds of ways; "I skipped my break" and so on. A couple of days this week, I tried living by the letter of my contract, and it was fairly simple and brought a sense of satisfaction.

Q/C: You can steal without thinking about it much or you can steal while thinking about it quite a bit. What does being aware or not being aware have to do with it?

K: I think the crux of the precept is "The self and the things of this world are just as they are. The mind and its object are one." If we perceive an object as something we don't have and need to gain, then we're in opposition to that object. This precept is also worded "Do not take that which is not given," which is essentially the same as "Honor the gift not yet given." We can look at the basics, at what is specifically given, and then go further to what we understand to be given. A simple illustration of this is an office situation: can you make personal use of the copier there or not? Is it understood that a certain amount of personal use of the copier is acceptable?

Our connections with others can also be looked at in terms of what we understand to be given. Recently, on Gyokuko's and my day off, I made the tea and brought her breakfast. We were reading the paper, and when her cup was empty, she set it next to me. I saw the cup and felt connection and warmth; this is something I do for her — I make the tea and breakfast, and I always bring it to her. When I mentioned this to her, she told me that when she puts the cup down, it's because she knows what's "given" and the joy felt in that connection.

Q/C: How do you know what's given in situations that are unclear?

K: The teacup example is one of the few places that's really clear in my life. But one of my principles is to always give more than my share. If you take that as a principle, if a community takes that as a principle, the community will thrive. Abundance is everywhere and you cease begrudging what you give or comparing it to what others give.

Q/C: How do you give more than your share and not allow yourself to be taken advantage of? How do you say "no" without thought of gain?

K: I think it's always good to err on the side of trying too much. But there is a point when you know the most honest gift is a clear communication of "that's enough."

Q/C: Part of the thought of gain is the approval of others; if we act to get approval, we are acting for personal gain.

K: To invest someone else with our self esteem is to rob ourselves, and that's another form of stealing.

Q/C: I really like the phrase "Honor the gift not yet given." Isn't the idea to simply give with no expectation of getting anything back?

K: Robert Aitken writes, "Not stealing is contentment, no thought of obtaining. This starts much deeper in the mind than deciding to do without luxuries." That's very profound; in a way it doesn't matter what things are around you. To be content with what is there is not stealing.

Do Not Misuse Sexuality — Remain Faithful in Relationships

In the realm of the ungilded Dharma, not coveting or creating a veneer of attachment is the precept of not misusing sexuality. The three wheels are pure and clear. When there is nothing to desire, we follow the way of all Buddhas.

"In the realm of the ungilded Dharma," everything is plain and perfect as it is. "Creating a veneer of attachment" from one side is the projection of desire onto something that is only flesh and blood. From the other side, it is slick packaging and careful marketing. Things are rarely as advertised. Dogen's comment, "The Three Wheels are pure and clear" refers to the three aspects of any interaction. Sometimes it is listed as "giver, receiver, and gift," which refers to dana and turns up in our meal verses. Sometimes it is "actor, action, and that which is acted upon." In this formulation it speaks quite directly to sexual activity in which both partners are equally actor and acted upon. This is originally pure and clear. "When there is nothing to desire" refers to when we are complete in ourselves. Whether we are celibate monks or in a committed relationship, this applies equally. It is important to be faithful to one's vows.

Q/C: The phrase "creating a veneer of attachment" struck me as really odd — something very shallow, very thin.

Q/C: I was also taken by the word "veneer," but it didn't strike me as a weak word at all. We have veneer furniture, and veneer is a layer of something bonded onto another material. It occurs to me that a sexual relationship gone awry, perhaps one that's been abusive as in the case

with my father, is a relationship where the veneer is very important. What I experienced as sexuality for many years was only that veneer of control and power and attachment. For many years, even in my adult life, I was confused as to what sexuality actually was; my only experience was with this veneer.

Q/C: Veneer caught my attention more than anything else, too. To me, veneer is not the real thing. It's the covering.

K: For me, veneer is like projection. We project a desire of what someone is to us onto them. Sometimes we try to put on something for the sake of someone else, to "bait" them. Even a master/disciple relationship can be like this; we can be drawn into practice like this.

We are drawn toward risk, somehow compelled to connect and drop our defenses and be seen. Every aspect of sex — physical, emotional, and psychological — can be seen in terms of this vulnerability. The sex act itself is most compelling when there is complete surrender, a collapse of people into each other. There is something very spiritual about this and the fact that procreation can issue from it. With complete surrender, separation of self dies and life comes from that.

Something this compelling should be celebrated, but all too often it is misused, abused and confused. So that's why we have this precept and why we trip over it so much. It's also why some people get upset about the fact that there are precepts concerning it at all.

Q/C: This view could be seen as homophobic; we routinely see sexual desire arise completely outside the realm of procreation. And people can also get incredibly attached to procreation; sometimes there's more attachment to that than to anything else. Sex can be seen as symbolic of samsara — love and sex can have hell realms and god realms, and we're here trying to make it work on the human plane.

