

THE teachings are more of a guide than a rulebook, really. Among the monks, that is known and accepted. More of them have been using firearms recently, and the teachings expressly forbid that, but nobody has ever raised an objection. In ten years' time there will be more gun wielders than swordsmen, probably, but there will be no harm in it. The elders will state that such contraptions are forbidden, and then they will incline their heads and say, "of course, in some cases we recognise the necessity," and everyone will nod along as if it had always been the case.

The teachings are to be interpreted as best suits each man. Otherwise, there would be some men who would be unable to live with themselves. There are commandments about how to live one's life that in some cases cannot be obeyed; there are people who must make the decision not to try. The sick, and those who cannot work in religious service. Families that come together by accident, where the most important thing is the sense of a home. Men who fall in love with nonbelievers.

When the very essence of who you are goes against the teachings, there is little to do but resign yourself to it. Otherwise, you will be in such conflict with yourself that it will destroy you. And surely this thing – this deviance – is so fundamental that the other men will also understand. It is not that you chose to go against the teachings: this is simply who you are.

Even when it doesn't go that way – even when they spit

in your face and call you a sinner, and lead you to the water's edge – you will know you are still a holy man. Your faith is still strong, even though the priests and temples turn against you. That is what sustains you, for now.