

Zenkai Ichinyo (The Oneness of Zen and the Precepts)

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In the present Sotoshu, we find the expression “the oneness of Zen and the Precepts” in Article Five of the Sotoshu Constitution. This article is titled “Tenets.” This is the only place in the Constitution where the principle of the Precepts is listed as an essential element of Sotoshu doctrine. Since the usage of this term has changed with the times, I would like to discuss it by looking at how it has been used during several different historical periods.

Clarifying the Term “Zen and the Precepts”

To begin with, there are two central meanings for the term “Zen and the Precepts” as it is used in Sotoshu:

1. The Precepts transmitted by the Zen sect, and
2. Zazen (samadhi) and the Precepts.

The overlapping content of these two meanings has led to the present-day teaching of “the oneness of Zen and the Precepts.” The first meaning is based on a sentence that is found in the *kechimyaku* (lineage document), which Dogen Zenji transmitted and which has been received by his Dharma heirs.

Torin Osho, while at Mt. Tendai in the Vimalakirti Hall said, “The Bodhisattva Precepts are the one great matter (the single-great-causal-condition) of our school.” On the eighteenth day of the ninth month in the first year of the great Song era of Hokyō, the former abbot Tendo Nyōjo Osho said, “The Buddhas’ Precepts are the great matter of our school.”

(From a postscript to *Jukakushinkaimyaku*, “The Precept Lineage Presented to Kakushin” discovered in the storehouse of Senpukuji Temple, Oita Prefecture, Japan)

In these two quotations, “our school” refers to the Zen sect and the meaning is that the Bodhisattva Precepts as well as the Buddhas’ Precepts is transmitted as the great, grave matter of the Zen sect. Later, Sotoshu passed on and maintained its own precept-vein based on these sentences. Particularly in the early modern period of Japanese history and in the time following, this teaching formed the doctrine of “transmitting and maintaining the Sixteen Precepts,” then, gradually led to the acknowledgement that the Precepts and transmission are one.

Zen and the Precepts as Expounded by the Two Founders

First of all, I would like to consider the writings of Dogen Zenji to see the context in which he used the term “Zen and the Precepts.” *Bendowa* (*On the Endeavor of the Way*) is a writing in which

Dogen Zenji emphasizes *zazen* as the correct transmission of the Buddhadharma. He also discusses the relationship between *zazen* and various other forms of training.

Zazen is not to be equated with the *samadhi* or *dhyana* included among the Six Paramitas or Three Studies. (*Bendowa*)

In other words, Dogen Zenji rejects the understanding that, since *samadhi* is one of the Six Paramitas as well as one of the Three Studies, *zazen* is essentially something practiced in parallel with other practices, or the idea that *zazen* must be one part of the process of practice. Dogen Zenji says that *zazen* cannot be compared with other practices. Based on this position, let us consider the following passage.

When we sit in *zazen*, what precept is not observed, what merit is not actualized?
(*Shobogenzo Zuimonki*, Chapter 2)

Training in a Zen monastery must be done in accordance with the monastic standards (*shingi*), the essence of the practice is “to observe the precepts and practice *zazen*.” And the actual form of it is designated as *shikantaza*. Dogen Zenji states that when a person is sitting in *zazen* there is no precept that is not observed.

Also, *zazen* is not concerned with the precepts, *samadhi*, or wisdom, but contains these Three Studies. (*Zazen Yojinki*, Precautions Concerning *Zazen*)

In Keizan Jokin Zenji’s “Precautions Concerning *Zazen*,” it says, as it does in *Bendowa*, that *zazen* is not the same as the study of *Samadhi*, one of the Three Studies. Rather, *zazen* contains the Three Studies. Thus, Keizan Zenji emphasizes the absolute nature of *zazen* and declares that *zazen* includes the Three Studies. Therefore, the Two Founders did not use the expression “Zen and the Precepts.” However, in order to emphasize the absolute and universal nature of the Zen lineage and the practice of *zazen* (*shikantaza*), they declared that the Precepts are included within *zazen*. At the same time, it was stated that the Precepts are connected to the transmission of the awakening of the Buddhas and Ancestors as well as being linked to the Zen tradition. In the “The Manner of the Buddha-Ancestors’ Correctly Transmitted Bodhisattva Precepts” as well as in the “Receiving the Precepts” chapter of the *Shobogenzo*, the idea of the “Buddha-Ancestors’ Correctly Transmitted Precepts” is emphasized.

