

The Beautiful Path

Readings on Ethics,

to Soothe and Brighten the Mind

Jason Espada, editor

The Beautiful Path - Readings on Ethics

To Soothe and Brighten the Mind

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About these selections: The Traditional teachings in this collection are my own versions; and the the texts and prayers offered here have been edited, and in some places revised, according to my understanding. In these cases, I have done my best to be true to the meaning.

Preface

There is a great need these days for the study and practice of ethics. The universal values of caring for each other, and for this sacred earth have always been needed, but they are especially called for when life has gotten out of balance. We turn again to traditional teachings, which are our precious inherited wisdom. By changing the way we live, they all tell us, we can restore health on personal and collective levels.

We today live under one life philosophy, which is principled on compassion, reciprocity, stewardship, and really, about humility...

- Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, Hopi Keeper of Knowledge

In Buddhism, in every lineage, morals are the basis of the path. They are integral in the Three Trainings, of ethics, meditation, and wisdom, that leads to freedom from suffering. Ethics precedes meditation, and meditation is the essential ground for the wisdom that uproots the defilements, ends suffering, and brings the peace, health and happiness that we all seek. In this way, Buddhism recognizes that there are levels to the mind and heart that need to be cultivated over time to bring about greater peace. This keeps moral teachings from staying on the surface, becoming just another dogma, and resulting in endless struggle, and hypocrisy.

Even though ethics are not emphasized for the most part when Buddhism is taught in the West, it is recognizing our interdependence and having a compassionate motivation for self and others that is the basis for progress on this path.

With this in mind, I've gathered here the teachings on ethics that have meant the most to me over the years, with the thought that they may be illuminating and encouraging for others as well.

I send this forth then, from my heart.

May the study and cultivation of ethics lead us all to create the foundation of peace and health in our lives, and in this world.

Jason Espada
San Francisco,
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Sila is the mother and father of all Dhammas.

- Ajahn Chah

Virtue and integrity are the foundation of all good things.

- Ajahn Pasanno

Observe the pure precepts, the magnificent adornment in the world,
to which gods and humans make offerings.

- Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche

Shramanas who study the Way should get a hold of their minds and be vigorous, courageous, and valiant. Not fearing what lies ahead, they should destroy the hordes of demons and obtain the fruits of the Way.

Having the strength of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom in order to break through and destroy your beginningless habits and your beginningless pretensions, and all your other faults is analogous to destroying the multitudes of demons...

Don't turn back halfway. Go forward vigorously and with courage. Only go forward; never retreat. Only advance; never retreat.

- From The Forty-Two Sections Sutra

*Just as the Blessed Buddhas and Arya Bodhisattvas have done,
May I and all beings in the six realms and the bardo
all accomplish the Perfection of Virtue.*

May the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion
be quelled in me, and in all beings,
and all across this earth

May there be peace and harmony everywhere...

Recollecting the Qualities of the Three Jewels, Praise, and Taking Refuge

Homage to the Founder,
 the Endowed Transcendent Destroyer (of defilements),
 the One Gone Beyond,
 the Foe Destroyer,
 The Completely Perfected, Fully Awakened Being,
 the Glorious Conqueror, the Subduer from the Shakya Clan

(Recollection of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha)

(This fine report of the Buddha's reputation has spread far & wide,
 that) He is

Worthy of honor and reverence,
 being the Great Benefactor of us all,
 He is an Arahant, completely purified,
 A Fully Enlightened One,

Accomplished in Knowledge and Conduct,
 Well-gone,
 Knower of the world

He is an Incomparable teacher for those to be trained,
 A Teacher of devas and humans,
 The Awakened One,
 He is a blessing to the world.

(Recollection of the Dhamma)

His Liberating Teachings
 are well explained,

They are timeless,
 to be seen here and now,
 They are inviting,
 leading onwards,
 and to be experienced individually by the wise

(Recollection of the Sangha)

And His Spiritual Community has practiced well,
 with understanding, and integrity;
 They have practiced with faith and clear intelligence,
 with diligent effort and dedication,

They are worthy of praise and respect,
 They are worthy of love and support
 They are worthy of gifts,
 Worthy of hospitality,
 Worthy of offerings,
 They are an incomparable field of merit for the world!

An Awakened One has appeared in the world.
 He has taught the Way to freedom,
 and generations of his followers
 have realized his teachings.

I take refuge in the Buddha,
 the Great Compassionate Teacher

I take refuge in the Dhamma,
 in all the Liberating Teachings

and I take refuge in the Noble Sangha,
 the Accomplished Spiritual Community,
 the Great Assembly of Saints and Bodhisattvas

I praise and celebrate,
honor and support all those who are cultivating
these paths and their results

Praise and Taking Refuge

Endowed with excellent qualities,
 of purity, transcendental wisdom, and compassion,
 The Great Teacher has enlightened the wise
 like the sun awakening the lotus -
 I bow my head to that peaceful Chief of Conquerors.

The Buddha, the Noble Lord,
 who is the supreme, secure Refuge of all beings -
 As the First Object of Recollection, I venerate Him with bowed head.
 The Buddha is sorrow's destroyer, and He bestows blessings

I take refuge in the Buddha,
 and to the Buddha I dedicate this body and life.
 In devotion I will walk the Buddha's path of awakening.
 By my devotion to the Buddha, and by the blessings of this practice,
 By its power, may all obstacles be overcome.

The Dhamma is excellent because it is so clear and inspiring,
 It's actual nature is known when put into practice -
 it can be seen then as Path and Fruit, as Practice and Liberation.
 This Dhamma holds those who uphold it from falling into delusion.
 I revere the excellent teaching, that removes darkness from the mind

The Dhamma, which is the supreme, secure Refuge of all beings -
 As the Second Object of Recollection, I venerate it with bowed head.
 The Dhamma is sorrow's destroyer, and it bestows blessings

I take refuge in the Dhamma,
 and to the Dhamma I dedicate this body and life,
 In devotion I will walk this excellent way of Truth.
 By my devotion to the Dhamma, and by the blessings of this practice,

By its power, may all obstacles be overcome.
 Born of the Dhamma, that Sublime Sangha
 Is guided in body and mind by most excellent virtue.
 I revere that assembly of Noble beings perfected in purity.

The Sangha, which is the supreme, secure Refuge of all beings
 As the Third Object of Recollection, I venerate it with bowed head.
 The Sangha is sorrow's destroyer and it bestows blessings

I take refuge in the Sangha
 and to the Sangha I dedicate this body and life.
 In devotion I will walk the well-practiced way of the Sangha.
 By my devotion to the Sangha, and by the blessings of this practice,
 By its power, may all obstacles be overcome.

To the Buddha,
 The Savior having Great Compassion and Great Wisdom,
 with qualities like a vast ocean,

To the purity which makes one free from attachment,
 The virtue which frees one from the lower realms,
 To that Dhamma which pacifies, brings freedom,
 and reveals our true nature,

And to those who are liberated and who also show the path to liberation,
 The holy field qualified with realizations,
 Who are devoted to the moral precepts,
 and to the benefit of beings,
 To the Sangha, the sublime community intending virtue -

Homage

I take refuge in the Buddha

I take refuge in the Dharma

and

I take refuge in the Noble Sangha

May all beings share in these blessings.

