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THE SECOND PARAMITA
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This text addresses some of the most fundamental and delicate religious issues.

Therefore, it should be read, quoted and analysed in a mindful way.

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SHILA

Shila is the mnemonic listing of precepts, and by extension it is Vinaya, the moral way. Vinaya is the first of the "Three Baskets" or Tripitaka, the Buddhist canon, the others being Sutra and Abhidharma, the teachings and the commentaries. Formally becoming a Buddhist is a matter of accepting the precepts in the ceremony called Jukai. To understand how morality and Buddhism go together, it is probably best to review the Buddhist teaching itself briefly:

The basic teaching of the Buddha is that there is no abiding self. Our being is made up of and constantly depends upon other people, animals, plants, soil, water, air, the planet earth, the other planets, the sun, moon and stars. Our very genes are programmes provided to us by our ancestors and from unknown sources back to the earliest green slime and before. Nothing is my own and everything makes me up: my parents, grandparents - the birdsong, portraits by Rembrandt, the scent of the Puakenikeni, and the laughter of a friend. Also forming my being are death in the family, the danger of biological holocaust, misunderstandings, and malicious gossip.

This formation that is me, flowing along, eating and adapting and adopting, is the same formation that is you, with very small variations in our combination of genes and experience that give us our uniqueness. This uniqueness is our own personal potential, and we depend upon each other for sustenance to fulfill it.

Each centre in our multi-centred universe is dependent in this way. Nothing abides and we find that everything is fundamentally insubstantial -- shunyata, emptiness. It is not a vacuum that we perceive, but the absence of a fixed self in ourselves and in the multitudinous things of the universe. With this perception, or with an understanding that such an experience is possible, we glimpse the Dharma: the peace of the fathomless void and the harmony of the many centres as they flow about and through each other - out there and as this 'me'.

We also perceive misuse of harmony as habitats are destroyed, nations threatened, children and spouses abused and friends slandered.

The Ten Grave Precepts, which make up Shila for the Zen student, are ten ways to prompt our awareness of the Dharma, the peace and great harmony of life and death that is our universe. They not only prompt our awareness, they are expressions of perfection in the Dharma. Each precept is a paramita.

The Ten Grave Precepts.

1. I take up the way of not killing. This First Precept echoes the first of our Great Vows for All, "Though the many beings are numberless, I vow to save them." The Precept is specific and negative in wording; the Vow is universal and positive. The emphasis in the Precept is upon protection and nurturing: the emphasis in the Vow is upon spiritual encouragement. Both are expressions of perfections: both enhance the process of perfection.

Usually, nurturing a specific being is clearly also a matter of saving the universe, but sometimes options of abortion, spraying bugs, and trapping rats seem to offer ways to keep the world organism thinned and healthy. Such issues can become agonizingly difficult, and it is tempting to make decisions on the basis of persuasive arguments that are over-simple and reductive. They are koans and must be faced with a clear sense of proportion.

Decisions about the quantitatively larger issue of war and peace have been clarified by the unprecedented technological capacity for killing which science has achieved. There is no longer an argument for a "just war", or for "mutually

assured deterrence". Incredibly murderous weapons are prepared to destroy all human life and almost all animal and plant life. The koan here is how to speak out appropriately and take action that is instructive in opposition to such weapons and their so-called rationale.

Less obvious, but no less dangerous, is the probability of biological disaster through the destruction of forests, meadows, wetlands, lakes, rivers, seas, and the air. I vow to moderate my lifestyle and reduce its demands, and to encourage you to do the same, for the protection of all beings in their infinite variety.

2. I take up the way of not stealing. This and all the subsequent Precepts are variants of the first, "Not Killing". "I take up the way of not stealing" means I will respect the order of things - the paramita of harmony.

Peasants who occupy unused private land in Central America are demonstrating their view of the fundamental order. "We are taking what is rightfully ours", they say. The landlords say they are stealing. The question is, which view kills? Which view gives life?

3. I take up the way of not misusing sex. Sexual intercourse is misused when it is an addiction rather than the peak experience of love between a committed couple. All the Precepts point to addictive behaviour, stealing, lying, using alcohol or drugs, slandering, even killing. Addiction reveals a lack of confidence, a need for something from others, the interdependence of all things inverted for just one being. It is no good condemning promiscuity as immoral behaviour, for it is only a symptom of general immaturity. Like anybody else, the addict needs guidance to find a way to forget the self.