The Theory of Zen and the Precepts During the Edo Period

At the beginning of the Edo Period, Ingen Ryuki brought the Obaku Zen sect from China to Japan. At the same time, the ceremony of Receiving the Precepts was also brought from China to Japan and it was frequently performed by Obaku priests. In the Sotoshu as well, the Receiving the Precepts ceremony had been performed in the past and was used as a way to teach the common

people. Due to the influence from Obaku sect's Receiving the Precepts ceremony, Sotoshu priests began once again to examine the Precepts they were transmitting. (For more detailed information, see "An Explanation of the One Mind Precepts of Shaolin" by Ranryo Esshu)

At this point, Manzan Dohaku (1636-1715), who led the movement to restore the Sotoshu's authentic mode of transmission, wrote about Zen and the Precepts in "The Secret of Zen and the Precepts" (*Zenkaiketsu*) and "Quiet Talks with Visitors" (*Taikyaku Kanwa*). However, Manzan limited his discussion of Zen and the Precepts to realization of the Precepts transmitted by the Zen sect, the first of the meanings I mentioned at the beginning of this article. It is notable that his grandson disciple, Banjin Dotan (1698-1775), was the one who wrote about the second meaning of Zen and the Precepts, "Zazen (samadhi) and the Precepts." In *The Principle Significance of Zen and the Precepts (Zenkai Hongi)* and *The Essence of Buddha-Ancestors' Correctly Transmitted Zen Precepts (Busso Shoden Zenkaisho)*, he emphasized the following teaching. (There are very similar passages in both books.)

From the time before the sutras were compiled in India and translated in China, the correct Dharma was transmitted from the Tathagata to Mahakashapa, then down through twenty-eight generations until it reached the great master of Shaolin. What has been transmitted is provisionally called "the treasury of the true Dharma eye (*Shobogenzo*), the marvelous mind of Nirvana." This is also called "the great matter of cause and effect," and "the greatest thing from the time of the king of the empty eon." Also, this is called "Zen" and "the Precepts." In this way the term "Zen and Precepts" is established here. (From the Preface to *Zenkaisho*)

In other words, Banjin says that the Tathagata's true Dharma was the authentic Dharma before being written in words and letters, which has been transmitted to Mahakashapa and through the twenty-eight generations of Indian masters, through the successive generations of masters in China. Then, these masters called this transmitted Dharma "the treasury of the true Dharma eye, the marvelous mind of Nirvana" as well as "the great matter of cause and effect." However, since this is, in short, the essence of zazen, the Dharma transmitted by buddhas and ancestors, has been called "Zen" and "the Precepts," and together they were named "Zen and Precepts."

In the precept text, it says "receiving" is transmission; transmission is awakening. This means that awakening to the Buddha-mind is called "truly receiving the Precepts." (Bodhidharma, The One Mind Precept Text)

Also, there was a large influence on the theory of Zen and the Precepts during that time from *The One Mind Precept Text*. This text was transmitted between master and disciple by means of *kirigami*. However, *The One Mind Precept Text* was found in several copies of books written on the theory of Zen and the Precepts during the Edo Period. In these books, the Zen sect's unique approach to "receiving precepts" lies in awakening, while teaching the oneness of awakening to Buddha-mind and sitting in zazen, the idea that the Precepts were included in Zen was developed.

Then, based on the debates that occurred during the Edo Period, this led to the theory of “the oneness of Zen and the Precepts” which appeared in the Meiji Period and afterward.