Q/C: When I think of sex, I think of it as something very intense, exciting, mood altering. You can develop a compulsion for that high having nothing to do with intimacy or caring for another person. Perhaps that's where a lot of suffering happens around sex. I have a version of the precepts at home that says "no secret fulfillment." Sometimes with sex you're seeking this fulfillment which is gone in a flash. You have to repeat it again and again.

Q/C: Fantasy can also be a big problem in sex. It gets a lot started and relates to what is meant by veneer.

K: Misusing sex has a lot to do with sincerity, or the lack of it, and how honestly you engage life. I don't mean engage sex, I mean engage life, engage the whole of it.

Q/C: Then there are the words "not coveting." I expand them beyond just the sexual aspect.

K: You get to where sex, sexuality, the veneer of attachment all become metaphors for lots of different things. The precepts are all connected; the way we desire and seek sexual fulfillment is similar to the way we desire and seek meditation and enlightenment experiences.

Q/C: For me, this is not so much about possessing someone's body but possessing someone's love or who they are. This is a misuse of sexuality — trying to possess a person. Like walking through a park and loving a flower so much that you pick it instead of seeing it and smelling it and walking on.

K: That is really the essence, this feeling that you need to complete yourself through someone else. Taking the flower is a good analogy, although sometimes we do pick flowers.

Do Not Speak Dishonestly — Communicate Truthfully

In the realm of the inexplicable Dharma, putting forth not one word is the precept of not speaking dishonestly.

The Dharma wheel turns from the beginning. There is neither surplus nor lack. The sweet dew covers the earth and within it lies the truth.

You should understand that "In the realm of the inexplicable Dharma" refers to the place where nothing can be said. This is rather like "no thought samadhi." Nothing arises in that space, so here "putting forth not one word" is the only way of "not speaking dishonestly." I really appreciate Dogen's addition about there being neither surplus nor lack. Roshi Kennett's translation of that line was a little different. She had it as "The Wheel of the Dharma rolls constantly and lacks for nothing yet needs something." I found that intriguing, as it suggests that, although nothing is lacking, we still need to say something. Silence is perfect as it is, yet does not meet every need, so we must, after all, come forward.

Dharma as the sweet dew, or truth, covering everything is like the rain falling equally on the just and the unjust; the sweet dew of the Dharma covers everything, with nothing is excluded.

Q/C: I am really perplexed by both comments to this precept. “Putting forth not one word” implies there’s something implicit in language that is dishonest in itself. So I practiced a bit with how language encodes our reality, but then I had a talk with my daughter that was truthful, succinct and to the point. I couldn’t put that together with this little mystery here.

K: I would suggest that your work with the precept was very helpful preparation for that talk being so succinct and real. Bodhidharma’s comment about putting forth not one word relates the precept to the absolute; the realm of the inexplicable Dharma means Dharma beyond words. As soon as you speak, you’re in the realm of the conditioned or relative. One can inform the other, which is why we sit zazen.

Q/C: Bodhidharma’s “putting forth not one word” and Dogen’s “there is neither surplus nor lack” seem directly connected. It’s as if there’s no way to speak dishonestly; the truth exists regardless of what we say or do. You can’t affect the truth — you can’t change it.

K: Yes. One aspect of the precepts is that they plunk us right in the midst of paradox. You cannot explain “it,” you can only express to the best of your ability where you’re coming from at a particular moment. That’s why intention is so important; you cannot affect absolute truth, but you can make conscious effort to put yourself in harmony with it moment to moment.

Q/C: Putting forth words implies you’re trying to do something all the time; putting forth not one word could mean to just be or let be.

Q/C: “Putting forth not one word” is a way of saying don’t be attached to words. Don’t think words can explain things. That’s not to say don’t talk; we live with words and you can’t get around that. Dogen’s comment that “there is neither surplus nor lack” could be seen as acknowledging that we can speak without being attached to what we are saying.

Do Not Become Intoxicated — Polish Clarity, Dispel Delusion

In the realm of the intrinsically pure Dharma, not harboring delusions is the precept of not becoming intoxicated.

We are naturally pure; there is nothing to be deluded about. This is enlightenment itself. Understand this truly, and no intoxicants can be taken in.

It is wonderful how this precept connects intoxication with delusion, because both involve clouding over the naturally clear mind. Buddhist texts sometimes refer to “the wine of delusion,” because we become intoxicated with our own opinions. “There is nothing to be deluded about” point to spacious mind where not one thing arises. How can there be delusion about that? Dropping all opinions we can see it clearly. Intoxication with wine is really no different. It is choosing confusion over clarity.

Q/C: I had trouble identifying what intoxicants are; they are surely more than drugs and alcohol. I think an intoxicant is anything that reduces clarity, and things like television come to mind. Driving home, I wondered if having the radio on was keeping me from the actual experience of driving home. So I turned the radio off and in no time at all, I had some old monkey song in my head. If I get rid of that, something else takes its place. It really makes me wonder what should be there.

