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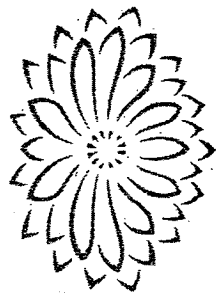
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THE
BEGINNER'S
GUIDE TO
ZEN
BUDDHISM

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Zen

THE TEN GRAVE PRECEPTS

The Three Pure Precepts become the foundation for the next ten, the *Grave*, or Cardinal, *Precepts*: not killing; not stealing; not misusing sex; not telling lies; not using intoxicants; not talking about others' errors and faults; not elevating oneself and blaming others; not being stingy; not being angry; and not speaking ill of the Three Treasures. All these precepts can be taken from different points of view—and are, in different traditions. For example, regarding *not stealing*, the Vipassana/Theravada teaching is very specific: Never take something that has not been offered. But the Mahayana perspective would be: In some cases, you have to take something in order to give it to someone else. If there is a case where you must steal, you could also take the outlook position: that everything belongs to everyone—there's nothing to be stolen—there's just oneness. You can take that prism and examine each precept from those three points of view to show that the precepts are not rules to be submitted to—but rather are a living phenomenon that, when followed with reverence and understanding, is the Noble Eightfold Path. In one form of practice, the precepts are used, one at a time, as loans. Similarly, if you want to truly experience the precepts, sit with one precept each week and really examine it. Let's look briefly at each one.

1. Not Killing

Clearly to live is to kill. With each breath we take, minuscule microbes are being breathed in. When we eat, we kill. What is nonkilling? In the end, it's a reverence for life. But what if you're a cook, for example, getting rid of roaches and rats in the

kitchen to maintain the health of those who will eat the food you prepare? Such decisions are not always clear-cut. You have to be present to the context and the experience of the situation. Sometimes there are alternatives—for example, putting a screen in a window rather than using a flyswatter. For many, this precept means not to take life unnecessarily.

2. Not Stealing

In contemporary society, this precept isn't just about grabbing an apple from an applecart. You have to look at the items you buy and the investments you make, for this precept is about having things and not having things and deeply involves the environment and all our resources. To spend a week thinking about all the instances of not taking things but rather of supporting the nourishment of life on this planet is a powerful experience. You find yourself questioning how long your showers are, how far you go to recycle even when it's inconvenient, what kind of mileage you'd get on the designer sports utility vehicle you want, even where you shop and eat.

3. Not Misusing Sex

This precept is really about respect for another. Not misusing sex has nothing to do with whether a person is gay or lesbian or heterosexual or with the various sexual situations that might occur. It has to do with whether you are honoring the other person and yourself. Some people feel that not treating yourself or another person as an object is a suitable guideline for this precept. Others are more proscriptive and say that you should not engage in sex with a person if either of you is in a committed relationship.

4. Not Telling Lies

Telling lies arises from an inability or unwillingness to see the situation as it is, to speak and listen genuinely from the heart. To actively practice not lying to yourself is liberating. To not lie to others liberates them as well.

5. Not Using Intoxicants

This precept is about not being intoxicated with chemical substances, with ideas, with anything. It doesn't mean that a person can't have a glass of wine with dinner. The precept is not to cloud the mind, which is basically pure and undefiled.

6. Not Talking About Others' Errors and Faults

On the first level, we need to be able to notice when we're running others down, because that same critic is running us down, is running down the Buddha, is running down all of life and all that is nurturing and wonderful. This chain reaction creates very negative energy. On the other hand, this precept does not mean that we shouldn't talk about social problems, political issues, even difficulties in our sangha. It doesn't mean being passive. From the Mahayana perspective, for example, you *should* talk about governmental errors as loudly as you can. When you do so with a "little mind," then people just think you're another crank. But with the compassionate mind and the heart of the Mahayana, you'll be effective. Thich Nhat Hanh's recommendation for interacting with elected officials is not to rant and rave at them but rather to send them "love letters" laying out your position.

7. Not Elevating Oneself and Blaming Others

We've all experienced the desire to make ourselves look good

or to point the finger at someone else as the cause of a difficulty. The link between *not elevating ourselves* and *blaming others* is sometimes hard to see, but they are two aspects of the same phenomenon: Both cause us to separate ourselves from others. Remember, these precepts are about the Eightfold Path, which is intended to save us from doing something that will create pain and suffering in our lives—as separation from others always does.

8. Not Being Stingy

Not holding back and always being willing to give have to do with the Dharma, as well as with the giving of material things. This precept includes always being able to express the Dharma when it's appropriate—not with dead words, but with actions in your life.

9. Not Being Angry

This is an important precept for Americans because we are told that we need to express our anger, but we're also told not to express our anger as we grow up. It's a confusing and difficult precept for many people—perhaps the most confusing. It's important to acknowledge feelings of anger and to be really present to them. The aim is not to eliminate anger when it arises but rather to accommodate it, to create a space for it. In a very paradoxical Zen way, we say, "Not being angry is being angry." *Not being angry* is to allow what is occurring to be there but not to hold on to it or fan it. If you push anger down and deny it, it seethes underneath. Awareness of your state of mind, of anger, is important. *Not being angry* is being aware of what you're feeling—and thus transforming the anger into wisdom.

10. *Not Speaking III of the Three Treasures*

Doubt is an important part of every practice. "Good doubt" is like salt—you need it. It's fine to challenge and to ask questions, but to speak ill of the Three Treasures weakens *your* faith and the faith of those around you.

SIXTEEN OBSERVANCES OF THE ZEN PEACEMAKER ORDER

Whenever we look at precepts and vows, the first question is often "How do I do that?" Sometimes getting someone else's perspective can help answer that question. Within Zen Buddhism, the Zen Peacemaker Order, founded to link people who are engaged in social action and Zen Buddhism (see chapter 9), has given serious consideration to how their commitment to engaged Buddhism is expressed through the sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts. Here is how they first drafted their observance of these precepts.

Three Refuges of a Zen Peacemaker

Inviting all creations into the mandala of my practice and vowing to serve them, I take refuge in:

Buddha, the awakened nature of all beings
Dharma, the ocean of wisdom and compassion
Sangha, the community of those living in harmony with
all Buddhas and Dharmas

Three Tenets of a Zen Peacemaker

Taking refuge and entering the stream of Engaged Spirituality,
I vow to live the life of:

Not-knowing, thereby giving up fixed ideas about myself
and the universe
Bearing witness to the joy and suffering of the world
Healing myself and others

Ten Practices of a Zen Peacemaker

Being Mindful of the interdependence of Oneness and Diversity, and wishing to actualize my vows, I engage in the spiritual practices of:

1. Recognizing that I am not separate from all that is. This is the precept of Non-Killing.
2. Being satisfied with what I have. This is the precept of Non-Stealing.
3. Encountering all creations with respect and dignity. This is the precept of Chaste Conduct.
4. Listening and speaking from the heart. This is the precept of Non-Lying.
5. Cultivating a mind that sees clearly. This is the precept of Not Being Deluded.
6. Unconditionally accepting what each moment has to offer. This is the precept of Not Talking About Others' Errors and Faults.
7. Speaking what I perceive to be the truth without guilt or blame. This is the precept of Not Elevating Oneself and Blaming Others.
8. Using all of the ingredients of my life. This is the precept of Not Being Stingy.
9. Transforming suffering into wisdom. This is the precept of Not Being Angry.
10. Honoring my life as an instrument of peacemaking. This is the precept of Not Thinking Ill of the Three Treasures.