Adapted from The Ceremony Praising Ancestral Teachers, by Thich Nhat Hanh

Homage to the Ancestral Teachers of all ages!

I am aware that just as trees have their roots, and water has its source, the Buddha and all generations of Ancestral Teachers are my source;

I am the continuation of you, my ancestors, and this is my aspiration:

I am determined to receive the awakened understanding, compassion, peace, joy, and healing energy which the Buddha and the Ancestral Teachers have transmitted;

I am determined to maintain these and to help them grow, never allowing this precious spiritual inheritance to come to an end;

I am determined to continue your aspiration to help all beings;

I am determined to transform my own suffering, and to help the people of this time to transform their suffering;

I am determined to open Dharma doors for this and future generations which are appropriate, and that can help them to apply the teachings of Buddhism in all fields of life.

I vow to practice to live happily and peacefully in the present moment, to nourish solidity and freedom in myself, in order to help those around me.

* * *

*I call upon my teachers and spiritual ancestors
May I realize your teachings,
and communicate your love and wisdom to all*

*I turn to my spiritual ancestors
I ask them for their support,
inspiration, and strength*

*Lord Buddha with your retinue,
please come to this place...*

From The Profound Practice of Taking Refuge

An Awakened One has appeared in the world.
He has taught the Way to freedom,
and generations of his followers
have realized his teachings.

I take refuge in the Buddha, the Great Compassionate Teacher
I take refuge in the Dharma, in all the Liberating Teachings,
and I take refuge in the Noble Sangha,
the Accomplished Spiritual Community,
the Great Assembly of Saints and Bodhisattvas

*I entrust my spiritual life to the Buddha, the Enlightened One, the Great
Compassionate Teacher*

*I dedicate myself to the study, practice, and realization of the Dharma,
{and in this way take refuge in all the Liberating Teachings}*

*and I entrust myself to the guidance and support of the Noble Sangha, the
Accomplished Spiritual Community, the Great Assembly of Saints and
Bodhisattvas...*

Taking Refuge in the Dharma Includes Ethics and Meditation

We take refuge in the Dharma in actual fact by practicing the precepts and meditation, cultivating calm and insight. If we just repeat words, that by itself is not taking refuge. Think about it. When our aspirations and words of commitment and our actions come into alignment - *that* is what brings protection. That is what brings the safety and peace that we all seek...

Having confidence in practice - from Steps on the Path to Enlightenment, Volume One, by Geshe Sopa

The most important thing to do in the beginning is to take refuge in the Three Jewels; this is the way to enter deeply into the teachings of the Buddha.

The next step is to examine causality, drawing from examples in your own experience until you're convinced that positive actions result in happiness and non-virtue leads to unhappiness.

Strong trust in the relationship between cause and effect is the basis for living a life of virtue and engaging in spiritual training.

To obtain happiness and avoid misery, you have to accumulate their causes: practicing virtue and eliminating non-virtue, (however) it's not easy to control your actions, and it requires great mental and physical effort. If you don't have the confidence in the truth and the benefit of the practice, you'll not be able to change your attitude and your behavior. *This is why faith in karmic causality is the root of all happiness from worldly joy up to the bliss of supramundane happiness, liberation, and enlightenment.

Recollection of the Mindfulness Trainings

The Mindfulness Trainings, the wholesome way of living taught by my Noble Teacher,
is the wonderful practice that remains unbroken,
that remains harmonious, that remains flawless, that remains refined;
is the wonderful practice that has the capacity to protect self and others,
and to reveal beauty;
is the wonderful practice that is leading to concentration,
leading to peacefulness, leading to insight, leading to non-fear;
is the wonderful practice that shows us the way to total emancipation
and long lasting happiness.

The Three Refuges and the Five Precepts

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

(3x)

Buddham saranam gacchami

Dhammam saranam gacchami

Sangham saranam gacchami

Dutiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami

Dutiyampi Dhammam saranam gacchami

Dutiyampi Sangham saranam gacchami

Tatiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami

Tatiyampi Dhammam saranam gacchami

Tatiyampi Sangham saranam gacchami

I accept the training rule to abstain from the destruction of life.

I accept the training rule to abstain from stealing.

I accept the training rule to abstain from sexual misconduct.

I accept the training rule to abstain from false speech.

I accept the training rule to abstain from wine, liquor, and other intoxicants.

You have undertaken the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts.

Observe them carefully.

From The Way to Buddhahood, by the Venerable Yin-Shun

Our activities as humans are the pivot of ascent and descent

Ascending and descending {through various existences} is primarily due to the good or bad karma done as a human being.

The human ability to practice meditation, with the possible consequence of being born in a heavenly realm, is good karma; Becoming a monastic, keeping the precepts, practicing self cultivation, ending birth and death, becoming a buddha - these are possible only for humans.

With regard to ascent or descent throughout the six realms, good or evil human conduct is the central pivot from which all movements up or down are initiated. Because of this, one should be very careful not to lose the human form...

*One should be happy that one is a human now, because the opportunity to be free from birth and death and to become a buddha has arrived!

* * *

Everyone wants to have happiness - no one wants to fall into evil destinies. Everyone wants to be born as humans, or in a heavenly realm, however, one will not be born human or in a heaven simply as a result of one's wishes. All the joyful rewards are the results of the accumulation of good karma.

Therefore, have right views with firm belief in karmic results, reject suffering and seek happiness, and now matter what the situation is now, cultivate good karma diligently.

The Fortunate Karma of Ethics

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*In order to control oneself for the benefit of others,
One has to be determined and patient in keeping the pure precepts.*

Giving primarily, sacrificing one's external belongings in order to benefit sentient beings- is a valuable and virtuous conduct, but it is not the most precious. The objectives of the Buddha Dharma are to avoid evil and do good so that one may have a pure mind. Keeping the precepts is therefore superior to giving material goods. Precepts for virtuous conduct come from controlling one's selfish desires in order to enhance harmony, happiness, and the growth of good in the world- that is, from controlling oneself to benefit others.

This can be explained in the following way. Keeping the precept of not stealing does not just mean for today or tomorrow, or just not from the Zhangs or the Wangs; it means that from now on, one will not steal the belongings of any person, any sentient being. Therefore, to keep the precept of not stealing means that one gives a secure guarantee that one will not violate or harm the body or belongings of any human or any sentient being.

Likewise, to not engage in improper sexual conduct means that from now on one will not seduce or use force to destroy another person's chastity or family harmony for the gratification of one's selfish desires. This precept is to be applied toward all members of the opposite sex and is not just limited to certain people. For these reasons, the Buddha has praised the five precepts as "five great gifts." The kind of merit obtained from benefiting others through keeping the precepts is greater than that obtained from the common act of giving material goods, and it has greater value.