4. I take up the way of not speaking falsely. Speaking falsely is also killing, and specifically, killing the Dharma. The lie is set up to defend the idea of a fixed entity, a self image, a concept, or an institution. I want to be known as warm and compassionate, so I deny that I was cruel, even though somebody got hurt. Sometimes I must lie to protect someone or large numbers of people, animals, plants and things from getting hurt, or I believe I must. What

is the big picture? "Buddha nature pervades the whole universe." 1

5. I take up the way of not using drink or drugs. This can be extended to anything that clouds the mind: silly conversation, noisy music, most TV programmes. But Buddhism is not absolute. A little wine warms my bones and relaxes my inhibitions, and casual conversation enhances my humanity and the humanity of others. This Precept is warning against addiction and dependency. When I am completely honest at the very source of my thoughts, what is the path of the Buddha?

6. I take up the way of not discussing faults of others. Again, this Precept too deals with an aspect of killing. More people get hurt by gossip than by guns. The point is that nobody has a fixed character. Everyone has tendencies, and those tendencies can be used or misused, read or misread. The tendency to be accomodating can be seen negatively as passivity, and positively as patience. Encourage the tendency, and it will find its own perfection.

7. I take up the way of not praising myself while abusing others. The reason I praise myself and abuse others is that I seek to justify and defend myself as a certain kind of rather superior being.

Actually, I am not superior or inferior. My actions and words are appropriate or inappropriate to the needs of people, animals, plants and things, including myself. If I am authoritarian and put myself up and others down, then I am not meeting their need to grow and mature or my own to listen and learn. The Buddha Dharma is obscured. The world suffers.

8. I take up the way of not sparing the Dharma assets. The Dharma assets are all phenomena in their precious uniqueness, the interdependence of everything in perfect harmony, and the absence of any abiding self. When I am not stingy with the Dharma assets, I conduct myself and say things that enhance my own understanding of uniqueness, harmony and peace - and understanding on the part of others, so that my family members, friends and everyone and everything can maintain their path of perfection. Another way to say this is: I conduct myself so that the original perfection becomes more and more clear to all beings.

9. I take up the way of not indulging in anger. You and I have had the

experience in sesshin of bathing in anger. Something unreasonably tiny, perhaps something you don't even notice, punctures a nasty bubble of angry gas, and you sit there playing out scenarios of retribution. Perhaps you blame yourself for this condition, but it is needless blame, and it only adds to the confusion. Even such a nightmare of anger is not a violation of this Precept, because if you are sincere, you return to the practice whenever you possibly can. Anger itself is the field of your practice, and you pursue the little puck Mu on that field.

Blake says, "the tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction." Kwan-yin hurls a thunderbolt of anger from time to time. Indulgence in anger is the addiction, and it rests upon pain. What is it that troubles you?

10. I take up the way of not slandering the Three Treasures. The Three Treasures are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. These are variously the Historical Buddha, his teaching, and the fellowship of his followers - and realisation, the path to realisation, and the harmony of all beings. Slandering such Treasures is belittling them, and the grossest kind of belittling is conceptual analysis that reduces and quantifies - obscuring the unknown and unknowable source, the marvellous subtlety of the Buddha's words and the words of his great followers, the synchronicity and symmetry of experience, and the precious nature and aspiration of each individual person, animal or plant.

I take up the Ten Precepts of the disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha, and I invite you to join me.

THE TEN GRAVE PRECEPTS.

1. I take up the way of not killing.
2. I take up the way of not stealing.
3. I take up the way of not misusing sex.
4. I take up the way of not speaking falsely.
5. I take up the way of not using drink or drugs.
6. I take up the way of not discussing faults of others.
7. I take up the way of not praising myself while abusing others.
8. I take up the way of not sparing the Dharma assets.
9. I take up the way of not indulging in anger.
10. I take up the way of not slandering the Three Treasures.

Notes.

1. From the classical dedication of sutras, translated by Nakagawa Soen Roshi,
and used in the Diamond Sangha and at the Zen Center of L. A..

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