Q/C: Intoxicants are anything, internal or external, which take you out of the present moment. You can go through a process of stripping away the more obvious stuff — alcohol, drugs, television and a multitude of other ways to distract ourselves. Then you get into all your own internal stuff. It’s an ongoing challenge to just stay present. Very difficult.

Q/C: Technology is another way of distracting ourselves from the moment. The only trouble is, if we manage to get to the moment, we don’t know what to do with it because we’re so used to being distracted. We don’t know how to nurture ourselves in a natural way. We use technology to take ourselves away from stillness.

Gyokuko: You can get just as intoxicated on pure, organic, natural stuff. You can chew a leaf and be out of your head in no time. The precept is not just pointing at things that take us out of the moment but the way we use things, grasp at them, in order to forget.

Q/C: Can even thought itself can be intoxicating?

G: Absolutely.

K: In fact, that was my primary intoxicant — opinions. Delusions. “Not harboring delusions is the precept of not becoming intoxicated.” I was, I am, a delusion type, an idealist. Idealists tend to hang on to their belief that things have to be a certain way. Attachment to opinion, to thoughts of how things should be, was my intoxication. Some people

love to build castles in the air, castles of theory and speculation because it's less painful than being aware.

Q/C: It seems that as we experience non-deluded moments, we lose interest in delusion. The urge to experience intoxication lessens as we experience non-intoxication.

K: You can also become attached to and deluded about clarity, trying to hold everything else, everything messy and difficult, at a distance. "There's nothing to be deluded about. This is enlightenment itself." And yet, we get all entangled in the things of this world.

Q/C: Sometimes my ten-year-old son spins one way like crazy, then the other way, then stops. He's high. It's a natural thing to get a break from our normal feelings sometimes.

K: This comes right back to what being intoxicated means, which is being attached and confused and choosing to pollute consciousness as a way to avoid the truth.

Q/C: I'm a very hopeful person and always looking for how things are going to get better. When I re-read the journals I've written, I realize I'm very focused on the future. It's a struggle to face each day and not always be invested in the future — to say, "I want to live this day so that I am satisfied with it. I want to live this day and not miss it because of trying to get somewhere else."

K: Planning and thinking about the future is your intoxicant, your way to be off somewhere else. That's the nice thing about the habit of meditation; there's nothing there but you and the wall and the cushion. You can get into some pretty spacey places there too, but if you cultivate the body memory of being centered right here and now, you'll come back to it. It arises more and more naturally.

Do Not Dwell on Past Mistakes — Create Wisdom from Ignorance

In the realm of the flawless Dharma, not expounding upon error is the precept of not dwelling on past mistakes.

In the Buddha Dharma there is one path, one Dharma, one realization, one practice. Do not engage in fault-finding. Do not condone haphazard talk.

"Not expounding upon error" is a key phrase in the commentary. Reflecting upon error, noticing it, or even pointing out an error can

be simple and straightforward. "Expounding" here means to dwell excessively, or obsess about past mistakes, with lots of blame attached. It is interesting in that one's own mistakes as well as those of others are covered equally here. "In the realm of the flawless Dharma" the mind can see the actions of the many beings as simply movement. Dogen's admonition to avoid fault-finding goes on to say we should not condone haphazard talk. This refers to gossip, which we can condone simply by listening to it without comment. It rather puts our feet to the fire.

Q/C: I think about my own self-blame and self-criticism and letting go of that self-criticism along with the idea it will make me a better person. My job often involves cleaning up messes that others have left behind; I could easily dwell on their past mistakes. But dwelling on others' past mistakes or on my own are all part of me needing to feel like a good person.

K: In the Buddhist view, the self lasts for only a thought-moment, so dwelling on past mistakes is always about somebody who existed in the past. We inherit and judge the karmic stream of the "past being" of the previous moment, and we call this "our mistakes," and "criticizing ourselves," but it can be seen as simply "dwelling on past mistakes."

Q/C: I love the part "create wisdom from ignorance." When we get hung up on our past mistakes, here's a wonderful opportunity to take ignorance and blame into this moment and create something new.

K: Ignorance is the key to the chain of suffering. Ignorance is a very particular thing — non-awareness of the truth of no-self. This non-awareness is what propels the wheel of rebirth. "Create wisdom from ignorance" is really profound.

G: Most Zen Centers word this precept something like "Do not speak against others." And some centers take this very literally, feeling they cannot even discuss obvious mistakes being made in the Sangha or in the teacher-student relationship — that to talk about problems means speaking against others. For us, this comes up when priests or teachers make serious mistakes. My feeling, and the feeling of several other teachers, is that we have an obligation to speak carefully about a mistake being made. We need to be able to protect students; we need to set standards for what is appropriate behavior among teachers. We can't do that from an absolute realm; we may have to be ready to reveal some ugly truths, but we don't have to say them in an ugly way. We

don't have to get attached to our own position or think of ourselves as separate from those making the mistakes.

