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The Heart of Being: Moral and Ethical Teachings of Zen Buddhism. By John Daido Looi. Boston: Charles E. Tuttle, 1996. Pp. 267. ISBN 0-8048-3078-9. \$16.95.

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The author is the spiritual leader and abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery in Mt. Temper, New York, and is the founder and director of the Mountains and Rivers Orders. He is the author of several books on Zen and in this latest work turns his attention to the ethical teachings of Zen Buddhism. The inspiration for the book comes from the work the author did on the precepts with his teacher Taizan Maezumi, who died in 1995.

The volume is divided into three parts. The first and longest is entitled "Jukai: The Ceremony of Precepts;" the second is "Koans on Moral and Ethical Teachings;" and the third is a short section entitled "Questions and Answers."

The first part begins with an explanation of the Zen version of the ceremony of taking the precepts. Chapter One explains the terminology and the symbolism of the ritual, while the precepts themselves are summarized in Chapter Two, which offers a short commentary of Dōgen's teachings on the precepts. There are two main groups of precepts: the "Three Pure Precepts" (not creating evil, practicing good, and actualizing good for others) which correspond to an ancient standard Mahāyāna formulation, and the Ten Grave Precepts which consist of the standard Five Precepts (against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and taking intoxicants) together with a further set of five which as formulated here seem specific to Zen. These precepts provide the framework for the discussion in the course of the fifteen chapters of part one and it is here that the author sets out his views on Zen ethics.

Part two is much shorter and consists of four chapters devoted to the discussion of koans which have a bearing on moral issues. The first koan is Master Sung-yuan's "The red thread of passion." The second is "T'ou-tzu's All Sounds" from the *Blue Cliff Record*, and the fourth "Chin-niu's thanksgiving" is also from this source. The third is "Pai-chang and the fox" from the *Mumonkan*. With the exception of the first, which relates to sexuality, the ethical significance of these koans was at times less than obvious to this reader.

The third section consists of twenty-two pages of questions and answers from an evening at the Zen Mountain monastery. There are general questions on the relationship between intention and action, on how to deal with emotions such as anger, on sexuality (abortion, celibacy, masturbation), and a range of practical aspects such as how to keep one's practice fresh.

This is a useful book which will be of particular use to those practicing in the Zen tradition. It is particularly welcome in adopting what might be described as a "second generation" perspective on Zen ethics which eschews the views of an earlier generation of writers such as Alan Watts and D.T.Suzuki that Zen is amoral and beyond morality. As the author rightly

states, "Although they made it sound right, both were implicitly dead wrong. Zen is not amoral. It is a practice that takes place within a very definite, clear context that is most definitely moral and ethical" (p.184). This point is well made, and is emphasized repeatedly throughout part one, for instance in the statement that "Enlightenment and morality are one" (p.24)

At the same time there seems to be an ambiguity in the author's mind about the precise status of the precepts. Although he rightly calls for practice within a clear moral framework he seems keen to leave room for a situational interpretation. This leads to contradictions in the harder cases, such as abortion. We are told on page 8, for example, that the eighth duty of a ruler is "to actualize nonviolence, which means not only avoiding harming anyone but also opposing any activity that involves violence and destruction of life." We are also told that the first grave precept is "Affirm life; do not kill. 'Life is nonkilling. The seed of Buddha grows continually. Maintain the wisdom life of Buddha, and do not kill life'" (p.20). When specifically asked about what the precepts have to say about abortion, however, rather than relay this very clear guidance the author responds "From a Buddhist perspective, making that choice, and the consequences of that choice, are the woman's. Each person has to weigh the consequences individually, and each person will bear the karma of his or her decisions, good or bad" (p.239). This disappointing response simply dodges the issue. Of course it is true that Buddhism teaches that we are all responsible for our moral choices, but this is an entirely separate question from the morality of specific acts. Surely the precepts are part of "the Buddhist perspective" on this matter and deserve to be engaged with seriously rather than brushed aside?

Again, in a related question on disconnecting a life-support machine the author bounces the question back with the reply "they're your precepts not mine." But surely the point about the precepts is that they are first and foremost the Buddha's precepts, and if enlightenment and practice are related in the way suggested in part one they should be respected by everyone who is seeking to emulate the Buddha. Attempting to relativize the issues, as if all moral problems were reducible to time, place, and individual, dilutes the emphasis on respect for the precepts found elsewhere in the book. There is clearly an underlying contradiction in Zen ethics as expounded here which needs to be resolved. Either Buddhism is able to articulate a moral position on issues or it is not, in which case why bother with the precepts at all?

Despite the above, the book is to be welcomed as a useful contribution to the field of Buddhist ethics and as a generally sound guide for practitioners of Zen.