In order to accept and keep the precepts, one has to control one's selfish desires. One must have firm determination to endure various trials:

hardships, sufferings, situational temptations, threats, coercion. One must endure selfish desires without being disturbed. One must even have the determination to die in order to keep the precepts, that is, one must be so determined that one will not live if one has to break them. Only with such strong endurance and the determination to control sensual desires and overcome whatever situations arise can one keep the precepts with purity and not break them. If one can live in this way, then one will not destroy with a single act the merit obtained from keeping the precepts for years. Even if only one precept is violated, then all will fail. This situation can be compared to that of a person who has been law abiding for a lifetime but who, after one criminal act, is punished by the law.

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*Use one's own feelings to measure those of others.
One should not kill or harm others,
Should not steal or engage in improper sexual conduct,
And should not make false statements.
Because drinking can destroy all virtues,
Buddhists should also keep the precept of not drinking.*

There are three categories of precepts: the five precepts, the eight precepts, and the ten good precepts. These are the meritorious precepts of the Dharma that are common to the Five Vehicles. Not understanding the meaning of keeping the precepts, some people keep them because they want the merit to be obtained from so doing. Though this is good, it is not ideal. From the Agama Sutra and the Dharmapada to the Mahāyāna sutras, the Buddha has clearly said that keeping precepts means "to use one's own feelings to measure those of others" for the purpose of controlling one's sensual desires toward others. In the sutras, using one's own feelings to measure other people's (all sentient beings') feelings is called the Dharma of taking oneself as the yardstick against which to measure things. This is the same as the principle of reciprocity in Confucianism.

In the sutra this concept is explained in the following way: "I want to live and not to die, want to have happiness and avoid suffering. Would I like it if someone were to destroy my life through the act of killing when what I want is to live and not die, to have happiness and avoid suffering? If I would not like that, then when I destroy someone else who also wants to live and not die, to have happiness and avoid suffering, that being will not like that either. In addition, that which I do not like or enjoy will not be liked or enjoyed by others either. How can I harm others with those things which I do not like or enjoy?" This is like what Confucius said: "Don't do to others what you don't want to be done to you." Jesus Christ said, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." When one uses oneself as a measure of what others feel, the proper ethics to regulate the relations between people is not difficult to realize.

If I hate suffering and want happiness, and other people are just like me, then how can I take away others' happiness and add to their suffering? How can I not rejoice in others' happiness and not alleviate others' suffering? In Buddhism, the kindness that gives happiness and alleviates suffering is the actual putting into practice of this spirit. Therefore, controlling one's sensual desires in order to keep the precepts is nothing more than the Dharma of taking oneself as the measure. It is based on one's compassion and willingness to act in this way. This really is the practice of the Dharma that brings happiness in this life and in future lives.

The Five Precepts

The five precepts are those that should be kept by male lay devotees (upāsakas) and female lay devotees (upāsikās). These precepts are called the precepts of "attendant service," which is the literal meaning of "upa." Such is the virtue of the precepts for lay life. The foundation of the virtue of the precepts is the same for the low and the high, however; even the bodhisattva precepts are built on this foundation, although they are more complete and pure. The five precepts are all based on the principle of using one's own feelings to measure those of others.

"Do not kill." Whether one does the killing oneself or sends another to do it (conspiring with others to kill is also sinful), ending a sentient being's life is killing. An unintentional killing is not a serious offense, however. Among all the killings of sentient beings, killing humans is naturally the most serious offense. Harming others with knives, canes, earthenware, rocks, etc.- although not counted as heavily as the offense of killing, belongs to the category of killing.

"Do not steal." This applies to all things- national, personal, or Buddhist that have owners. One breaks the precept of not stealing if one takes, forcibly occupies, or misappropriates things without the owner's consent. According to the Buddha Dharma, one cannot use the excuse of being hungry, sick, or wanting to provide for one's parents, wife, and children to steal. All stealing is sinful.

"Do not engage in improper sexual conduct." If a man and a woman agree to be husband and wife by means of publicly recognized rites, with the approval of guardians and not in violation of secular laws, then sexual contact between husband and wife (which is an important element of family formation for the continuation of posterity) is proper and not sinful. Even in cases where the other partner consents, sexual conduct is improper for laypeople if it is not permitted by the Buddha Dharma (for example, when one has received the eight precepts), not allowed by secular law, or

not agreed to by the related guardians. Buddhist lay devotees should abstain from such contact. Such contact not only harms the other person's ability to make choices free of external influences, but it is also evil conduct that ruins the harmony of families and disturbs the order of society.

"Do not make false statements." Sometimes one makes untruthful statements for the sake of one's own benefit, for the benefit of one's relatives and friends, or in order to harm one's enemy. The precept of not lying also applies to pretending to know something when one does not, and denying that one knows something when one does; to saying there is something when there is not, and saying there is not something when there is; and to calling right something that is wrong and vice versa. By making false statements that benefit oneself and one's relatives but bring harm to others, one commits the serious offense of lying. For other kinds of false statements the offense is lighter.

The four precepts discussed above are called natural precepts, because the deeds themselves are crimes. That is, to do these things is wrong whether one accepts the precepts or not. Not only does the Buddha Dharma not permit these acts, but even secular laws will punish one for such conduct.

"Do not drink alcohol." Whatever substance has the ability to disturb or confuse one's mind is called alcohol, and one should never consume it. Although some people say that drinking alcohol is good for one's health, according to the Buddha Dharma it is devoid of any merit. First, drinking alcohol can disturb one's mind and lead one to lose self-control. When one is drunk, one not only makes mistakes, but one also may say things or commit evil deeds that one would ordinarily be unable to say or do.

In the Vinaya there is a story about a Buddhist disciple who was very strict about keeping the precepts but who, after becoming confused and disorderly from drinking, committed the four serious offenses of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying all on the same day. Because of situations like this, drinking is said to destroy all virtues.

In actuality, it is not only the virtues of the Buddha Dharma that are destroyed by drinking alcohol. The happiness of families, friendships, businesses, and wealth are often destroyed as well. Second, derangement and ignorance are the root of all crimes and can be caused by drinking.

Habitual drinking is a big obstacle to the maintenance of right mindfulness and right knowledge. Some people, because they are always drunk, have children who are born insane or with serious mental retardation. Even if drinking may not seem to be evil, it really is one of the chief culprits that impedes wisdom and destroys virtues. In addition to the first four precepts, therefore, Buddhists should seriously keep the precept of not drinking in order to guard their virtues and move toward the world-transcending doctrines, which have wisdom as their foundation.

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*To one who keeps the five precepts for life,
All good fortune will come.*

The five precepts discussed above are pure precepts that should be kept by the upāsakas and upāsikās. When one takes refuge, one willingly says: "All my life I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha". One should also accept and keep the five precepts for life. To take refuge means to have faith in and to vow to follow the Three Treasures; accepting the five precepts is the actual practice of following the Three Treasures. People who take refuge but do not accept and keep the five precepts can be said to be upāsakas and upāsikās in name only. When one takes refuge and says, "From today until the end of my life, I will protect living beings," this is the vow to accept the precepts.

