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This morning I want to—to explain how to take our bodhisattva's vow. We say "bodhisattva's vow," but actually this is not only Mahāyāna Buddhist vow but also all the Buddhist vow. When we say Mahāyāna, we also—it means that something—usually it means that the something superior teaching in contrast with Hīnayāna. But this is—may not be real understanding. According to Dōgen-zenji, this is not right understanding, to say "Hīnayāna" or "Mahāyāna."

From the beginning of—the *Āgama-sūtra*¹ is supposed to be the oldest sūtra—Buddhist sūtra, but even in *Āgama-sūtra* this kind of thought is there. [It] says, *Shujō muhen*—"Sentient beings are numberless. I vow to save them."² Why Buddha, you know, come to this—came to this world is to save sentient beings. Usually those who do not believe in Buddhism comes to come to this world because of karma. But for Buddhist—for Buddha, he did not come to this world because of the karma.

In *Āgama-sūtra*, they say Buddha passed away by his own choice. And because he finished his task, he—because he has nothing to do more in this world, he took nirvāna, it says. When he finished, you know, his task he took nirvāna. It means that already [the] purpose of his coming to this world is to save sentient beings or to help others. So if that is, you know, the reason why he come to this world if he finish his task—when he finished his task, there is no reason why he should stay in this world. So he took nirvāna.

So underlying thought [is] already to help others, to save sentient beings. Usually, you know, Mahāyāna Buddhist denounced Hīnayāna Buddhism. Only Mahāyāna—Hīnayāna Buddhist just practice our way to help themselves, not to help others. That is what they say, but actually when they say in *Āgama-sūtra* that he took nirvāna because he finished his task in this world, it means that already he came to this world to save others. And [in] various Hīnayāna—so-called-it Hīnayāna sūtra, we find this kind of thought everywhere. Anyway, those vows are supposed to be Mahāyāna—Bodhisattva's vow or Mahāyāna vow, but it is actually—those four vows actually [are a] vow for all Buddhists. All Buddhists should have this vow.

¹ *Āgama-sūtras* (Jap. *Agon-gyō*): A collection of four Sanskrit sūtras roughly corresponding to the Pali *Nikāya*. The *Āgamas* form the basis of Hīnayāna teachings.

² *Shujō muhen seigandō*: "Sentient beings are numberless. I vow to save them"—the first line of the four-line vow traditionally chanted after lecture.

To take vow is very important. To believe in Buddhism means to take vow. If you don't take vow, life will be life of karma. Only when we take vow, we—our life is life of Buddhist. And how to take vow is with—should be ex- [partial word]—may be the most important point. How to take vow.

Another reason Mahāyāna Buddhist denounce Hīnayāna—so-called-it Hīnayāna Buddhist is they are rigidly caught by precepts or teaching or what was told in scriptures. And they have no freedom from precepts or teaching. That is another reason why we denounce—why Mahāyāna—so-called-it Mahāyāna, Buddhist denounce Hīnayāna Buddhist.

But when Buddhism [was] started by Buddha, there was Mahā- [partial word]—there were—there was not much difference between—actually, Buddhism was Mahāyāna. So if I dare to say, that was Mahāyāna. And why Mahā- [partial word]—so-called-it Mahāyāna Buddhist arise was mainly Buddhist teaching of Buddhism or teaching of Buddhism became more and more concrete or caught by concrete idea of some particular teaching or some precepts. And they rigidly try to stick to the teaching. At first it was they respected the teaching too much and preserved—tried to preserve teaching, and that was the purpose of the priest especially. And this kind of effort result [in] very rigid understanding of precepts or teaching. So when, for an instance, they had—they—at first, Buddha did not have no idea of setting up precepts. And some—when someone do something wrong, Buddha just said, "That is not right. Why don't you do it this way?" That was the precept—the original precept. So there was no precepts in term of "Don't do—this is a precepts all the Buddhist should keep."