Q/C: Some commentary on this precept includes the phrase “Do not allow another to make a mistake in Buddhism.” This isn't just the idea that we should expound on error, it's about not compounding error by passive behavior, colluding with it, as it were.

K: Passively allowing misbehavior is, indeed, a kind of collusion. In discussing this precept, the Zen Roshi Robert Aitken speaks of silence, saying there's a silence that underlies very truthful speaking. “When we don't hear the silence within someone's communication, it makes us wonder. Something is hidden. Something is not real.” He goes on to say, “The ephemeral world is made of relative elements. High and low, light and dark, loud and quiet. The sixth precept shows us how we can find intimacy within this world. The silent mind intuitively and truly, ‘She has an awful temper,’ or ‘He is thoughtless of his friends,’ can be experienced as basic information, free of moral judgment and on a par with ‘Her hair is brown,’ or ‘He has big feet.’ On the other hand, fault-finding, discussing the faults of others, are acts of rejection... Dogen Zenji said, ‘In the Buddhadharma there is one path, one Dharma, one realization, one practice. Don't permit fault-finding. Don't permit haphazard talk.’

“Dogen insists we must be single-minded. The fabric of Buddha's sangha is as fragile as the intention of a single member. One person can create havoc in the group by malicious or haphazard talk. Intent is critical here: without judgment, we can say things that are hard to hear but nonetheless helpful, or we can fortify barriers between self and other by fault-finding and rejection.”

Do Not Praise Self or Blame Others — Maintain Modesty, Extol Virtue

In the realm of the equitable Dharma, not dwelling on I versus You is the precept of not praising self or blaming others.

Buddhas and Dharma Ancestors realize the empty sky and the great earth. When they manifest the noble body, there is neither inside nor outside in emptiness. When they manifest the Dharma body, not even a speck of dust is seen on the ground.

“I versus you.” The self of yesterday or even one minute ago is “other.” We are reborn moment by moment, so even when we blame ourselves,

it is a previous self being blamed by a present self, which is also “I versus you.” Dropping this distinction we find the meaning of no-self. “When they manifest the noble body, there is neither inside nor outside in emptiness... not even a speck of dust is seen upon the ground.”

Q/C: I find this one difficult. Saying almost anything about anyone can somehow break this precept. Being up front in pointing out problems to somebody seems to break the precept.

K: Sometimes it's as if you can't breathe without breaking these precepts. We need to look at the precepts so closely that we become totally ensnared in them; that's vital for finding the spirit of stepping through them.

Q/C: As I open to the precepts, I repeatedly find how I break them in so many subtle ways, and how they're so interrelated that you often have to choose one over another. It's easy to say you're going to give up gossip, but if you go deeper, you see so many layers of “I versus You” in daily life. It's unending.

K: It's very important to realize clearly we cannot break one precept without breaking them all. But then, at another level, we see that in order to keep one precept truly, we have to break another one explicitly. To try to understand which precept applies in the present moment is one of the great koans.

Q/C: If somebody's gossiping to me and I don't want to participate, not participating can bring a separation: “I'm not going to do what you're doing.”

K: When in small groups or one-on-one, I like the aikido technique: When someone is coming at you, join their motion and say, “Oh, where are we going?” In the process, you turn and redirect the energy. If you sympathize with the feeling they're having, connect with that you can say, “But do you know what I think sometimes?” Then you turn it. It's important to take one or two steps with the person so that you're not putting yourself in opposition. Sometimes this is very difficult. There are times when the habit of negative speech is too strong, and the best thing to do is say, “I just don't want to participate.”

Q/C: That statement can make people really angry and have a powerful effect. There is often immediate hostility, but the statement can have tremendous reverberations beyond the immediate moment.

Q/C: I struggle with this precept a great deal. We don't want to maliciously gossip or talk in a way that blames somebody, but we find ourselves in circumstances sometimes where we have to say: "You screwed up," or "You're doing something wrong here." Occasionally I find that people won't listen until I say: "LOOK, YOU MEATHEAD, YOU'RE NOT CATCHING ON." This is my conflict; to get their attention, I'm using a two-by-four.

K: You might try visualizing a two-by-four, then make gassho before you pick it up, and make gassho when you put it down, so that you are aware of both using it and putting it down. I'm completely serious.

Q/C: It seems that the key word is blame: YOU did this and YOU screwed up.

K: Try taking the "you" out of it. Say instead, "This action has this consequence," or "When you do this, then such-and-such ensues." When my little niece was visiting, I told her clearly not to whack me with her little alligator. But it wasn't until I grabbed her hand rather forcefully and said "No" that she stopped. Eventually she got up and walked away, but we were still friends. To be generous enough to express how you feel about something in the most honest way you can is sometimes the best gift.