Precepts are based on the compassionate Dharma of taking oneself as the measure. The precepts therefore have as their foundation the principle of no killing, or protecting life. Not stealing, not engaging in sexual

misconduct, etc., are all specific explanations of the principle of protecting others' lives. Some people have translated "protecting lives" as "releasing life" in reference to the East Asian practice of releasing captive animals. Some people use the precept of no killing as the most explicit example when they are explaining the five precepts (not all the precepts will necessarily be explained when one is accepting precepts, even when the bhikṣu precepts are being given).

Accepting the five precepts after taking refuge is basically a way to learn more about the specific details of the precepts. Those who sincerely take refuge in the Three Treasures will not refuse to accept and keep the five precepts. Faith without a corresponding improvement in a person's conduct is clear proof of the absence of real faith. One cannot be a complete upāsaka if one does not have real faith.

The enormously compassionate Tathāgata, however, felt that lay devotees' habits are so severely contaminated that they cannot immediately accept and keep all the precepts with purity. He thought that if Buddhism were too strict, people might not dare approach the Three Treasures. To allow for their different abilities, the Tathāgata spoke of four groups of devotees: the one-precept upasakas, who have the ability to keep one precept; the few-precepts upāsakas, who keep two precepts; the more-precepts upasakas, who keep three to four precepts; and the complete upasakas, who keep all five precepts. Among all the lay devotees, those of the last group are excellent.

Once one has accepted the five precepts and is able to keep them purely, one will have good fortune. This can be compared to getting a wish-fulfilling pearl; once one has it, one can get other treasures as well. By keeping the precepts, one does not break secular laws, so one gains the respect of society. This pleases both humans and divine beings, and the divine spirits will come to protect one. Evil ghosts and spirits will make all haste to retreat; everything will be auspicious. Those who have pure minds and who keep the precepts without doing any evil can be reborn as

humans or divine beings; with the precepts as a foundation for meditation and wisdom, they can initiate the world-transcending merit.

The Eight-Branched Fasting Precepts

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*For additional practice, there are the one full-day precepts
That follow the lifestyle of the practitioners who have given up lay life.*

The second category of pure precepts is the eight-branched fasting precepts, also called the "staying nearby" precepts. The first five of the eight precepts not killing, not stealing, celibacy, not lying, and not drinking are similar to the five precepts except for the precept of celibacy. While one is keeping these precepts, even normally proper sexual conduct between husband and wife is prohibited, just as it is for monastics.

The sixth precept not to wear perfumes or garlands and not to sing or dance, or watch or listen to singing or dancing-may be split into two: the first part directs one to abstain from using cosmetics, putting flowers in one's hair, and wearing extravagant jewelry. The second indicates that one should also abstain from watching and listening to dancing and singing, in addition to not doing these things oneself. The seventh precept is not to use luxurious high seats or beds, and the eighth is not to eat after regulation hours, that is, in the afternoon. The last three precepts are similar to those of monastic people. The precept of not eating after regulation hours is called the precept of fasting.

Unable to give up lay life to practice, lay disciples in the Buddha's time were very envious of the monastic life. Therefore, the Buddha established the eight precepts for the lay disciples' additional cultivation to allow them to keep these precepts for one full day. In this way, lay practitioners can follow those practitioners who have given up lay life (arhats, etc.) in order to learn and practice their disciplined and simple way of life. Those who receive these precepts temporarily live near the Sangha or the arhats, which is why these are called the "staying nearby" precepts.

Since the five precepts are kept for life as the virtuous conduct of laypeople, to practice the monastic life for a short time laypeople take the eight precepts. If they additionally take the precept of not handling money, these nine precepts are the same as the formal monastic precepts for a śrāmaṇera.

The eight-branched fasting precepts were established by the Buddha to be kept for one full day, generally the eighth, fourteenth, fifteenth, twenty-third, twenty-ninth and thirtieth of each month of the lunar calendar, which are the days to give and perform good deeds according to Indian tradition. On those days, people generally go early in the morning to the monastery and request that the acarya transmit the full-day precepts. People then keep the precepts without breaking them until dawn of the next day. If people then want to take the precepts for another day, they can go to the teacher again and request formal instruction.

The Buddha established these precepts for one full day because it would be impossible for the laity to live like monastics; but some people think that these precepts should not be restricted to one full day. So, depending on the participant's vow, it is possible to keep the precepts for three days, five days, or a month.

The eight-branched fasting precepts are more strict than the five precepts. Because the five precepts are to be kept for life, however, they are superior to the eight-branched fasting precepts in some ways. Since the merit accrued from keeping either the five or the eight precepts depends on the way a person keeps them, it is very difficult to say which are superior.

The five precepts are the regular discipline that guides the conduct of lay disciples, and it is only on occasions when they want to practice the monastic life that they keep the eight-branched fasting precepts. However, there are also some people who cannot keep the five precepts for life but instead resolve to take the eight-branched fasting precepts for a short time. Although this is contrary to the standard (which requires people to take the

five precepts first), since the primary purpose of the Buddha Dharma is to lead people to do good, it is permissible.

The Ten Good Precepts

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*The ten good precepts are no killing, no stealing,
no improper sexual conduct,
No lying and no backbiting,
No evil words or frivolous talk,
No greedy desires, anger, or deviant views.
The foundation of all good karma
Is these ten good deeds as explained by the Buddha.
These are the foundation for the good karma of divine and
human beings,
Upon which the sacred Dharma of the Three Vehicles is established.*

The third category of the pure precepts is that of the ten good deeds, which are also called the ten good precepts. The ten good deeds are not included among the rules and regulations that were established by the Tathāgata. However, the "Chapter of the Ten Stages" in the Avatamsaka Sutra (Flower Ornament Sūtra), the Upasakasīla Sūtra (Sūtra on the Moral Behavior of the Laity), the Madhyamakāvatāra (Treatise on Entering the Middle Way), and the She bo lu mi duo lun (Discourse on Embracing the Pāramitā) all say that the ten good deeds are bodhisattva precepts.

Beginning with the Agama Sutra, the ten good deeds are recognized as the principal guidelines for virtuous conduct and as equal to the five precepts. In the Buddha Dharma, the precepts and the rules and regulations are similar yet slightly different. Whether one takes the precepts by oneself or receives them from a teacher, they are considered precepts and have the ten good deeds as their foundation. Various rules are established based on a particular practitioner's environment and capacity: the eight categories of rules and regulations of the five precepts, the eight precepts, and so on. These are precepts as well as rules and regulations.

The fundamental virtuous conduct of the ten good deeds is therefore discussed in this section on the fortunate karma of keeping the precepts.

The ten good deeds are divided into three groups: physical, verbal, and mental. There are three physical good deeds: not killing, not stealing, and not engaging in improper sexual conduct. These are the same as the first three of the five precepts.

There are four verbal good deeds: not lying, not backbiting, not speaking evil words, and not engaging in frivolous speech.

The precept of not lying is the same as that of the five precepts.

Not backbiting means not destroying the harmony of others through gossiping and thereby sowing discord and dissension.

