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HOW TO UNDERSTAND RITUALS AND PRECEPTS:

ZAZEN, RITUALS AND PRECEPTS CANNOT BE SEPARATED

July 28, 1970. San Francisco.

This evening I want to talk about some problems you have when you come to Zen Center and you understand why we practice zazen, zazen practice pretty well, but why we observe this kind of ritual is maybe rather difficult to understand why. Actually it is not something to be explained so well and you ask me why we observe or why I observe those rituals without much problem. It is difficult to answer. But first of all, why do I do it is because, because I have been doing it for a long time. For me there is not much problem. So I tend to think that because I have no problem in observing my way there will not be problem-so much problem for you. But actually you are Americans and I am Japanese and you have been-you are not practicing Buddhist way, so there must be various problems. So this kind of problem is almost impossible to solve. But if you-actually for our way I think you will reach-you will have some understanding of our rituals. And what I want to talk about is actually about precepts. But precepts for me is also includes rituals. And when we say precepts it is actually another name of our zazen practice. For our zazen practice and observation of rituals are not different. Two different things. How to observe and the idea of observing practice or rituals are actually same. And our practice especially as Soto School, put emphasis on our everyday life including rituals or eating or way of going to restroom or bathroom. All those things are included in our practice. So the way we practice zazen, the way we practice ritual and the way we-the way of life as a Buddhist or Zen student is fundamentally the same. But when we talk about our way of life or rituals actually you face to some rules. Rules of life will be rules of observing pre...ceremony is ritual. And rules in our everyday life are precepts. So we have, you know, here we have the idea of rules. When we say precepts, precepts means some rules usually, but that is just superficial understanding of rituals, precepts. Precepts is actually expression of our true nature is precepts and how we express our true nature is always...according to the place or situation, under which you live. So to practice zazen is to be yourself on your black cushion and to observe our precepts is just to be yourself and how we observe our rituals to be with people in Buddha Hall. So as you have some way of sitting on black cushion, we have some way of observing rituals or ceremonies, and...spirit of, you know, in our zazen practice point is to get rid of thinking mind, to be free from thinking mind or to be free from emotional activity. In short that is the practice of selflessness. And in our ritual observation the point is to be free from selfish idea or the rituals, the practice of rituals is selflessness.

First of all you enter, you bow. The bow means, we say gotai tochi (?). Gotai is our body. Tochi is to throw away our body, which means that, in short, practice of selflessness. To throw away our physical and mental being, and-or we offer ourselves to Buddha. That is our practice of bow. When you bow you bow and lift your hands, that

means to lift Buddha's feet which is your palm like this, and you feel Buddha on your palm. So in this way you when you practice bow you have no-you shouldn't have, you are supposed not to have any idea of self, give up everything. So when Buddha was begging, his followers spread his hair on the ground, the muddy ground and let Buddha touch that place. That is supposed to be the origin of why we bow. And in ritual you bow and work, you do everything by some sign, that is, you know, that kind of thing is maybe the things you may not like so much. Just-it looks like very formal to do everything by sign, but-hell. Whether you want to do it or not, you must do it, but it looks like very formal and actually as long as you...in Buddha Hall, you should observe our way according to the rules we have here, but why we do it is to forget ourselves and to become-to feel, to be Zen students actually in this Buddha Hall. That is why we observe our rituals.

This is very important point. To feel your being here, right in this time is very important practice for us. And actually that is the point of observing precepts and of observing rituals and our practice of zazen. To feel-to be yourself at certain time in certain place. For that purpose we practice our way.

So actual feeling could not be understood without observing it, when you observe it, you feel actual feeling of ritual. As long as you try to know what does it mean, or why you do it, it is difficult to feel your actual being at that place. Only when you do it, will you feel your being. To be a Buddhist is to do things like Buddha, like your friend do, that is actually how to be a Buddhist. It does not mean, you know, when you are able to observe our rituals as your friend do, then you will see, you will have no problem in your everyday life, that kind of feeling or practice will be extended in your everyday life. You will find yourself in various situations and you will intuitively know what you should do and you will react, you will have right reaction to someone's activity. When you, you know, you have or when you lack, or when you are not able to respond to the people without thinking, without wondering what he has in his mind or what is the reason why he throw something to you, then it maybe sometime you can, but most of the time I don't think you will have right, you cannot have right response or you will not have most intuitive response to the people. So why you do it is, you know, I want you to do it until I think at least he is-until I think quite sure about his response to other people. How he responds to other is very important point as teacher. When we teachers see our students, they maybe trying to be-to act right and try to understand people, but most of the time it is rather difficult to have-to be-to have some kind of intuition. And if you have this-if you start to have this kind of intuition you have big confidence in yourself and you can trust yourself and so all the problem which is created by yourself will be no more. You will have no more problem. Something, you know, almost all the peoples may have. That is why, you know, we have training or practice.

My master used to say to us-if you stay with me for several years, whether you become a priest or not, if you become a priest you will be a good priest and if you stay-remain layman you will be a good layman or good citizen. He always said-and you have no problem in your life. And I think that is-that was very true. I was the six youngest disciple when I became my master's disciple. And two of us became a priest, but rest of

disciples became-remain laymen. And they are very good actually. When they come to my teacher they were, they had some problem, but most of them-one of the disciple who passed away is exception, but rest of the people has been doing pretty well, although they are not priests. So I think that is very good anyway. This kind of practice is very, very good practice for you. You may think our practice is like army practice (laughs), but actually it is not so. The idea is quite different. Maybe Japanese army copied our practice, maybe. Looks like so. But they couldn't copy our spirit.

