

Everyday Precept Practice

The Tenth Grave Precept: Not Disparaging the Three Treasures

Zen Peacemaker Precept

I will honor my life as a Zen Peacemaker. This is the practice of Not Disparaging the Three Treasures. I will not create conditions for others to disparage the Three Treasures. I will recognize myself and others as manifestations of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

This month, we will explore the last of the 10 Grave Precepts: Do not ill-speak of the Three Treasures or Do Not Disparage the Three Treasures. This last precept is a good summary of all of the others. It brings us back to what is at the very core of our practice, the Three Treasures: the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. These, of course, are not three separate things. They are aspects of one thing. And what is that one thing? That's the big question in Zen. What is that one thing? It is our life.

Our life has the three aspects of the Three Treasures. The Buddha Treasure means that our life is the life of the Awakened One. Who is awake? That's the Buddha Treasure. Our life unfolds exactly according to the law of cause and effect. That's the Dharma Treasure. The law of cause and effect is not something to do with the age-old debate about free will vs. determinism. Simply, it's that oranges grow on an orange tree and strawberries grow on a strawberry bush. If we throw hard, the ball will go across the yard. If we throw with little force, the ball will only travel a few feet. It seems more complex, of course, because we can't see all of the interwoven causative factors. We see only a the tip of the iceberg, so what results often seems to be a surprise, unpredicted. Because things are always changing and there are so many factors interacting, like Indra's net, no two things are ever the same. Each is unique. That's the Dharma Treasure. Each thing appearing uniquely according to it's unique chain of cause and effect. The Sangha Treasure is the connection. As much as we think and act as though we were, we are not separate from all else. We are all connected in this web of cause and effect. Practicing together, acting from our collective wisdom is the manifestation of the Sangha Treasure, that connectedness.

Our lives are very ordinary, humble, rooted in the practical and routine, and yet they contain the infinite, each action, word, thought manifests unsurpassable completeness. The grass is green, white clouds roll across the blue sky, we have two hands and two feet or as Dogen Zenji famously declared, our nose is vertical and our eyes horizontal. To disparage the Three Treasures is to not appreciate our life in this way. The word "disparage" actually means "to regard or represent as having little worth." It's a very appropriate word here, because that is how we regard or represent our life most of the time - as this small, self-important being, disconnected from what is all around us. We don't recognize our own Buddha nature, because we are identifying with the one who is dreaming, not the one who is awake. On a human, psychological level, this translates into feeling that we are not good enough, that we need something or need to change or eliminate something in order to be OK. And no matter what we do, we don't quite feel OK. We feel that something is missing and we look for it somewhere "outside" of ourselves.

I will not create conditions for others to disparage the Three Treasures. Said in a positive way, this means we will create conditions for others to recognize themselves (and us) as manifestations of the Three Treasures.

I will recognize myself and others as manifestations of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. We must honor the wisdom and recognize the value of each person, really each being, just as they are. Everyone and everything has a place and function. When we are having difficulty with someone, it is helpful to remember that they are also a manifestation of Awakened nature. The wisdom that they manifest is actually in being just who they are. Even flaws and shortcomings are a manifestation of wisdom. Relating to people in this way helps us to appreciate and honor their uniqueness and to see them more clearly as they are rather than filtered through our judgments and prejudices.

Thich Nhat Hanh's Precepts of Engaged Buddhism

4. Do not avoid suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world. Find ways to be with those who are suffering, including personal contact, visits, images and sounds. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world.

This Engaged Precept from Thich Nhat Hanh does relate to recognizing myself and others as manifestations of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. There is so much suffering in the world - ours and others. It is as important to be present for the suffering as for any other part of our life. And as we know, often suffering brings the greatest clarity of vision when we can be present for it. The Zen Peacemaker Bearing Witness Retreats are very much about being present for the joy and suffering in the world. The places chosen for the retreats are places associated with great and intense suffering - Auschwitz, Rwanda, the Lakota territory in South Dakota. As we listen to people's stories with openness, love, and without judgment or recrimination, we recognize and honor their wisdom, we respect and value the endless diversity of people. We concentrate on really hearing them, not on trying to change them. In this way, genuine healing can come about.

On the other hand, if we try to avoid coming into contact with suffering, we are avoiding the manifestation of wisdom. If we are unconscious and unaware of the suffering going on around us (its even possible to be unaware of our own suffering), then we are not awake, we are not recognizing our own nature.

Bodhidharma's One Mind Precept

Self-nature is inconceivably wondrous.

In the One-Dharma,

Not giving rise to the dualistic view of sentient beings and Buddhas

Is called the precept of refraining from reviling the Three Treasures.

There are no sentient beings apart from Buddhas and no Buddhas apart from Sentient beings. Realizing this and manifesting this is upholding this precept to refrain from disparaging the Three Treasures.

Dogen Zenji's Kyojukaimon

To expound the Dharma with this body is the refuge of the world. Its virtue returns to the ocean of omniscience. It is inexpressible. Wholeheartedly revere and serve it.

Yasutani Roshi explains that the characters for the word "Refuge" are: shin (place where boats gather - a harbor) and ryo (a place where fish gather) In other words, "the most

important thing.” All eyes turn toward the expounding of the Dharma. When we use our life in this way, even for an instant, we become Shakyamuni Buddha expounding the teaching. The historical Shakyamuni Buddha passed from this sphere over 2,500 years ago. We are here now. How do we expound the Dharma? Our life lasts for such a short time. We really have no time to waste or squander. The turning of the Dharma Wheel depends on us right now.

Yasutani Roshi explains further that “Ocean of omniscience” is a metaphor for true reality. The word “omniscience” means having complete or unlimited knowledge, awareness, or understanding; perceiving all things. It also means having infinite awareness or insight or possessing universal or complete knowledge. This is our True Nature; it contains everything. There is nothing apart from it. It is inexpressible and yet we must express it. For the sake of all beings, we must expound the Dharma even though it is already in perfect realization. It cannot be otherwise. It is inexpressible in that it is fully and completely expressed at every moment. Nothing to add. And yet, because everyone hears and understands in their own way, we need many expressions of the Dharma, no one way is adequate for all ears.