Do Not Be Mean with Dharma or Wealth — Share Understanding, Give Freely of Self

In the genuine, all-pervading Dharma, being jealous of nothing is the precept of not being mean with Dharma or wealth.

One phrase, one verse — that is the ten thousand things and one hundred grasses; one Dharma, one realization — that is all Buddhas and Dharma ancestors. From the beginning, not one thing has been begrudged.

"In the genuine, all-pervading Dharma" indicates there can be no lack. "One phrase, one verse" refers to giving just a phrase or a verse. Dogen says this is the same as "the ten thousand things," which means that grand gestures are rarely necessary. "From the beginning, not one thing as been begrudged" corresponds to "all-pervading." One indicates no lack throughout space, the other throughout time.

Q/C: This one puzzles me in terms of not proselytizing but also not withholding. This week I found myself in conversation with a friend who thinks she knows a lot about Buddhism and was expounding on

what Buddhism really is. I was in the position of disagreeing with her notions but trying not to get up on the lectern at the same time. I'm still puzzling over how to respond.

K: This is a beginning level of mondo you're having with her.

Q/C: I'm struggling with how to offer the Dharma in a way acceptable to her. To find the single word, the single phrase — neither of which have to use words like Buddhism or Dharma at all. To find the word that conveys the truth in a way acceptable to that person. I haven't solved this.

K: When we speak of the "one hundred grasses," remember that "grasses" is an image with multiple uses in the Buddhadharma and in Zen tradition. One meaning is the confusion of the world, but it also means the multiplicity of the world, all growing from one thing.

Q/C: I thought it meant the Dharma appearing in all things.

K: Yes, that's right. But this is a particularly Zen twist on it, because the traditional meaning for the hundred grasses — sometimes called the weeds and grasses — is getting lost in the brambles, the myriad things. Zen turns this upside down, so it also means "myriad manifestations of the Dharma."

Q/C: There are people I've known for years who don't know I'm a Buddhist. I don't want to retire from it too much; perhaps I should step forward, but this precept sometimes holds me back from speaking in Buddhist terms. I feel the Dharma is so much larger than Buddhism. As soon as I reduce it to Buddhist terms, some people can't hear it. My great-aunt thinks Buddhism is a mind-washing cult. I can't talk to her about Buddhism, but that doesn't mean I can't talk to her about Dharma. So I find that sometimes I avoid identifying myself as a Buddhist.

Q/C: I'm in the same boat. I have friends who are fundamentalists and conservatives. Should I push being Buddhist when it would cause problems? Maybe I'm being a coward, being untrue.

K: There is prohibition in Buddhism against proselytizing, yet we also have the precept about not being mean with Dharma or wealth. Sometimes it's easier to say, "You know, there's a Native American tradition that does such and such. . ." You can do the same with Buddhism: "There's an old Zen tradition. . ." and so on.

Q/C: I understand the ideal of not trying to preach and convert, but I also feel it's important to say what I'm about and what I'm doing. People ask me, "What have you been up to lately?" Well, for the past year, I've been involved here and it's one of the biggest things happening in my life. To some degree, you just have to put it out there and let the reaction be what it will be.

Q/C: I'm not saying I won't tell people what religion I am if they ask. But today, I wrote a letter to somebody who asked me for professional advice. My letter was filled with advice and wisdom I've gained from Buddhism. I didn't have to say where it all came from; I just gave the wisdom I had to give. If people aren't asking, that's where I hesitate. Kyogen likes to say, "Err on the side of action," but there are times when, being a very active person, it's good for me to err on the side of hesitation.

K: "In the genuine, all-pervading Dharma, being jealous of nothing is the precept of not being mean with Dharma or wealth." How does this strike people?

Q/C: Jealousy seems to come from a feeling of want or privation. If you're in a wanting state, it's difficult to share. I am aware of the dilemma of being jealous of somebody having more truth than me.

K: How about that last phrase: "From the beginning, not one thing has been begrudged."

Q/C: It tells me that everything I need is available. It's all right there, all I've got to do is look for it.

K: There are tremendous resources at all times. The Dharma, as well as wealth, is flowing all the time.

Q/C: But it's also true that not everything needed is there all the time. The truth is that you don't have everything you need and that a lot of people in this universe do not.

K: Very true, and it's true that people don't realize there is nothing to begrudge. But this precept is pointing to the place beneath the need. I think you're saying that this teaching doesn't do a starving child any good, and what you say about need is true on a relative level. But if a child is dying in your arms, what do you want to convey to that child at that moment? You can connect to the child in a place where the precept is true, and this can be very helpful and make a real difference.

Q/C: This is *gassho* — bowing to circumstances. You've come to the point where the child is going to die; you're at the executioner's block and about to be killed; you're falling off the cliff, you might as well eat the strawberry. But in a situation where you still have a choice, is it any different?

K: Yes and no. If you can touch this place where the precept is true, then you can take an action. You do the best you can.

