

Shila or morality.

At the end of a Zen sesshin we had a period of questions and someone asked my Zen teacher 'What is the Zen position on euthanasia? (I think it was). My teacher replied something along the lines of 'In Zen we don't have any fixed positions on moral issues like that....rather we take each issue and decide the right action to take in the direct experience of the actual situation.'

We do have rough guidelines in the form of the precepts which have been formulated over many centuries. Moral guidance cannot be a static, absolute set of rules set in stone, as what might be acceptable in one culture might be totally unacceptable in another, and even in the same culture moral values change. Homosexuality was regarded as a punishable offence 50 years ago and we no longer hang people for stealing sheep.

But when people have to live together in close proximity to each other, some guiding principles seem to be necessary. Even then they must be subject to interpretation in the light of circumstances. We should not kill other humans or animals but at times that may be necessary. We have to kill to eat, even if only vegetable life. Sometimes we might have to lie to protect someone. There always seems to be a tension between absolute and relative morality in Buddhism, but the emphasis seems to me to be to attain the wisdom necessary to make correct judgements in any given situation through being able to have a correct view, untainted by ego, of reality, through our practice.