

Reading the “*Kyojukaimon and Commentary.*”

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One of the most useful and powerful parts of my training is the daily reading of the *Kyojukaimon and Commentary*, the sixteen Precepts, together with the commentary of Great Master Keizan and of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. When I first began reading *The Kyojukaimon and Commentary*, I must say I had only a very foggy idea of what it was about. But as I continued to read it and meditate, things began to become more clear. Sometimes one of the Precepts has seemed to come to life and stand out in relief as I went about my daily business. The two particular Precepts with which this has happened are:

“Do not speak against others.”

Do not speak against the Lord of the House. Every person, every being is the Temple of the Lord wherein the Lord dwells, the still water wherein the Dragon lives. If you speak against others you speak against the Lord of the House. Do not try to divide the Lord of the House; do not try to cause war within the Lord; do not try to make the Lord make war upon Himself. “In Buddhism, the Truth and everything are the same; the same law, the same enlightenment and the same behaviour. Do not allow any one to speak of another’s faults.” Do not find fault with the Lord of the House. “Do not allow any one to make a mistake in Buddhism.” To speak against the Lord of the House is the gravest mistake of which I know.

This article first appeared in the *Berkeley Buddhist Priory Newsletter*, Fall, 1981.

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“Do not be proud of yourself and devalue others.”

It is enough for me to know the Lord of the House, to know that He dwells within all things. How can there be devaluation of others if they are the Temple of the Lord? How can there be pride if all possess equally within the Lord? “Every Buddha and every Ancestor realises that He is the same as the limitless sky and as great as the universe. When They realise Their true body there is nothing within or without; when They realise Their true body They are nowhere more upon the earth.” There is nothing to be proud of and nothing to be devalued.¹

One day I began to realize that I was breaking these Precepts time after time during the day, so I started to make an effort to keep them. The first thing that happened was that I found I had about twenty-five to fifty percent less to say during my normal conversations when I quit judging, criticizing or making fun of others. Although dramatic, this change was not too difficult, once I made the effort. However, the next level in keeping the first of these Precepts was much more subtle and difficult. I would find myself listening to others criticize someone else and to some extent supporting them just by nodding my head slightly or rolling my eyes or with a facial expression that indicated consent. These little gestures of consent would frequently result in two or three minutes of breaking the Precepts with criticism. When I began to stop doing this the effect it had on my interactions was surprising, and after a while people tended not to run someone or something down when I was around.

Reading the *Kyojukaimon and Commentary* has also had other effects. For example, there have been times when I was just about to do something (or in the middle of it) when one of the Precepts would come to mind, like, “Cease from

evil.” At these times the Precepts have kept me out of a fair amount of trouble. At other times I have been pondering over a decision (like, should I write off this lunch as a business expense or was it social?), when I just stop and turn to the Precepts. There is “Do not steal,” and the decision is suddenly easier. I do not have to think, “Will I be audited by the IRS, and if so can I prove that we talked about business?” The truth is it was just a friendly lunch, not business, and the decision is that simple.

It is important when putting the Precepts into practice to use them as a guide to avoid mistakes and not to use them to be unnecessarily harsh with oneself. For example, in the above case it is useful to recognize that declaring a lunch as a business expense, when it is not, would be making a mistake. However there is no benefit in going beyond this and saying that I am training poorly because I almost broke the Precepts and therefore I am *bad*. It can be a very severe mistake to misuse the Precepts in this way, and in fact one is actually breaking the Precepts by so doing. I have found the Precepts to be most helpful when used as a gentle guide to point the way when faced with the decisions and problems of everyday life. It is not possible to keep all of the Precepts literally at all times, but we must do the very best we can.

One of the things that surprised me about trying to keep the Precepts was that some of them actually get a little easier with practice. A good example is anger. When I started out trying not to get angry it seemed almost impossible. This was because when I realized that I was angry, the anger was already overwhelming. It was like trying to stop Niagara Falls. But with some persistence, I began to notice my anger as it started to arise. When I was able to see the anger arising, it also became easier not to get caught up in it. The anger did not disappear, but I did not necessarily have to do anything with it, such as yell at someone or defend myself. Sometimes the anger just comes and goes very quickly when I recognize

it and do not get tangled up in it and feed energy into it. This is like a large boulder sitting at the top of a hill. Once the boulder starts to roll down the hill it gathers momentum and becomes more and more difficult to stop. But if you watch the boulder very carefully at the top of the hill and see when it just begins to teeter, you can steady it without too much effort. Trying to keep the Precepts is like carefully watching the boulder. The more you practice, the better you get at keeping the boulder balanced and seeing when it starts to teeter. In this way one of the big problems that comes up for me is now much easier to train with than it was when I first started.

The thing that is most helpful to me about reading and taking the Precepts is that I can do it *now*. I do not have to wait until I have more faith, or until I decide if I want to be a monk, or until I go to a meditation retreat or until everything is *just right*. The Precepts are something that I can put into my everyday training now and they get straight to the heart of what I am trying to do. Reading the *Kyojukaimon and Commentary* takes me about twenty to thirty minutes. It is important to read in a place where there is as little distraction as possible and to give yourself fully to reading without the diversion of a cup of coffee or conversation. Reading just before meditation, or just after, also seems to be helpful. I try to read the *Kyojukaimon and Commentary* every day, or half one day and half the next if there is not time all at once. I am sure that it would also be helpful to read it twice a week or once a week if that is all the time one can find. The benefit seems to come from reading and practicing on a regular basis so that the Precepts weave themselves into the fabric of our everyday life in the same way that daily meditation does.

Note.

1. See Great Master Dogen and Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, *Kyojukaimon and Commentary*, in this publication, pp. 80–81.