Q/C: What of the child who's not being held? The held child is confirmed in its loveliness and its humanity. The child not being held is what I wrestle with — the child who has to look within its own self and decide that nothing is begrudged.

K: There's a tendency to think that once the child dies, the game is over and lost. That's not true. You can go to sleep one night in total despair, and it's the death of that life moment. That child dies, unheld. What will you do tomorrow? Tomorrow, you pick up that karma; there really is no separation in time and space. Time and space exist, but it is an illusion that they divide or separate. So, you can hold a child that died unheld a hundred years ago.

Q/C: I'm reminded of a passage in *The Brothers Karamozov* where the old monk is going to die and he's talking to his young student. Essentially, the monk tells the student he won't get anywhere until he's accepted responsibility for everything.

K: Bummer, huh? It's either a bummer or suddenly it's just wonderful. This suffering world is our joy. There's a saying that the world of samsara becomes the Bodhisattva's playground; it's a pretty poignant playground, but it is a beautiful place.

Q/C: We always have a choice. Even if our body is forced into a place we don't want to go — the executioner's block — we still have a choice. We have volition, we have consciousness. We are never deprived of choice. That's what this precept is saying. There is always room in which to be generous to others and to ourselves.

Do Not Indulge Anger — Cultivate Equanimity

In the realm of the selfless Dharma, not contriving reality for the self is the precept of not indulging anger.

Not advancing, not retreating, not real, not empty. There is a brilliant sea of clouds. There is a dignified sea of clouds.

“Not contriving reality for the self.” What a potent phrase. Having anger, or feeling anger is quite different from indulging anger. We used to translate this precept as “Do not be angry.” I rather liked that, as it points to a self defined by anger. “Contriving reality for the self” is the work we do to justify our anger, and solidifies “I versus you.”

Q/C: Kyogen, can you explain the last two sentences in the commentary?

K: Nope. I think it’s enough to have the sense of them. They are very informing.

Q/C: I like it. “There is a brilliant sea of clouds,” and it’s up to me to find my way into that brilliant sea of clouds.

Q/C: This is a big one for me. I feel anger over all sorts of things, over a contrived reality. The sea of clouds is just the real thing. My anger is not based on anything. Sometimes I see that, and sometimes the anger comes up and it really looks real. I don’t see the sea of clouds at all.

K: We have karmic predispositions that cause responses to arise. Allowing them to arise and fall without getting caught in them is how we get out of the habit of generating stuff over and over. “Emptiness” doesn’t mean that things don’t exist; it means they have no permanent self-nature, they are a sea of clouds. Anger exists, but in reality it is baseless and empty. The key to this precept is “not contriving reality for the self.” When we let go of that, we find our dignity, and the ephemeral world is a brilliant sea of clouds. In contriving reality for the self, everything becomes hard and abrasive.

Anger can arise at a subtle level where it informs us very clearly about our own habit energy, or about the truth of what is in front of us. Again, we need to focus on not contriving reality for the self. The problem arises when we define and justify a “self.”

Q/C: After last week’s precept class, while bicycling home from work, I went through a red light, as I often do. A guy rode up next to me and said, “What are you doing? You went through a red light! You give all bicyclists a bad name. You’re terrible, a danger! Who do you think you are?” I was in a daze. I didn’t know what to do, so I uttered an obscenity. He uttered one back at me. We went on towards the Burnside Bridge, and I laughed because we sounded like my two sons often do — the way they let off tension without coming to blows. We got to the end of the bridge; he went one way and I went another, and I gave him

an obscene gesture. I’m not like that — I usually don’t even raise my voice. I thought, “Well, right after the first class on the precepts, I’m obnoxious, rude, verbally violent. How about that?”

K: Once you make an aspiration or commitment, an opposite and equal resistance arises. Nothing like being ordained to suddenly find yourself absolutely determined to go hog wild.

Q/C: You’re not the first person to pick a fight after Wednesday night class. Guilty, guilty, guilty. It’s like the flower opens, then the flower starts to close, and we really have to be conscious of that resistance and closure within ourselves.

K: Once you notice a certain karmic pattern and action, that pattern’s days are numbered. This is true, though it may take twenty-three lifetimes!

Q/C: I’m recalling what you said about making gassho before picking up the two-by-four and after putting it down. Saying you’re not going to be angry or indulge your anger doesn’t mean you aren’t going to bark at somebody sometimes.

Q/C: I guess there are situations where anger is pure. I think one of those occurred for me this week; I was in the right with my anger and I think the people on the other end of it were rightly informed, but I still didn’t feel good later. They may have learned and gained from it, but it was still bad for me on some level. I developed some karma from the situation, I know it. Even if I was “right.”