But when we count precepts in—like Ten Precepts—Ten Prohibitory Precepts, it is, you know—we feel as if we—if we fail to observe those Ten Precepts, you know—if you miss—if you cannot [if you violate] even one of the ten, you will not be the good Buddhist. So the purpose of precepts, receiving—taking vow or taking precepts is just to, you know, observe those things literally. That is maybe the usual way of understanding of precepts. But a true purpose of precepts is not just to observe precepts so that you can attain enlightenment.

Why we observe precepts or why we take vow is to actualize Buddha's spirit—Buddha spirit. So to take vow I, you know, this is the way: "Sentient beings are numberless. I vow to save them." The sentient being are numberless, you know—if it is numberless, you know, how is it possible to save them? [Laughs.] Same thing will be true with keeping precepts, you know. We should not kill: We should not take life without reason. "Without reason" is, you know, extra, you know. Without reason—we shouldn't say "without reason." We should just say, "You should not kill." [Taps table four times.] That is enough, you know.

When you fell into the idea of more usual, you know, secular understanding of precepts, you should say, "without reason" [laughs], if it means that if there is some reason, we can kill. By saying so we are making some excuse to kill. But why we have to make this kind of excuse is because you think the purpose of keeping precepts or taking vow is to attain enlightenment. And if you do not kill, or do not observe precepts, or do not take vow, you will not be a Buddhist or you will not attain enlightenment.

But purpose of—if you understand the purpose of observing the precepts is—precepts is to arise buddha-mind, then when you say "I will not kill," at that moment you have buddha-mind. There is no need to think, "I have to keep or observe precepts or vow forever." Even though—actually we don't know what we will do in next moment [laughs]. It is very difficult to know, to be sure about our future. But even it is so right now "I will not kill!" That is enough to arise buddha-mind. Even though it is not possible to save all sentient beings, but moment after moment if you say, "I must save all sentient being"—then you have buddha-mind.

So to arise—to be a Buddhist, moment after moment, we take vow. So it is not necessary to think about whether this is possible or not. When you take vow or when you keep precepts in this way, your way is already is not Buddhist way. You are fell into the superficial practice of "you should do" or "you should not," or "you should take vow" or "you shouldn't take vow." To take vow is to observe our way. So this is one of the way—many ways to practice our way, like zazen practice.

So "Sentient beings are numberless": Maybe, you know, it means that sentient beings are numberless. I vow to save them moment after moment, continuously. But "moment after moment, continuously" is not necessary. "I vow to save them" is strong enough and good enough. "I vow to save them." If the sentient beings are numberless, we will take this vow numberless times, that's all [laughs]. In this way, we feel another, you know, quite—feeling of quite different quality. We feel the eternal practice of our way, of our Buddhist way. So that it is—"Sentient beings are numberless" means that our practice is—will continue forever.

"Desires are inexhaustible. I vow to put an end to them."³ If our—the purpose of keeping precepts is to annihilate our desires. This vow is con- [partial word]—not possible, contradiction. But if the purpose of vow is to arise our buddha-mind, then it makes sense. The "inexhaustible" is some—gives us some encouragement, and we can continue our practice forever. And we—we will have firm confidence in

³ The second line of the four-line vow traditionally chanted after lecture.

our practice which continue forever. So we will be encouraged by this vow forever.

"The dharma is boundless. I vow to master them."⁴ Here it says also "boundless," the boundless dharma. I vow to master it. So our vow will continue forever, and we—we can believe in our boundless *dhamma*.⁵

"The Buddha's way is unsurpassable. I vow to attain it."⁶ The same thing will be true with this vow.

In this way, we should take vow and we should keep our precepts. When you receive precepts, you know, you say, "I will," you know, "keep it," you say. When I give you precepts, you say, "I will keep it." It is not even promise. When you say, "I will do it," by words that is how you keep precepts. "I will do it." That's enough.