Not speaking evil words means not using offensive language that causes others to be very embarrassed: scolding, mocking and ridiculing, criticizing bitterly or meanly, attacking maliciously, exposing others, and so forth.

Not engaging in frivolous speech means not talking uselessly in a way that leads to stealing, sex, lustful love songs, jokes, and heedless conversation, or in a way that superficially touches on any and every subject. Not only is such frivolous speech a waste of time, it is also harmful to the body and the mind.

The fact that the ten good deeds emphasize verbal deeds clearly demonstrates that these deeds are fundamental to virtuous conduct.

Human beings use language to communicate their feelings and thoughts. If their speech is full of lies, backbiting, evil words, and frivolity, how can the peace and happiness of humankind-well-managed homes, well-governed countries, and a peaceful world-be achieved?

Although it is said that "speech is as fast as the wind," it is still not easy to communicate verbally. Since the advent of written languages, it has been possible to spread information over great distances and to preserve it for a long time. With the recent inventions of the telephone, television, and so forth, people's minds are now connected as closely as each breath is to the next. Yet these close connections are full of lies, backbiting, and so forth. That is the kind of world in which we live. Trying to establish everlasting peace for humankind while going against normal virtuous conduct is like trying to find fish by climbing up a tree.

In addition to the three good physical deeds and the four good verbal deeds, there are three good mental deeds: having no greed, no anger, and no deviant views.

Having no greed means having no desire to possess another person's wealth, spouse, power, or position, or plans to take possession of these. It also means being content without greed.

Having no anger means being without hatred or the idea of harming others.

Having no deviant views means having the right views of the existence of good and evil, of karmic results, of past and future lives, of ordinary people and sages, and so forth. Though mental deeds take place in the mind, when expressed, they become physical and verbal conduct. The opposite of the ten good deeds is the ten evil deeds. Abandoning the ten evil deeds and practicing the ten good ones is a virtuous conduct that everyone should practice.

The ways to accumulate good karma are extremely numerous, but the ten good deeds are the most obvious ways to do so. In the Mahāyāna Dharma, these ten good deeds are bodhisattva precepts and the foundation for all good conduct, whether for śravakas, pratyekabuddhas, divine beings, or

humans. They are the foundation for the good karma upon which the sacred Dharma of the Three Vehicles is established.

As is said in the Sagara-naga-rāja-paripṛechā (Ocean Dragon King Sūtra), "The good Dharma is the fundamental basis upon which human and divine beings must rely to become complete and upon which the śrāvakas and pratyeka-buddhas must rely for the attainment of enlightenment and supreme universal enlightenment. What is this basis upon which they rely? It is the ten good deeds."

It is also said, "The way of the ten good deeds leads to rebirth as a human or divine being, the attainment of different grades of arhatship of the śrāvakas, the enlightenment of pratyekabuddhas, and is the basis of reliance for all the wonderful deeds of all bodhisattvas and all the Buddha Dharma.

Ranking the Three Fortunate Karmas in Order of Importance

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*Acts of charity are often impure.
Practicing meditation may lead only to self-benefit.
To aim for buddhahood while still a human being,
Keeping the precepts is therefore the most important element.*

In a previous section it was said,

*Having wished to become human and having become human,
One should cultivate the Dharma of the divine vehicle
without wanting to be a divine being.*

If one is aiming for the attainment of buddhahood as a human while cultivating the deeds of the Human and Divine Vehicles, which should one emphasize more, the keeping of the precepts or the practice of concentration? The emphasis should be on keeping the precepts, because most people improperly cultivate the fortunate karma of giving; they are often defiled by afflictions. No matter how vast one's good fortune that comes from giving, if one does not keep the precepts, one cannot even become human. Instead one can enjoy these good fortunes only as an animal, a hungry ghost, or an asura, and one's future is very dangerous.

Practicing meditation is, of course, outstanding. But when one practices meditation- whether one renounces the five desires or becomes a forest recluse the emphasis may be on one's own blissful meditation, which may lead to the path of self-benefit only. When one is rewarded by being born above the second dhyana, one lives an independent existence.

This does not really correspond with the bodhisattva practice, which is directed to the realization of peace and happiness and the deliverance of all sentient beings. If one hopes not to lose the human form in future lives and

aims toward attaining buddhahood as a human, therefore, one must keep the five precepts and the ten good deeds in constant focus. Novice bodhisattvas, called "the bodhisattvas of the tenth stage" (ten stages of faith), also emphasize the ten good deeds.

Through keeping the precepts, one can continue to be born in the human world. Even if one is poor, one is not prevented from studying Buddhism. If one keeps the precepts and also practices the acts of giving, one can have vast fortunate karma while living among people; this is even better. If one keeps the precepts without practicing meditation, one will not lose the human form. But if one keeps the precepts and practices profound meditation, one will be born in the longevity heavens, and this creates a big obstacle to the study of Buddhism.

So, in order to steer oneself toward the Buddhist way as a human, one should primarily keep the precepts with their emphasis on human ethics and sound character. With the keeping of precepts as one's foundation, one should give according to one's ability. If one wants to practice meditation, one should practice the four infinite states, because they are closely connected with the world-transcending One- Vehicle Dharma of benefiting sentient beings.

Universal Guidelines for Living

The root of the precepts, enlightened, universally honored guidelines for living, are to cause no harm whatsoever to oneself or to anyone else, but rather, to have the aim to live in harmony, and to benefit.

The traditional Buddhist Five Precepts are given as:

Not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct, not to lie, and not to take intoxicants,

and these may then be more fully translated as

To protect life, to heal, and to nurture

To live generously

To regard our own body and that of all others with regards to sexuality with the utmost respect, and to engage with them a way that brings only benefit now and in the future

To speak in accord with the Dharma,
truthfully, with kindness, harmoniously, and meaningfully

and

To cultivate a clear mind

I take refuge in practicing the fullness of the Precepts, the fullness of love,
the Heart Treasure of the Noble Ones.

The Five Great Gifts, by Ajahn Pasanno

In terms of the five precepts, there is a sense of trust and ease and well being that arises when there is a confidence when one is not being physically threatened by someone, because they are virtuous, and they are not prone to harming and taking the life of other living creatures, or stealing, or lying, or being without real boundaries around sexuality.

One of the ways that the Buddha talked about the five precepts - not killing, not stealing, not engaging in sexual misconduct, not lying, and refraining from intoxicants, a commitment to a certain clarity and sobriety - is as *the Five Great Gifts*.

Oftentimes, we think of gifts as something material, but the Buddha talks about these five precepts, saying

There are these five great gifts. And what are these five?

{A 'Great gift' is *Maha Dana*}

Refraining from harming, refraining from stealing, taking what isn't given.... all the five precepts

And why are these great gifts?

It's because they are based in compassion, and they foster trust between us as human beings.

It's an incredible gift to do that.

In terms of our relationships, giving that gift of trust is so important. Being a human being is tough already, so being able to give that gift of trust and confidence, and ease, is a tremendous, tremendous gift.

The Five Faultless Gifts

"There are these five gifts, five great gifts - original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated, unadulterated from the beginning - that are not open to suspicion, that will never be open to suspicion, and are found to be faultless by knowledgeable contemplatives & brahmans. Which five?

