
Ethical behaviour

By Patrick Pargnien

In view of the form taken by the organization of our human society, it seems more and more important for us to lead our lives in harmony with what an ethical conduct is, as an essential axis of the spiritual way, axis that we find also in the ideal of Bodhisattva.

Ethical conduct is based on compassion and universal love for all beings, which is at the heart of all Buddha's teachings. This implies before all that we become aware of the faculty of benevolence, of love which is in us, to be able to experience it in all beings and for all beings.

Ethical conduct is summarized by ten precepts or ethical principles which establish the foundations of the spiritual way (you will find these principles at our centre and on the website). First of all, the most important thing is not to interpret, not to live these bases as moral major principles based only on prohibitions, defences, mortifications, or to live them as great rigid laws that should be followed by willpower only.

The ethical conduct expresses the "nature", Buddha's wisdom. The term Buddha is used here in the meaning of the awakened reality which is in the heart of every human being. Yoka Daishi said that the precepts are printed in our mind, that they are not that laws coming from outside. They are based on our deepest, most intimate reality. They are the demonstration, the expression of the awakening spirit (Bodaishin).

Therefore, the ethical conduct is the precious art of being a buddha (to be awakened) in daily life. We cannot realize them or understand them by our will only or by our conceptual mind. Otherwise, the trap is that they become principles, dogmas and that the conditioned system (ego) uses them to strengthen, to exercise power, to assert itself above the others.

From the practice of the sitting meditation (zazen), we can understand them more and more profoundly, with the wisdom of the body and the spirit without any separation. In this sense, the root of the rules, their essence is zazen. They are the demonstration of zazen, which is itself the demonstration of the awakened heart in the actions of the daily life.

They are the link between the actions of the daily life and the philosophical values, allowing our daily life and our spiritual commitment to be no more than one and a same gesture.

On this matter, Master Deshimaru said: "The precepts symbolize Buddha's transmission, they are the mirror of satori, the awakening to Buddha's mind. The highest precept is zazen. Zazen is beyond any precept, he includes them all. The precepts of the sutras remain at the level of the formalism, but to do zazen means becoming Buddha, the cosmic life, the real precept".

What he expresses here does not mean that we should not make them the axis of our life, because they are the light that enlighten the path of our existence, and they prevent us from leading our life only on the base of our conditionings, our mental patterns.

If we were driven in our life only by the spirit of zazen, the spirit of compassion, of non-separation with all beings, with all the cosmos, it would not actually be necessary for us to follow the precepts, because each of our actions would be their expression.

When we are more and more guided by the awakening spirit, when it is not the conditioned system which drives us, then, the action to kill, the intent to kill, to steal, to lust, to criticize, to get drunk etc. does not occur to us anymore, and the act is not perpetrated

But if we observe - with an attention devoid of judgment and without complacency - our way of behaving, our way of working in life, we can become aware that our life is often driven by the functioning of the ego. This ego which tries to gather knowledges, to amass material objects and to become attached to it. Which tries to gain some power on ourselves, on the others, on the world. To making us prisoners of the belief that happiness and freedom are exclusively obtained by the various objects of the outside world.

The identification to this system makes us live through desires, aversions, fears. The fear of the world, the fear of others, and it is from there that all the processes of the ego originate: appropriation, attachment, conflict, rejection, opposition, separation ... Which govern our life, creating suffering in oneself and around ourselves.

In interdependence with this awareness, the precepts can be necessary, can be a real help on the Way, allowing to put into light our conditioned attitudes and to change them by giving a more adequate answer. And so, to be the awakened vehicle which leads our life.

If in our way of living, of being with the others, we realize that some of our acts are far away from an ethical conduct, but it is then important for this realization not to be transformed into guilt or judgment. As it is also important not to take this comprehension with complacency. But it should give us the opportunity to purify our actions or intentions, so that they would not cause any suffering.

Do not forget that the ethical conduct leans not only on the base of love and compassion for all beings, but also on the awareness that the faculty of benevolence and love are in ourselves. That she can be a precious partner on the way, to awaken us to a vaster dimension, radiating in each of our actions.

If we consider it as a precious gift and receive it as such, we can experience a feeling of joy, of friendship and gratitude at the slightest appearance of life. A flower which opens in the light of the sun, the singing of the wind in the foliage of the trees, a smile, the presence of a beloved person ... From all this, a feeling of gratitude emerges naturally, as generosity, the drive to share what we have and to love.