The Theory of Zen and the Precepts During the Meiji Period and Later

At the beginning of the Meiji Period, the Sotoshu of that time intended to use the precept ceremony as a means of propagating its teaching among the common people. Of particular note are the “Sotoshu Teaching Assemblies’ Bylaws” which were enacted in 1876, as well as the establishment of the Sotoshu’s first constitution in 1885. *The Meaning of Practice and Verification for Lay People in the Soto Tradition* was edited and assembled under the auspices of the Soto Assembly for Upholding the Tradition (Soto Fushukai), which was born from this teaching policy. When the Soto Assembly for Upholding the Tradition was taken into the Soto Assembly, *The Meaning of Practice and Verification of the Soto Teaching Assemblies* was edited again to become *The Meaning of Practice and Verification (Shushogi)* which the Sotoshu uses now.

In this context, Seiran Ouchi (1845-1918), who had been very much involved with putting together *The Meaning of Practice and Verification for Lay People in the Soto Tradition*, emphasized the significance of “Receiving the Precepts and Realizing Buddhahood” in the third chapter (“Receiving the Precepts and Joining the Ranks”) of his commentary on *The Meaning of Practice and Verification*, called “Hearing and Understanding The Meaning of Practice and Verification.” Taking one phrase from the *Brahma Net Sutra*, “When sentient beings receive the Buddhas’ Precepts, they join the ranks of the buddhas,” which is chanted during a Sotoshu precept ceremony, Seiran explained that anyone who receives the transmitted Sotoshu Precepts can be thought to have the potential to “join the ranks of the buddhas” and he established these words as the key to propagate the Dharma to the common people.

Furthermore, it can be said that Seiran understood Zen and the Precepts in terms of the first meaning I mentioned at the beginning: the precepts that the Zen sect has transmitted. He strongly taught the precepts transmitted by the Sotoshu, which highly esteem this phrase from the *Brahma Net Sutra*. He also emphasized the importance of the precept ceremonial form and etiquette.

The Meaning of Practice and Verification had at first been a sutra that was edited and assembled for teaching and liberating the common people. Regarding its position *vis-à-vis* other teachings, Takitani Takushu Zenji, the abbot of Eihei-ji and one of the editors of *The Meaning of Practice and Verification*, wrote a commentary on this sutra, *A Companion for The Meaning of Practice and Verification (Shushogi Sentei)*. He began by stating that *The Meaning of Practice and Verification* was a sutra which established the “peace of mind of the four kinds of Buddhists: monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen.” Some considered this statement a problem because zazen, the great matter for monks and nuns, was not mentioned in *The Meaning of Practice and Verification*.

In 1905, some time after the death of Takitani Zenji, an article titled “Concerning *The Meaning of Practice and Verification*” appeared in the magazine *Wayushi*, written under the penname “Kyohaku” (literally, “vacant–white”). It was notable for its time. The author claimed that the “theory of salvation or liberation of that era was a mess because of issues revolving around the

interpretation of *The Meaning of Practice and Verification*. The author questioned which was more important, zazen or receiving the Precepts?

In response to this confusion, the priests then in positions of leadership of the Sotoshu taught the oneness of zazen and the Precepts, based on the doctrine they had received from the debate that occurred during the Edo Period. However, the Edo Period debate was one concerned with “the Precepts transmitted by the Zen sect.” So by extension, the priests in the early twentieth century taught that, since the Precepts are the one great matter of cause and condition, Zen and the Precepts are one. Nevertheless, this debate in the Meiji Era was one that took place within the discussion of protecting *The Meaning of Practice and Verification*, which had already been established. Consequently, this resulted in the upside-down theory of “the oneness of Zen and the Precepts” which emphasized Zen by linking it to an emphasis on receiving the precepts.

Then, receiving this form of the debate, the Sotoshu was urged to accept *The Meaning of Practice and Verification* as the basis for teaching the laity in the Sotoshu Constitution which was revised during the later part of the Meiji Era through the Taisho Era. Also, the Four Principles of “repenting and eliminating bad karma,” “receiving the Precepts and joining the ranks,” “making the vow to benefit all beings,” and “practicing Buddhism and repaying blessings,” along with “the oneness of Zen and the Precepts” were included in the Sotoshu Constitution for the first time when it was revised again in 1941. This teaching remains in place through the present day.

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