"There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, abandoning the taking of life, abstains from taking life. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings.

In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, limitless freedom from animosity, and limitless freedom from oppression.

This is the first gift, the first great gift - original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated, unadulterated from the beginning - that is not open to suspicion, that will never be open to suspicion, and is found to be faultless by knowledgeable contemplatives & brahmans...

"Furthermore, abandoning taking what is not given (stealing), the disciple of the noble ones abstains from taking what is not given. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings.

In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, limitless freedom from animosity, and limitless freedom from oppression. This is the second great gift...

"Furthermore, abandoning sexual misconduct, the disciple of the noble ones abstains from sexual misconduct. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings.

In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, limitless freedom from animosity, and limitless freedom from oppression. This is the third great gift...

"Furthermore, abandoning lying, the disciple of the noble ones abstains from lying. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings.

In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, limitless freedom from animosity, and limitless freedom from oppression. This is the fourth great gift...

"Furthermore, abandoning the use of intoxicants, the disciple of the noble ones abstains from taking intoxicants. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings.

In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, limitless freedom from animosity, and limitless freedom from oppression.

This is the fifth gift, the fifth great gift - original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated, unadulterated from the beginning - that is not open to suspicion, that will never be open to suspicion, and is found to be faultless by knowledgeable contemplatives & brahmans." - AN 8.39

The Five Precepts, from Buddhistmonks.ca

An Ancient Gift

The Buddha taught us that training rules (virtue) is the foundation for all of the good qualities we can develop in the mind. By following five basic training rules we can eliminate worry and regret that disturbs our meditation. As well, we avoid all the unpleasant results of unwholesome actions.

These are the five basic moral rules the Buddha asked his lay disciples to follow:

1. I observe the precept of abstaining from killing living beings. This means not intentionally causing the death of any living beings.
2. I observe the precept of abstaining from stealing. This means not taking things that do not belong to us.
3. I observe the precept of abstaining from abstaining from sexual misconduct. This means not having sex with people we are not married to or with people against their will.
4. I observe the precept of abstaining from telling lies. This means saying what is true at the proper time.
5. I observe the precept of abstaining from using intoxicating drinks and drugs. By following this precept we are committed to having a clear mind at all times.

Buddhists will usually remind themselves of their commitment to keep these precepts by reciting them once a day. They also take the precepts when they come to a monastery.

When we realize we have broken a precept, we can immediately make the determination to follow it in the future. The Buddha taught us that even this intention is extremely powerful.

It is important when we have doubts about the precepts to ask a knowledgeable good friend so we can have confidence in our actions. Sometimes we think we have broken a precept when we really haven't. Sometimes we even think it is impossible to keep the precepts because of some misunderstanding.

Even though it is sometimes difficult to keep the precepts, especially at the beginning, we will quickly see the benefits. When we meditate our minds won't be troubled by worry and regret. When we think about the many bad results we have avoided by keeping the precepts, we will have a tremendous gratitude for the compassion of our teacher, the Supreme Buddha.

The Buddha also encouraged his lay disciples to observe some additional precepts as often as they could. They are known as the Eight Precepts.

The Eight Precepts, from Buddhistmonks.ca

Imitating the Enlightened Ones

The Buddha encouraged his lay disciples to follow extra training rules as often as they could. They are an enhanced version of the five precepts they follow every day.

The Eight Precepts are:

1. Abstaining from killing
2. Abstaining from stealing
3. Abstaining from sexual activity
4. Abstaining from telling lies
5. Abstaining from intoxicating drinks and drugs
6. Abstaining from eating after noon
7. Abstaining from entertainment and beautifying the body, and,
8. Abstaining from using luxurious furniture

We follow these precepts thinking, “The fully enlightened disciples of the Buddha followed these precepts for their entire lives. Let us imitate these great beings for this day.”

Lay people can follow these precepts as often as they like. Traditionally, Buddhists come together to observe these precepts, listen to teachings, and practice meditation on the full and new moon days.

Taking Eight Precepts

Usually we begin by paying homage to the Buddha and going for refuge to the Triple Gem. Then we recite:

1. I observe the precept of abstaining from killing beings.
2. I observe the precept of abstaining from stealing.
3. I observe the precept of abstaining from incelibacy.
4. I observe the precept of abstaining from telling lies.
5. I observe the precept of abstaining from taking intoxicating drinks and drugs.
6. I observe the precept of abstaining from eating at improper times.
7. I observe the precept of abstaining from dancing singing music shows wearing garlands and beautifying with cosmetics.
8. I observe the precept of abstaining from using luxurious and comfortable seats and beds.

Imitating great arahants, I follow these precepts for happiness in this life, for rebirth in heaven, and to realize the Four Noble Truths in this Gautama Buddha's Dispensation.

The Buddha's Words

When virtue is well-developed it yields great fruit and brings great advantages in regard to concentration, when concentration is well-developed it yields great fruit and brings great advantages in regard to wisdom, when wisdom is well-developed

the mind is completely liberated from the taints, that is to say: the taint of sensuality, the taint of craving for continued existence, the taint of ignorance.”

– From the Mahāparinibbānasutta

Better it is to live one day virtuous and meditative than to live a hundred years without virtue and stillness of mind.

– From The Dhammapada

Precepts or training rules laid down by the Supreme Buddha are there to uplift moral conduct through refraining and guarding physical and verbal actions. Sila or moral conduct is the foundation of the path to enlightenment. You are the owner of the consequences of your actions.

Adopting a simple lifestyle and being knowledgeable enough to avoid actions that are considered evil gains you good karma. The good Karma collected helps you in the path to end suffering. This is why the Eight Precepts are paramount to a practitioner.

Observing Eight Precepts enables us to collect good karma by avoiding the harmful actions we would otherwise engage in our daily lives. Living a simple lifestyle during this day, the practitioner mindfully avoids actions that are considered bad. These could be simple things like watching a movie that arouses your sensual desires or even actions that arouses anger.

At the end of the day, the practitioner could reflect on the good karma collected during the twenty-four-hour period. Not only does it make you happy and adds up to your collection of good deeds {positive karma} in the Samsara (cycle of rebirth), but it also helps you to have a healthy life through fasting after the midday meal.

The Five Precepts: Buddhism and Morality

From the Editors of the website Buddhho

{The text with links, can be found [here](#).}

In essence Buddhism is all about liberating the mind. To accomplish this, the Buddha taught his path of morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*).

These three trainings support and strengthen each other. It is through *paññā* that the practitioner eventually realizes from his or her own experience that everything in this world is changeable, unsatisfactory and without an underlying self, but you cannot just develop *paññā*.

The mental strength and purity needed for *paññā* comes from *samādhi* and *sīla*. So important are these two pillars that the whole teaching of the Buddha is summed up in the *Dhammapada* (verse 183) as:

Abandoning what is evil, developing what is good, purifying the mind – that is the teaching of the Buddhas.