As you trust your innate nature which is called Buddha Nature, you should trust your innate nature, that is the most important point and if you trust, you know, your true nature, you should trust your teacher too. That is very important. Not because your teacher is perfect, but because his innate nature which is the same with you. The point that-the point of practice between teacher and disciple is to get rid of selfish idea as much as possible and to trust each other. When you-only when you trust your teacher you can practice zazen. And you can practice ritual and you can act as a Zen center student. So to be always-to remain always as a Zen center student is very important point for you and how you, you know...become a Zen center student is to trust your zazen practice. Without saying why. I think you should be-as long as you come here, and if you don't want to do so, you do not want to do so, you shouldn't come here, I think. As long as you come here, you should follow our way or else maybe you will waste your time and you will have regret.

So in this way we can carry on our schedule. How we carry on our schedule is how we observe our precepts. Precepts started by Buddha when he said-"don't do this, don't ...behave like that." That was origin of precepts. So in India in Buddha's time they have Buddha's precepts. And in China they have more Chinese-they had precepts that are based on Chinese way of life. We have sixteen precepts, but those precepts which we should observe, as a Japanese, as an American, as an Indian priest or layman. That is sixteen precepts. And those precepts are the precepts which you can apply to various-apply to your everyday life. We say-"don't kill." But "don't kill" does not mean just don't kill flies or insects. Actually it is too late...if you-if you say "here is a fly" whether you should kill it or not, it is too late! That problem is always with us. Before you see fly. We have always this kind of problem. When you eat, what will you say-"Seventy two labors brought us this rice..." when you say so-"Seventy-two labors..."- include to keep grains from various insects. So, you know, it is not just not to kill insects. When you eat, when you say "Seventy-two labors brought us this rice" it includes already the precept of not to kill. But actually, you know, after making a great effort to protect...corn from insect, we can eat. So at that time we-the way you observe-the feeling you say "Seventy-two labors..." is-should be related to the precepts "not to kill." The precept "Not to kill" is not any special precept. To be, to exist here in this way is the result of sacrificing many animals and plants. We are always sacrificing something for your being. So as long as you are involved in dualistic concepts, it is not possible for you to observe our precepts.

So the point is how to be- how to get out of this kind of dualistic concepts. And feel our being with gratitude is the point of practice. So it is very foolish to say :not to kill" actually. But why we say not to kill is to point out, or to understand our life from various

point-pointing up at various points. Not to kill. Not to steal. Not to speak ill of others. Each of those precepts include the other precepts and each practice or rituals we observe include the other. So if you know, if you have actual feeling of your being here, then it is the way, that is the way you observe precepts and the way you practice zazen. So if-if you understand how you observe our precepts-even one of them, you can observe the rest of the precepts and you can practice our zazen, you can observe our rituals. Zazen practice and observation of rituals or precepts cannot be separated. How to experience this kind of feeling is why you-how you understand our precepts.

So actually, if you say it is difficult, it maybe very difficult, but it cannot be so difficult if you say "I will do it." That is how you observe precepts without thinking,-whether I can observe it or not. "I will do it," means don't kill animals. Yes. You may say-you can say because originally it is not possible to kill anything. You think you can kill-actually you cannot. Even though you think you kill, they are still alive! Even though you eat something, it is still alive in your body. If something leaves your body, they are still (tape interruption)...impossible for anything to be killed. So only way is to be grateful for everything you have. That is how we keep our precepts without having dualistic understanding of precepts.

You may say "if so, there may not be any need to have precepts." But unless you make yourself quite sure, you cannot feel your presence, you don't feel your being, you do not feel you are alive here. You do not have any gratitude or joy of life or gratitude for everything. So, you know, you can easily say "I will do it, I will not kill anything." But it means that you will not sacrifice anything, sacrifice yourself for anything. You will be just you. You will not be caught by dualistic understanding of yourself, and you will feel yourself, as you feel yourself in your zazen.

It is rather difficult to explain. But that is actually how we observe precepts. So Dogen Zenji says-"Even though we do not try to observe precepts like a scarecrow (more evil will come to you (?)). It is strange, you know. When you have-when you feel your being in its true sense right here, no evil comes. You cannot violate any precepts, and whatever you do that is expression of your true nature. You will not say-I shouldn't say so-I shouldn't do that-you will be quite free from that kind of regret or arrogance of observing some special precepts. That is how you observe precepts. To repeat precepts is to _____or to chew your brown rice. (laughs) Without chewing your brown rice you cannot eat it. Only when you chew for a very long time, you know, like this, you will appreciate the taste of brown rice. When you say-"oh this is awful!"-"how many more times should I chew it before I swallow it down?" That is very foolish way of chewing brown rice or eating brown rice. If you say-"Oh, sixteen precepts, that's awful to be a Buddhist!"-then you have no chance to have a real taste of Buddhist way. If you do it one by one, that is how you chew, how you chew brown rice and how you practice our way. And pretty soon you will have (tape turned)...you may say...umm...I have not much things to say for tonight but as you may have various, no doubt, but you may have many questions at this point, I try to explain why we observe rituals and our precepts. Precept observation is just to say "Hai." That is how you observe precepts. You shouldn't care- "Hai!" Shut your eyes-"Hai!" You should say. That is how you

observe your precepts.

When flies come, you should kill him, kill them. Whoosh (laughs) But you are always prepared for doing something wrong-maybe. Even though when you are eating your_____you are not eating your rice carelessly, you...recite from the bottom of your heart, "Seventy-two labors..." "Seventy-two labors..."-that is actually how you bow here. There is no other way. As long as you live here. If your practice-zazen doesn't reach so far, it is not real practice. That is how you feel, you know, eternal life in the midst-with motor body. When you say "Seventy-two labors..." there is Buddha already. Where there is nothing happens, even though many things happen, but that is part of Buddha's mercy.

Thank you very much.

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