

On Receiving the Precepts

(Jukai)

Translator's Introduction: In this discourse, Dōgen presents the ceremony of taking the Mahayana Precepts. In the Sōtō Zen tradition, the form of these Mahayana Precepts derives from the *Scripture of Brahma's Net*. They are traditionally given to the laity when they decide that they wish to live their lives as Buddhists, to those who are being ordained as novice monks, and to a novice monk as part of the ceremonial associated with Transmission. These Bodhisattva Precepts are distinct from the 250 preceptual regulations for male monastics and the 348 preceptual regulations for female monastics, which address everyday problems that may arise for those living in a monastic or hermetic setting.

In the *Procedures for Cleanliness in a Zen Temple* it says the following:

All Buddhas in the three temporal worlds—past, present, and future—affirm that to leave home life behind is to realize the Truth. The twenty-eight Indian Ancestors and the six Chinese Ancestors, all of whom Transmitted the Buddha's Mind seal,* were, each and every one of them, monastics. Most likely, it was because they strictly observed the monastic regulations that they were able to become outstanding models for those in the three worlds of desire, form, and beyond form. Thus, in practicing meditation and inquiring of the Way with their Master, they made the Precepts and the monastic regulations foremost. Had they not distanced themselves from their faults and guarded against misdeeds, how could they have realized Buddhahood and become Ancestors?

As to the method for doing the ordination ceremony of Taking the Precepts, three types of kesas* and a set of mealtime bowls, along with fresh, clean robes, are provided for the one to be ordained. If new robes are not available, be sure to launder old ones, but you must not use borrowed kesas or a borrowed bowl set to put on the altar when doing the ceremony of Taking the Precepts. Concentrate wholeheartedly and take care not to get distracted by side issues.

* See *Glossary*.

Assuming the form of a Buddha, being provided with the Precepts and the monastic regulations, and acquiring what the Buddha received and made use of are, by no means, small matters, so how could you possibly treat them lightly? Were you to borrow someone's kesas or bowl set, and then go up to the altar to take the Precepts, you would not really be obtaining the Precepts. Should you never receive the Precepts, you will be a person devoid of the Precepts for the whole of your life as you vainly cross over the threshold of empty scholasticism, meaninglessly accepting alms given in good faith. Those entering the path with a beginner's mind may not as yet have memorized the rules and regulations. Should their Master offer no guidance, they will lapse into error. What I am saying here is stern advice indeed. Dare I hope that you will engrave it on your heart? If you have taken the monastic Precepts, by all means you should also take the Bodhisattva* Precepts, for They are foremost for those who would enter the Teaching.

In India and China, whenever an Ancestor of the Buddha passed on the Transmission, without fail, the Precepts were accepted as the first act of entering the Dharma. Unless we accept the Precepts, we are not yet a disciple of the Buddhas, nor are we an offspring of our Ancestral Masters, because They have considered one's departing from error and resisting wrong to be synonymous with practicing meditation and inquiring of the Way. The words, "They have made the Precepts foremost," are already precisely what the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching is. Realizing Buddhahood and becoming an Ancestor have invariably been based on receiving and preserving the Transmission of the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching. Ancestral Masters who have authentically Transmitted the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching have invariably received and preserved the Buddha's Precepts. There cannot be an Ancestor of the Buddha who has not received and preserved the Precepts. There are Those who received and preserved them in compliance with the Tathagata, and there are Those who received and preserved them in compliance with a disciple of the Buddha, all of whom received the bloodline thereby.

The Buddhist Precepts, which have now been authentically Transmitted from Buddha to Buddha and from Ancestor to Ancestor, were Transmitted only by our Ancestral Founder Bodhidharma, the Abbot of Mount Sūzan, until They came down through five Transmissions in China to our Founding Ancestor of Mount Sōkei, Daikan Enō. Although the genuine Transmission of Seigen Gyōshi and Nangaku Ejō and beyond has been conveyed to us of the present day, there are

those senior monks who have never recognized the Precepts and could care less. Oh, how extremely pitiful they are!

As has been said, we should receive and accept the Bodhisattva Precepts, for this is how we reach the entryway into the Dharma. This is something that we need to know in our exploration through our practice with our Master. This procedure of receiving and accepting the Bodhisattva Precepts has invariably been correctly Transmitted to those of us who have explored the Matter* through our long-standing training within the private quarters of an Ancestor of the Buddha. It is not something that those who are lazy or indifferent achieve. This procedure invariably involves lighting incense and doing prostrations before our Ancestral Master Bodhidharma, and then asking if we may receive the Bodhisattva Precepts. Once we have been given permission, we bathe that we may purify ourselves. We then put on clean, new robes. Or, we may wash our previous robes, strew flowers, burn incense, and perform prostrations to show our reverence, after which we put those robes on. We respectfully bow to the altar images, to the Three Treasures, and to our venerable Ancestors, ridding ourselves of any obstructions. Thereby we can purify our body and mind. This procedure has been accurately Transmitted for ever so long from within the private quarters of Ancestors of the Buddha. After this, the presiding teacher of the Monks' Training Hall invites the ordinand to make a prostration and then recite the following refuges, while kneeling upright with hands in gasshō.*

*I humbly take refuge in the Buddha,
I humbly take refuge in the Dharma,
I humbly take refuge in the Sangha.*

*I humbly take refuge in the Buddha, the most venerated
among humans,
I humbly take refuge in the Dharma, the most venerated
among those who have forsaken their passions,
I humbly take refuge in the Sangha, the most venerated
among those in our assemblies.*

*I have taken refuge in the Buddha,
I have taken refuge in the Dharma,
I have taken refuge in the Sangha.*

(Repeat the above refuges three times.)

