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HOW TO OBSERVE PRECEPTS
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This morning I want to talk about Zen—Zen precepts. As you know, precepts is not—real meaning of precepts is not just rules. It is rather our way of our life. When we, you know, organize our life, there you see something like rules, you know. Even though you are not intending to observe some particular rule, but there you see some rules.

As soon as you get up, you know, to wake you completely up, you wash your face, you know. That is our precepts—one of the precepts. And at a certain time you eat breakfast, when you become hungry. That is, you know—it looks like you are observing some rules to eat breakfast at some certain time. But it is actually the way of life you follow or you are doing, you know, naturally in that way. So if you practice zazen, you know, there is some rules in your practice. So zazen practice is, at the same time, precepts—one of the precepts. So zazen and precept, if you really understand how we—how Buddhist get the idea of precepts, you will understand the relationship between Zen and precept. The precept is just the way of life.

As a Zen students, we rather, you know, put emphasis on our everyday practice, including zazen practice. But when you think about how to, you know, cope with the problem you have in your everyday life, you will realize how important it is to practice zazen. The only power of practice will help you in its true sense.

For an instance, you know, when you hit *mokugyō* [laughs], if you try to, you know, control chanting, you know [laughs], by here: "Please face this way," you know. "Oh, that is too fast. So I must make them—make them—make their chanting slower." Or, "That is too slow. I must make their chanting little bit faster." That is—but actually, how you do it is not by here.

If you try to do it by your hand [laughs] or your mind, it doesn't work. Only when you do it by your *hara*, you know, the feeling—by the feeling you have in zazen practice, then [laughs], you know, you can do it. Just by your mind or by your hand, you cannot do anything. It doesn't work. Student will not follow your *mokugyō*. Only when you do it, you know, with your zazen, you know, power, then you can control it.

When you can control yourself very well, you know, without having any idea of controlling anything, you know, when you do in right pace,

then you can control yourself. And when you can control yourself like you sit in zazen posture—zazen, then you can control the chanting perfectly. This is true with your everyday practice, you know.

When you do something, just, you know, by your skill or just by your mind, you know, you cannot—you will not be supported by people, and you—so you cannot help others. Only when you do it with zazen mind you can help others. And you will be naturally supported by people. This is also—so, if—if the precepts, you know, is some moral code which you have in your mind, that precepts doesn't work at all [laughs]. When you forget all the precepts and, without realizing—without trying to observe it as you eat when you are hungry, you know, then there is—naturally there is precepts. So when you forget all about precepts, and when you can observe it quite naturally, there is precepts, and that is how you keep our precepts

In your zazen practice, you know, you have—you just sit. You have no idea of attaining anything. You just sit. And what do we mean by "just sit" is—when we, you know, just sit, we already include everything, and we are not even a part of this cosmic being. We are one with everything. When we are one with everything, you know, we include, you know—this is just explanation, but—the feeling is you include everything, and actually this is not just—it is not true just for zazen.

When you, you know, drink a cup of tea, you know, that activity include everything. Actually it is so. Because you say "this is tea" and "this is me" [laughing], it doesn't include anything. You are here and tea is there, you know. This is just tea, which doesn't include anything. But when you, you know, drink it without thinking what it is, and being with—completely with the—one with the tea, because you have no idea of "tea" or no idea of "you," this activity, you know, include everything.

So, as Dōgen-zenji said, if your activity—everyday activity doesn't include everything, that is not Buddhist activity. It looks like almost [laughs] impossible, you know, to feel in that way, but actually if you realize, you know, or if you experience what is zazen practice, you know, then, you know, you will understand what is your everyday life and how everyday life should be for yourself and for others. And each activity—you will realize that each activity should be zazen.

The famous Zen master Ummon¹—his words—kōan—kōans are very famous for—for its subtlety—very subtle. Now he explained this point in various way. But this point is, you know, difficult to explain unless—the only way to understand is through practice. By words it is

¹ Ummon Bun'en (Jap.) or Yunmen Wenyan (Chin.): 864-949. Chan master.

almost impossible, but in Zen *mondō*—question and answer, the—he tried to express this point in various way.