Abandoning what is evil and developing what is good refer to the development of *sīla*. Purifying the mind refers to the purifying effect of *samādhi*. It is in a pure concentrated mind that wisdom can arise. *Paññā* begins with the first insight into the interdependence of these factors (or the whole Eightfold Path) and the awareness that it is important to develop all aspects in balance with each other. For anyone who wants to take steps on the path that the Buddha taught, it is essential to give the training in morality a prominent place in one's own practice.

A life grounded in morality is a life free from restlessness and remorse as a result of regret. For those who are free of restlessness and remorse, *samādhi* is a lot closer. If you have *samādhi*, *paññā* can arise, and with

paññā and *samādhi*, the desire to develop *sīla* increases further. The wish, or call it intention, aimed at wholesome moral behavior increases and gains strength because based on one's own experience, it becomes clear that *sīla* contributes to love and compassion, to inner and external peace. The latter by stimulating the externally directed fear of the consequences of moral misconduct (*ottappa*) and the inner shame regarding moral misconduct (*hiri*), known in Buddhism as the 'protectors of the world'. Your moral conduct thus becomes a pleasant abiding and not a 'must adhere to rules'. This creates a powerful upward spiral.

The practice of *sīla* makes a wholesome contribution on the road to liberation in various ways. For example, *sīla* is closely related to the practice of *sati* (mindfulness). For high morality requires a high degree of mindfulness to continuously monitor the mind, speech and actions. *Sati* is that mental vigilance with which you know at all times what your mind is doing, from moment to moment. You need very high *sati* to keep yourself from even the slightest and subtlest misbehavior. *Sati* is in itself a prerequisite for *samādhi*, which further supports the meditation process. Conversely, a lack of *sīla* is an indication that *sati* is only weak and that concentration can only be superficial. Wisdom then cannot arise.

Sīla is also an excellent antidote to desire. Desire, as we know, is the cause of all the suffering in the world, of all our problems. If you give *sīla* a place in your life, then there are things that you might want to do out of desire, but that you don't do because you know that in the long run they only carry suffering with them. In this way, *sīla* helps to curb your desire in your daily life. Desire is a hindrance for deep *samādhi*. If your desire diminishes, your meditation will be easier, and if your meditation is easy and *samādhi* deepens, it becomes easier to get further away from desire.

Ahba has sometimes said that if you love desire, it is better not to meditate. If you like a clean and free mind, then you should meditate, because with meditation you slowly but surely put an end to desire.

If you want to create the right conditions for deepening your meditation, then *sīla* must be an essential part of your practice. There is no end to the practice of *sīla* after which you can say that you don't have to do it anymore, that you can move on to the next step. *Sīla* is always important, in fact, the further you go, the more important it becomes.

The Five Precepts, a Practical Guide

But what is moral behavior in Buddhism? As a practical guide for lay people, the Buddha gave five moral precepts (*pañca-sīla*, also translatable as the five virtues). The Buddha advised over and over again to:

1. Abstain from killing
2. Abstain from stealing
3. Abstain from sexual misconduct
4. Abstain from wrong speech

and,

5. Abstain from the use of intoxicating substances that cause inattention

These precepts are nothing other than the path-factors Right Action, Right Speech and Right Livelihood that the Buddha taught in the Eightfold Path.

They are precepts, not commandments, because the Buddha does not impose them or order you to abide by them. That would not possible, the wish to adhere to the precepts always must be an internal wish.

Maybe at first the precepts seem simple and create a feeling of 'I stick to them anyway'. However, if you give them a place in your practice for a while, you will notice that they are not easy at all. They have a lot of depth,

and in addition to renouncing certain behavior, they also involve the development of wholesome qualities.

Intention

But what is moral behavior in Buddhism? As a practical guide for lay people, the Buddha gave five moral precepts (*pañca-sīla*, also translatable as five virtues). Just as in the entire Buddhist path, when it comes to the precepts the Buddha emphasizes the underlying intention. This does not mean that you can invoke ignorance or inattention to justify misconduct. You cannot say that you meant well or did not know better and that it was therefore moral. Much more it means that your consciousness is the forerunner of your actions and that the consequences of your actions follow, as the *Dhammapada* (verse 1) nicely states:

“Mind is the forerunner of all things, mind is their leader, they are made by the mind. When someone speaks or acts with impure thoughts, suffering follows, like the wheel follows the hoof of the ox.”

The practice of *sīla* begins with the renunciation of things of which you may not know why. These are just rules that you adhere to. Later, when you have found more depth in your practice, you will be able to see your consciousness better and better and work on the source.

We will now consider the different aspects of each of the precepts to try to share some of the beautiful depth. Ultimately, however, you can only experience the positive effects of these precepts by incorporating them into your daily life.

1. Abstain from Killing

The first precept is to abstain from killing. Maybe you think this is easy, you weren't planning on killing anyone after all. However, it is this precept not only incorporates people but all living things. This includes all beings from

the Buddhist lower worlds, such as animals, insects and the like. Abstaining from suicide is also part of this precept.

The emphasis on intention comes to the fore nicely in this precept. If you walk down the street and step on an ant that you have not seen, this does not result in remorse or unwholesome karma. However, if you do see the ant, you should consciously step around it if you adhere to this precept. Another nice example is a mosquito that stings you. Maybe you are inclined to crush the mosquito. In fact, it could be an almost unconscious reaction to the sting. The latter offers, another starting point for practice besides extending this precept to all living creatures. Because it is important to live mindfully and to refrain from these kinds of primary reactions in which you kill living beings. This is an aspect of *sati*.

Above are examples of physical behavior. But verbally instructing someone else to kill is no different than killing yourself, after all, the intention to kill is behind it as well. In this light, a common question is whether a Buddhist should eat vegetarian food only. In any case, the Buddha himself was not a vegetarian and neither were the monks at the time.

The third and most subtle form is keeping to the precept with your mind. That is, not having thoughts that go in the direction of killing creatures, and even more subtle, not harbouring malicious thoughts. So not only not acting on it but slowly but surely diminishing the first mental inclination itself.

This brings us to the active side of this precept. For if the foregoing is the passive side, not doing something, then the active side must be developed to protect the mind. To abstain from killing is on a more subtle level to do no harm out of malice. The positive force that counteracts this is loving-kindness (*mettā*). In order to adhere to not killing, it helps to develop *mettā*. If you do this, other beings around you do not have to worry anymore. You will become a safe haven, a beacon of peace for all beings, completely non-violent (*ahiṃsā*).

2. Abstain from Stealing

The second precept is to abstain from stealing. That seems easy, just don't break in or rob people and the like. However, this precept goes further than that. A better translation would perhaps be 'abstain from taking what is not given'. It presupposes a deep respect for the property of others. Don't just assume that you can borrow something. Don't just move things from someone else around. You can extend it to property that is less tangible. For example personal space or time. In that context, for example, it means not uselessly wasting someone's time.

Here, too, giving someone else the order to steal something is not in accordance with the precept either. The more subtle mental side of this precept is aimed at countering the mental greed for the property of others, and in essence the first mental underlying intention of greed in general.