Ordinand: “The Truth of the supreme, fully perfected enlightenment which was realized by the Tathagata is my great Teacher, in which I will take refuge from now on. From now on, I

shall not seek refuge in the demons of heresy or in those outside the Way, because I shall have His compassion and benevolence.”

(Repeat the above words three times. After the third time, repeat three more times the line “I shall have His compassion and benevolence.”)

Preceptor: “Good disciple, you have discarded past evils and been converted to the Truth. The Precepts have already embraced you. Now you are about to receive the Three Pure Precepts.

“The first is the Precept of Ceasing from Evil. From this present state of yours to that of becoming Buddha, will you keep this Precept or not?”

Ordinand: “I will.”

(Asked three times, answered three times.)

Preceptor: “The second is the Precept of Doing Only Good. From this present state of yours to that of becoming Buddha, will you keep this Precept or not?”

Ordinand: “I will.”

(Asked three times, answered three times.)

Preceptor: “The third is the Precept of Doing What Is Good for the Sake of All Sentient Beings. From this present state of yours to that of becoming Buddha, will you keep this Precept or not?”

Ordinand: “I will.”

(Asked three times, answered three times.)

Preceptor: “You must not violate the preceding Three Pure Precepts. From this present state of yours to that of becoming Buddha, will you keep these Precepts or not?”

Ordinand: “I will.”

(Asked three times, answered three times.)

Preceptor: “This is how you must keep Them.”

The ordinand then does three prostrations, ending by kneeling straight up with hand in gasshō.

Preceptor: “Good disciple, you have already received the Three Pure Precepts. Now you are about to receive the Ten Great Precepts. These are the Great Immaculate Precepts of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

“The first is ‘Do not kill.’ From this present state of yours to that of becoming Buddha, will you keep this Precept or not?”

Ordinand: “I will.”

(Asked three times, answered three times.)

Preceptor: “The second is ‘Do not steal.’ From this present state of yours to that of becoming Buddha, will you keep this Precept or not?”

Ordinand: “I will.”

(Asked three times, answered three times.)

Preceptor: “The third is ‘Do not covet.’ From this present state of yours to that of becoming Buddha, will you keep this Precept or not?”

Ordinand: “I will.”

(Asked three times, answered three times.)

Preceptor: “The fourth is ‘Do not say that which is untrue.’ From this present state of yours to that of becoming Buddha, will you keep this Precept or not?”

Ordinand: “I will.”

(Asked three times, answered three times.)

Preceptor: “The fifth is ‘Do not sell the wine of delusion.’ From this present state of yours to that of becoming Buddha, will you keep this Precept or not?”

Ordinand: “I will.”

(Asked three times, answered three times.)

Preceptor: “The sixth is ‘Do not speak against others, be they laity or monastics.’ From this present state of yours to that of Buddha, will you keep this Precept or not?”

Ordinand: “I will.”

(Asked three times, answered three times.)

Preceptor: “The seventh is ‘Do not be proud of yourself and devalue others.’ From this present state of yours to that of becoming Buddha, will you keep this Precept or not?”

Ordinand: “I will.”

(Asked three times, answered three times.)

Preceptor: “The eighth is ‘Do not be mean in giving either Dharma or material possessions.’ From this present state of yours to that of becoming Buddha, will you keep this Precept or not?”

Ordinand: “I will.”

(Asked three times, answered three times.)

Preceptor: “The ninth is ‘Do not be angry.’ From this present state of yours to that of Buddha, will you keep this Precept or not?”

Ordinand: “I will.”

(Asked three times, answered three times)

Preceptor: “The tenth is ‘Do not defame the Three Treasures.’ From this present state of yours to that of becoming Buddha, will you keep this Precept or not?”

Ordinand: “I will keep It.”

(Asked three times, answered three times.)

Preceptor: “The preceding Three Refuges, Three Pure Precepts, and Ten Great Precepts are what all Buddhas receive and keep to. From this present state of yours to that of becoming Buddha, will you keep these Precepts or not?”

Ordinand: “I will.”

(Asked three times, answered three times.)

Preceptor: “These are what you should keep to.”

The ordinand does three prostrations, coming back to kneeling straight up with hands in gasshō. The Preceptor and the ordinand together then chant the following verse in Sanskrit:

*We live in the world as if in the sky,
Just as the lotus blossom is not wetted by the water that
surrounds it.*

*The mind is immaculate and beyond the dust.
Let us bow to the highest Lord.*

When this is finished, they recite the following:

*Homage to the Buddha,
Homage to the Dharma,
Homage to the Sangha.*

The ordinand then leaves the Training Hall.



This ceremony of receiving the Precepts is what the Buddhas and Ancestors have, beyond question, correctly Transmitted to us. Such trainees as Yakusan Igen's disciple Tanka Tennen, as well as his novice Kō, both received and kept to Them. Even though there have been Ancestral Masters who did not take the two hundred and fifty monastic precepts, there has never been an Ancestral Master who failed to take these Bodhisattva Precepts, which the Buddhas and Ancestors authentically Transmitted. And it is These that we invariably receive and preserve.