But you [laughs]—you may think, you know, when you don't know, you can [how can you?] keep the precepts. To say "I will keep it" is, you know, not so conscientious, you may say. When you take the precepts in that way, or when you receive precepts in that way, you are not receiving precepts in its true sense as Buddha expected. Why don't you say, "Yes, I will do it." [Hits table several times.] That is what Buddha wanted you to say. That's all. And whether you can keep it, you know, in next moment or next day is not the point. Do you understand? So it not so—it is not difficult at all to receive precepts. We say so—so we say, to receive precepts is to arise buddha-mind. To receive or to give precepts is to arise buddha-mind at that moment. It is not matter of keeping precepts literally or not. To arise buddha-nature, buddha-mind [we say], "I will do it!"—you know. That's enough.

You know, when you say "I will not say so because I don't know whether I can do it or not," that is maybe a kind of arrogance, which is the enemy of Buddhist. People may say, you know, people who is not so conscientious may say, "I will do it." But a person like me who is very conscientious will not say [laughs], "I will keep it." You see? Big arrogance is there [laughs]. Anyway, you know, you say—when you say, "I will keep it!"—you know, there is no arrogance. There is soft mind, which we Buddhist expect is there when you say, "I will do it. At least I try to do it." And "try to do it" will not be so good, you know. "I will DO it!" [laughs], you should say. "I will try to do it" is you are hesitating. "I will do it" is like to jump into the ocean. "I will do it!" Then there is no trouble.

⁴ The third line of the four-line vow traditionally chanted after lecture.

⁵ Suzuki-rōshi used the Pali pronunciation.

⁶ The fourth line of the four-line vow traditionally chanted after lecture.

The other day I told you about to climb up the top of the pole and to jump off the top of the pole.⁷ We say—usually we say to climb up the top of the pole is easy but it is difficult to jump off from it. I don't think this is true [laughs]. To climb up, you know, to the top of the, you know, pole is difficult, but to jump off from it is not difficult. The way is just so say, "I will do it!" [Laughs.] When you think which is easier, you know, to climb up to the top of the pole or to jump off from the top of the pole, which is easier? [Laughs, laughter.] When you—because you are thinking that way, it is difficult. When you don't think, when you trust Buddha, and when you say, "I will do it!" that is way—easy way.

We are liable to be caught by something we see or something we experience, and we liable to compare one experience to the other and say which is difficult. So you say to climb up, you know, to the top of the pole is difficult—too easy in comparison to jump off from the pole [which is] not so difficult, but to jump off is very difficult. But you shouldn't say so [laughs]—or because you say so, because you think so, because you compare the experience of jumping off from the pole to the experience to climb up, you hesitate to do so. So how you keep this—those—how you keep precepts or how you take vow, four vow, is to—to do it, you know, without being involved in some idea of vow or practice or precepts.

In Japan, Buddhist receive precepts—we say *jukai*—and everyone says, "I will keep it." [Laughs.] And when I was young, you know, I thought this is nonsense. [Laughs.] How they keep precepts, you know? When they go home have to eat eggs, meat, even they eat rice, that is living being. They are killing everything as long as they live. How is it possible to say, you know, "I will keep it. I will not kill"? But later, you know, I was strucked by them when they say, "I will keep it." [I thought], "Oh, that is the way," you know, "to keep precepts."

In this way, we should take vow—Mahāyāna vow. This is the way the Buddha's disciples—direct Buddha's disciples took vow. Later, you know, Buddhism became more and more idealistic or more rigid, and we lost the important point. Those things is not something which we should be told. Actually we are doing—we are leading our life in this way. If you observe carefully our everyday life, we are actually doing so—doing in this way. When we understand our life in some sophisticated way [laughs], you get into trouble.

⁷ From *Ts'ung-jung lu* (J. Shoyoroku, E. *Book of Serenity*), Case 79: "Changsha Advancing a Step": "Climb one step beyond the top of the hundred-foot pole. The whole world in the ten directions is revealed." See also SR-69-04-20 and SR-69-06-17.

So if you want to study our way, we must not forget this point. It is necessary to study, of course, but in your study if you lose this point, your knowledge or your study will not work. You cannot own your knowledge in its true sense.

Thank you very much.

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