Q/C: I’ve found this precept to be a wonderful antidote to anger. I watched my own anger a lot this week, and as I saw my anger come up, I thought about not contriving reality for the self. I noticed that I was getting angry because I perceived there was a “me” who was going to be hurt or whose reputation was in some kind of danger. When I saw it in those terms, that I’d created an artificial reality for my own self, I was able to let the anger subside. I no longer had such a strong entity to defend.

Do Not Defame the Three Treasures

In the realm of the One, holding no concept of ordinary beings and sages is the precept of not defaming the Three Treasures.

To do something by ourselves, without copying others, is to become an example to the world, and the merit of this becomes the

*source of all wisdom. Criticize nothing; accept everything.
Respect The Buddha Unfold The Dharma Nourish The Sangha.*

This last precept is one of the most important. If we put sages in a place above and separate from ordinary beings, we cut the Buddha Body in two. This is true regardless of the camp to which we assign ourselves. To do something by ourselves, without copying others, means that we shouldn't just mimic what we think the precepts are telling us to do. Instead we have to be deeply authentic, be ourselves completely, nothing more or less. Being ourselves is something no one else can do. It's our one clear purpose on this earth. If we don't do it, something is missing, and this defames the Three Treasures.

Q/C: When I first started studying Buddhism, it meant so much to me to read “do something by yourself, without copying others.” I puzzled over this precept for two years. Recently, I went through a period of rather severe depression. When something happened that broke me out of it and turned me around, I saw that I'd been totally critical of everything I'd done and been. When I turned and faced my fear, which I'd been running from for twenty-five years, I went into acceptance. With acceptance came an opening and space where I could see how things really were, not just see what was wrong.

Q/C: I criticize a lot; I'm especially critical of myself and my health. In accepting myself, I've changed how I live and how I see everything else. Every day, I keep reminding myself of that, and it really helps.

K: Dogen says that to really establish practice, turn the stream of compassion within. That accepting mind becomes real when it includes ourselves, when we can accept our own shortcomings in a gentle, tolerant way. Otherwise, there's something not quite authentic. Being harder on ourselves than we are on others is somewhat condescending. Once compassion is self-based also, then it can truly extend. Compassionate acceptance is truly authentic when we are able to embrace others in the same way we embrace ourselves.

Q/C: I read Dogen's words in terms of the teacher-disciple relationship and what that means to me these days — to teach and be taught without seeking affirmation from the teacher. To find affirmation within the relationship of give and take. To do something by yourself, yet still be in the relationship and still be engaged in the give and take of daily life.

Dogen also says, “When we wish to teach and enlighten all things by ourselves, we are deluded; when all things teach and enlighten us, we

are enlightened.” To do something by ourselves without copying others is the heart of what he's saying here — to be taught by all things.

K: Another wording for this precept says “Do Not Abuse The Three Treasures.” This didn't resonate with me right away, but it did when I thought about how the inner critic becomes officious. We take the precepts to heart, then the inner critic turns them all into exacting standards of behavior. To do something by yourself means you cannot just follow the letter of the law. You cannot rely on an exact or preconceived idea of what right action is — you cannot even copy yourself.

Q/C: What is the difference between “holding no concept of ordinary beings and sages” and the phrase “raising no concept . . .” which is used in other translations?

K: “Holding” here is the same as “having,” so both expressions point to complete unity of mind and object, where judgments don't arise. I like “holding no concept” because it hints that even when the concept arises, we can let it go, and we are immediately in the place where no such concept arises. When I had my pivotal experience at the monastery, I was sitting with Roshi Kennett in the dining room. I was in a state of abject hopelessness — really at the end of my tether. Then it just flipped over, all the bones in my body seemed to melt, and I slipped under the table. And while I lay there, joy bubbling through me, I heard Roshi recite the meal gatha. I remember thinking how utterly unnecessary that was, just extra words that just didn't need to be there. Then I realized, of course, that's why we do it. The minute we have the thought that it isn't necessary, we are entangled in emptiness. “Raising no concept” means that even in the place where all these things are unnecessary, recognize that every breath, every moment, also partakes of this complex relative world.

The master/disciple relationship also demonstrates “raising no concept.” When we first enter this relationship, there is such a high expectation of what the teacher's going to do or be. Chögyam Trungpa says that one of the first things to happen in this relationship is profound disappointment. This is very important — grappling with the ordinary and extraordinary aspects of the relationship. There is a point where the teacher becomes the obstacle, becomes everything but what you want. “How can this person be the teacher?” So the idea of ordinary beings and sages is something we do get entangled in.

There comes a point where we just drop that and see this person in a really clear-eyed way — as both teacher and ordinary being. That's one part of the relationship. The second part is taking the seat when it is our turn to do so — to be able to be in the senior position without attaching to ordinary beings and sages. Once again, the absolute and relative interpenetrate. You take the position of senior and use it correctly, without hesitation, and know there is no difference between ordinary beings and sages.

Q/C: How does that relate to not defaming the Three Treasures?