So later, the Zen masters, you know—referring to his point and said, "His word is like a," you know, "like a cup and its lid," you know, "which fit very well" [laughs]—a cup and its lid—cover—which fit, you know, perfectly. Or, "Follow the wave and drive the wave." Follow the waves and drive waves. Following waves and driving waves. Do you understand? Follow—waves come. The boat follow the wave and drive the wave like *mokugyō*, you know, follow [laughs]—follow the chanting and drive the chanting [laughs]. Do you understand? Follow the chanting and drive the chanting.

If you follow, you know—if you just follow the chanting, your *mokugyō* will get slower and slower and slower [laughs]. So—but unless you listen to them, you know, you cannot control. So you have to listen to them, and at the same time you should lead—you should drive their chanting. So it is not just follow the chanting, but it is—you should drive the chanting too. Follow—following the chanting and driving the chanting—the way—how you do it, you know? If you ask him how you do it, he maybe—he will say [knocks on wood twice quickly, laughs], "What are you thinking about?" [Laughter.] "Just sit," he may say so.

How can I make, you know, the perfect cover for this cup [probably referring to his water cup]? If you—the only way is, you know, to—just to make a lid and cover it. That is the way. But if you think too much about it, and if you work on it too much, the lid will become smaller and smaller [laughs]—a little bit more [laughs]. Then it will get smaller and smaller and it will not fit. If you do not, you know, observe the cup, you know, it may be too big. So observing the cup and making it, and [probably gestures]—that's the way [laughs]. That is, you know, how you practice zazen. That is power of practice.

So to know the center of things, you know—or to have whole picture of things or events is the point of our practice. And how you do it is to find, you know, to know the center of yourself. When you know where is your center in zazen, you know, that is the center of yourself and everything. When—if you do not lose your center wherever you are, it means that you are boss [laughs, laughter]. If you lose your center, you know, you are not. You are, you know, already mixed up even though you, you know, you insist yourself you are not in the center.

So how you keep our precepts is how you organize your life. And how you organize your life is how you practice zazen. This point is explained in various way. When we practice zazen, you know, there is nothing outside of us. Everything is—all—whole being is included in our practice. So the merit of practice is just for yourself. Because there is only one whole being, there is no "you," you know, or no

objective world. Objective world and subjective world is same in our practice—is one in our practice.

We, you know, explained in this way, but it is explanation of our zazen practice. It is so when you just sit without involved in thinking mind or emotional activity. When you just, you know, remain on your black cushion, then that is the practice we mean—which is explained in various way.

So, you know, what Bodhidharma said, "No merit." [Laughs.] "No merit." What will be the merit of practice? No merit [laughs], because there is nothing but practice. So there is no merit to give to anyone or to have—to own it for yourself. No merit. Merit itself is zazen. Zazen itself is merit. So no merit—zazen—just zazen.

If you say "merit," there is no zazen. If you say zazen, there is no merit. So, he said, "No merit." Whatever you do there is no merit. If there is merit, that is, you know, dualistic practice. If you observe precepts in that way, that is, you know, heresy [laughs]. If you have—if you think, "I have to," you know, "observe this precept and this precept and ten precepts, one by one," that is wrong practice.

For a long, long time, many Buddhists tried to observe our precepts with great effort, you know. So—but that kind of practice is, for us, a violence [violation?] of the precepts [laughs] because, you know, you—your precepts became—fall into dualistic precepts. "Here is precept. I have to observe it." That is not the way we practice zazen.

The Mahāyāna Buddhists said, you know, dualistic practice is the violence [violation?] of practice for Mahāyāna students. Why is it? Because when we observe rigidly, you know, or when we are caught by precepts, that is violence [violation?] of precepts. Then, if we have no idea of precepts what will happen? [Laughs.] That may be also a violence [violation?] of the precepts too.

There is precept, but, you know, the precept should be observed without any idea of observing it. That is how you practice—how you observe precepts. In short, when you observe precepts in the same way as you practice zazen—and that is perfect precepts transmitted from Buddha to us.

So as a Buddhist, whether you know the each of the sixteen precepts or two hundred fifty precepts or not, you know, we should be able to practice—observe precepts. And when we practice zazen we should not just, you know—we should not practice our way just "this is zazen." This zazen include, you know, various study of Buddhism.
[Sentence finished. Tape turned over.]

This morning when I join you, you know, I felt a deep feeling. I think that is because you were sitting just before you coming. This kind of feeling is important. This is the real *sangha*, you know. With this feeling I think you should carry on our practice and our life in this building.

Thank you very much.

Source: City Center transcript entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997.
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