

25.08.24 FIRST PRECEPT: NON-KILLING

Nonkilling: Life is nonkilling. The seed of buddha grows continuously.

Maintain the wisdom-life of buddha and do not kill life – Dogen Zenji

Appreciate your life – Maezumi Roshi

Please settle into your posture.

This evening, I am giving a *teisho* on the first precept – nonkilling. A *teisho* is a heart-to-heart transmission. A *teisho* is a presentation or performance of the teacher's realisation of the heart of zen. To quote *Wendy Egyoku Nakao*, "It is not a dharma talk or lecture, not an explanation of things-as-they-are, but a direct expression of it, a direct appeal to the true nature of the student". In the past I used to refer to my *teisho*'s as "guided meditations" but I now think it is important to distinguish a *teisho* from a guided meditation.

So please sit as in meditation, listen from the heart, but no need to engage in reflective thinking. Just listen.

*

Maezumi Roshi says receiving the precepts is receiving your life.

No more, no less.

The first precept contains all the other precepts. We are practicing nonkilling when we sit zazen. When we sit zazen we are expressing all the precepts.

Precepts are not rules to be followed but expressions of living the Buddha way of nonseparation from this moment.

We don't "follow" the precepts, we live the precepts.

We don't "break" the precepts, we separate and disconnect from the precepts.

There is no shame or guilt involved in separating from this moment. We are not breaking any rules.

*

We are living the precepts when we are at one with this moment.

The first precept of nonkilling contains all the other precepts.

If you maintain this precept, you maintain all precepts. Dogen Zenji comments that nonkilling is maintaining the life of the Buddha. When we live a life of nonkilling we live a complete life.

Nonkilling means saying "yes" to life. To all of life.

When we *resist* living this precept we are saying "no" to fully living our life.

We live our lives through this body. This very body is Buddha.

This body and the world it inhabits is our life. This very body is inseparable from the world. This world is inseparable from this body. This world is our body, this body is our world.

*

This life is full of joy and wonder.

This life can also be painful, both physically and emotionally.

To love our lives is to love this body and this world, inclusive of all our experience.

There is no pleasure without pain.

No love without loss.

To love our lives is to love this body through all the stages of the life cycle.

We say “no” to life when we resist accepting the seasonal nature of our life cycle.

When we practice zazen, we are practicing appreciating this life just as it.

We also practice allowing ourselves to experience pain without avoidance, because we cannot say “yes” to life without saying “yes” to the pain, the vulnerability, the grief and loss which are an inevitable part of the human need for loving relationships.

*

Life is always impermanent and interdependent.

When we say “yes” to life we are saying “yes” to impermanence and interdependence.

When we resist life, we say “no” to impermanence and interdependence.

Impermanence and interdependence *is* our Buddha nature.

When we say “no” to impermanence and interdependence we say “no” to our Buddha nature – our true nature.

Being one with living our lives through this body that we are is living the precept of nonkilling.

When we practice at-one-ment we practice nonkilling.

When we practice at-one-ment we “wipe away immeasurable crimes”.

*

What are the barriers that prevent you from fully embracing life - saying “yes” to Life?

Saying “yes” to life is being willing to fully experience life – we could say being nonkilling is being nonseparate from life. And this means being nonseparate from the lived experience of this body just as we are.

How do you separate from this life?

How do you disconnect from this body that you are?

In what ways do you kill life - say “no” to life?

How do you separate and disconnect from yourself and others? What emotions do you unconsciously avoid? What strategies do you use?

What is happening when you separate from this moment? For example, is it when you feel criticised or threatened in some way? Is it when you feel rejected?

These are the kinds of questions I invite you to explore over the next four weeks.

*

When practicing just sitting – we are practicing being *willing* to experience this moment without taking flight and separating. In just sitting, we are expressing our faith this body is the Buddha.

Willingness is a form of action taking place in the Now. The more we practice being willing to be this moment for 10, 20, 30, 40 minutes or more, we are building a bigger and bigger container, as Joko Beck was fond of saying.

Being just this moment is simply being the five senses and the awareness of mental states – but if we attach to a thought we separate from this moment – the gap widens.

Our practice is to continually close the gap between yourself and yourself (Maezumi Roshi).

We increase our ability to experience our emotions and our various self-states without resistance. We develop a kind of super-ordinate self-state – a container for holding them all with compassion.

Like the poem by Jalaluddin Rumi – The Guest House:

Translated by Coleman Barks

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

In practicing Zazen, we develop our Inner Host – the ability to welcome all guests even if we dislike them. We welcome our guests rather than putting them down or casting them out of our house. This Inner Host becomes intimate WITH ALL our guests – it accepts them all empathically. And eventually the guests feel accepted and settle down, realising they are acknowledged and safe.

The Inner Host is in alignment with our embodied natural functioning – with the rhythm of the breath – we realise that we are being breathed by Life itself. We relax and become one with our natural functioning. We let Life itself hold us with wisdom and compassion in this moment.

When we are sitting in zazen, one with just sitting, one with natural functioning, we are expressing this body is the Buddha and “killing” the desire to be experiencing something different to what we are experiencing, to be somewhere else, the desire to separate from this moment.

If you see the Buddha on the road, “kill him”. Because the Buddha is not on the road.

Where is the Buddha?

Who is the Buddha?

Thank you for listening.