K: Because Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha appear to be cut off from ordinary beings when they are seen as either “higher” or “lower” entities, and this is not truthful. So not defaming the Three Treasures means do not slander them by treating them as something they are not. On another note, sometimes you might be really angry at Buddha: “Damn you for making it so clear I've got no way out of this!” Be in a clear and truthful relationship to Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha — even when you're pissed at them. Then the connection is real and truthful, the relationship is authentic, and this is not defaming or abusing the Three Treasures.

One sign of taking the precepts seriously is getting entangled in them. When we get mixed up and confused, we are definitely engaged with them. A point comes where we drop below a specific precept, a specific action or nonaction, and return to the Three Pure Precepts; drop the self; act from selflessness; embrace all things and conditions. When that happens the precepts become like bells. Then, when awareness of a precept arises in the moment, it is a reminding bell — a mnemonic device instead of an obstacle. It reminds us to drop the self, go into selflessness, act from selflessness. At this point the precepts become amazingly beautiful.

Q/C: This precept moves me because it is an acknowledgment that there are no priests who will do it for me. Who is going to dedicate my day except me? Denial of this is also a kind of defamation.

K: Here's a bit of what Robert Aitken says on this precept: “Taking refuge in the Three Treasures is like Jui-yen calling to his master. Every day Jui-yen called to himself, ‘Master,’ and he replied ‘Yes.’ ‘Be alert!’ ‘Yes, I will.’ ‘Do not be deceived by others!’ ‘No, I won't.”

Aitken goes on, “This case is sometimes misunderstood as simple self-correction, as someone at the end of the day might reflect on their

mistakes and resolve to do better. Such meditation is fine, but it is not Jui-yen's practice. He is receiving, maintaining, and presenting the Three Treasures. He is saying in three ways, ‘I come back home.’

“Jui-yen was, however, explicitly not repeating ‘Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha’ and was warning himself not to be dependent on anything or anybody. Thus his words are vows that go deeper than any formal promise at the temple. The ‘don't know mind’ that underlies and infuses the Three Treasures keeps Jui-yen inspired and straight. In fact, there is a risk of defaming the Three Treasures by taking refuge in them. As Wu-men said, ‘If you just utter the name “Buddha,” you should rinse out your mouth for three days. If you are such a fellow, and you hear someone say, “This very mind is Buddha,” you will cover your ears and run from the room.’

“Chao-chou addressed the assembly and said: ‘I do not like to hear the word Buddha.’ A monk then asked, ‘How does your reverence teach others?’ Chao-chou said: ‘Buddha, Buddha.’

“We know Bodhidharma only as an enlightened old man, but he too practiced hard all his life, we can be sure. He could not express wisdom in his youth the way he did after he arrived in China. We share Bodhidharma's youthful tribulations in our own immature years, and take inspiration from his great mature teaching. Be careful. Old man Bodhidharma must not be allowed to get the upper hand. There is no ordinary being or sage. No leader and follower. No Roshi and student. Not defaming the Three Treasures is a matter of finding them in your heart-mind.”

That which is clung to is not Buddha, just as you cannot cling to non-attachment. What you cling to is the memory of an experience you once had. Once you attach to it, it is not non-attachment.

Respect The Buddha — Unfold The Dharma — Nourish The Sangha

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 and 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.

These sixteen Precepts are roughly thus. To be obedient to their teaching, accept them with bows.

Q/C: “All things become Buddhas.” Does that mean everything becomes your teacher, or does it mean more than that?

K: Once, at the monastery, I was struggling with the schedule and was assigned to do a meditation by myself at the Kanzeon shrine, which was in a little stone hut. It was summer and very hot and stuffy in there, and the sweat would roll down my clothes. Due to the flies I closed the door to the shrine, despite the heat, but someone would come along and kindly open it. The flies would come in and crawl all over me, which was worse than the heat. I was grappling with this one day, and as I left the shrine, the doorknob caught my shirt and tore it. In that instant, it was as if Kanzeon reached out and grabbed me by the arm, pulled me up short, and asked, “What is it that matters, right now?” At that moment, the doorknob became a teacher, a Buddha.

But a deeper meaning of “All things become Buddhas” is in the word “become,” which is the process of awakening to the reality of Mind itself. This Mind is not different from wooden posts, rocks, and lanterns. It’s not that they are transformed into Buddhas, but that we realize they are, essentially, Buddha Mind itself.

Physicists have determined that some minute nanosecond after what they presume was the big bang, the whole universe expanded to the size of an orange. That undifferentiated space contained all the matter in this room, all the beings here and in this world, all the other planets, solar systems, and galaxies were contained in that undifferentiated space the size of an orange. The universe unfolding, this process, has given birth to everything that exists, including wooden posts, rocks, lanterns, and the minds of physicists and sages. This universe, this process, is Buddha, awakened mind. When we become aware of this mind, when we awaken, “All things become Buddhas.” “From these precepts comes forth such a wind and fire that all are driven into enlightenment when the flames are fanned by the Buddha’s influence.”