The active side of this precept, that which needs to be developed, is generosity (*dāna*). *Dāna* has many different aspects, for example, giving material things, immaterial things like the Dhamma and giving your own life. *Dāna* helps to gain more distance from the idea that things have intrinsic value, that something is 'mine' or 'yours', and so it helps to slowly but surely create hairline cracks in the underlying conceit that there is a 'self'.

3. Abstain from Sexual Misconduct

Although the Buddha and his monks lived a life of celibacy, and the Buddha repeatedly indicates that desire is the cause of the unsatisfactoriness of existence, he does not speak out against sexual acts in general for lay people.

But the Buddha does speak out against sexual misconduct. As an example of sexual misconduct he mentions sexual acts with someone who still falls under the protection of mother or father, with someone who already has a

steady relationship (cheating), and unwanted or punishable sexual acts (abuse). In essence, it concerns any form of sexual act that harms the other person. Of course, ordering sexual misconduct is also unwholesome.

Sexual misconduct stems from sensory desire. The desire for pleasurable experiences can be so great that you lose the ability to lookout for the well-being of yourself and the other. This desire can completely control us. In the first place it is important to regain control, you do this by meditating, by practicing *samatha* meditation (concentration meditation) and by adhering to moral rules of conduct.

Ultimately, *nekkhamma* (renunciation) is the active opposite of sexual misconduct that needs to be developed. *Nekkhamma* means almost literally being free of sensory desire. Developing *nekkhamma* is seeing and giving up and letting go of desire every time it comes to the surface in your mind. It is part of Right Intention in the Eightfold Path and helps to live in deep contentment. In addition to *nekkhamma*, active aspects of this rule of life are developing respect for the other and loyalty to your partner.

4. Abstain from Wrong Speech

The fourth precept is to abstain from speaking in the wrong way. This is a very difficult thing in daily life. Abstaining from wrong speech means:

- Not lying
- Not speaking in a way that causes division among others
- Not using rude language
- Not gossiping

Actually, this rule means that you don't chit-chat with your colleagues at the coffee machine, that you don't gossip and don't swear. Just look at most

of the conversations you have and you will see how difficult this is. Causing no divisions means that you don't say things that sow discord between people or groups. And then there is no lying, which also means lying for good or white lies.

The Buddha equates lying with standing still on the road and throwing away everything you have accomplished. Only someone who speaks the truth, he states, can see through the truth. In a piece of text about Right Speech as part of the Eightfold Path, quote a part of the sutta that deals with this, it is very worthwhile to read.

Although it is about abstaining from speaking the wrong way, every form of communication falls under it, even non-verbal or written communication. The mental aspect is abstaining from false and coarse thoughts, fooling yourself and the mental illusions about reality that occur to our untrained mind.

The active side of this precept is the development of honesty or truthfulness (*sacca*). Those who live in honesty and speak the truth focus on reality. If you adhere to this rule of life, you also bring harmony into your own life and into the lives of those around you, you gain a soft and friendly mind, and you are trustworthy. It then becomes nice and inspiring to listen to you, and others never have to worry about what you say, whether they are there or not. In this way you contribute to peace and tranquility in the world.

5. Abstain from the use of intoxicating substances that cause inattention

The last precept is to abstain from using intoxicants that cause inattention. Quite a mouthful. The piece 'that cause inattention' is essential. This precept is specifically about abstaining from things that prevent or work against *sati* (mindfulness). Alcohol is the most commonly used of these substances. Alcohol divides the mind and makes *sati* and *samādhi*

impossible. Whoever drinks alcohol irrevocably brings his mind into a state that is incompatible with the teachings of the Buddha.

The main purpose of this precept is to prevent your mind from becoming so weakened and losing control that you will break the other precepts. If your mind is no longer able to guarantee *sati*, there is a great risk that *sīla* will fall apart as well. Just look at how much harmful behavior is caused by alcohol and similar substances and you will understand the importance of this precept.

If you want to develop *sīla* down to the last detail, there are no exceptions. That is, not even that one glass of wine. The renunciation of this piece of Burgundian life-style is at the same time countering desire by not always doing what you feel like doing. If you do break this rule of life, at least don't fool yourself with thoughts like 'this should be possible', don't praise this kind of behavior with the illusion that you are then a 'free spirit' or as bizarre proof that you are still a part of normal society. If you are unable to keep this precept then just accept that you still have too much desire to adhere to it.

It is nice to look at the mental side of this precept as well. You could say that the mind can also become intoxicated without the use of external means. Think of a very strong longing or a deep aversion to something. If a very strong longing or aversion manifests itself in your mind you might as well lose internal peace and control.

It will come as no surprise that the active side of this rule of life emphasizes *sati* even more. It is the development of *sati* that keeps our minds in balance. Just as the lack of *sati* is at the basis of breaking all precepts, it is *sati* that is at the basis of all the precepts.

The Perfection of Virtue (sīla-pāramī):

May my actions of body, speech and mind
always accord with the precepts I have undertaken:
pure and clean, free from breach or blemish.
May my conduct always be noble, lofty, and upright,
a model for all the world.

The Healing Power of the Precepts

by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

The Buddha was like a doctor, treating the spiritual ills of the human race. The path of practice he taught was like a course of therapy for suffering hearts and minds.

This way of understanding the Buddha and his teachings dates back to the earliest texts, and yet is also very current. Buddhist meditation is often advertised as a form of healing, and quite a few psychotherapists now recommend that their patients try meditation as part of their treatment. Experience has shown, though, that meditation on its own can't provide a total therapy. It requires outside support. Modern meditators in particular have been so wounded by mass civilization that they lack the resilience, persistence, and self-esteem needed before concentration and insight practices can be genuinely therapeutic.

Many teachers, noticing this problem, have decided that the Buddhist path is insufficient for our particular needs. To make up for this insufficiency they've experimented with ways of supplementing meditation practice, combining it with such things as myth, poetry, psychotherapy, social activism, sweat lodges, mourning rituals, and even drumming. The problem, though, might not be that there's anything lacking in the Buddhist path, but that we simply haven't been following the Buddha's full course of therapy.

The Buddha's path consists not only of mindfulness, concentration, and insight practices, but also of virtue, beginning with the five precepts. In fact, the precepts constitute the first step in the path. There's a modern tendency to dismiss the five precepts as Sunday-school rules bound to old cultural norms that no longer apply to modern society, but this misses the role that the Buddha intended for them: as part of a course of therapy for

wounded minds. In particular, they are aimed at curing two ailments that underlie low self-esteem: regret and denial.

When our actions don't measure up to certain standards of behavior, we either (1) regret the actions or (2) engage in one of two kinds of denial, either (a) denying that our actions did in fact happen or (b) denying that the standards of measurement are really valid. These reactions are like wounds in the mind. Regret is an open wound, tender to the touch, whereas denial is like hardened, twisted scar tissue around a tender spot.

When the mind is wounded in these ways, it can't settle down comfortably in the present, because it finds itself resting on raw, exposed flesh or calcified knots. When it's forced to stay in the present, it's there only in a tensed, contorted, and partial way. The insights it gains tend to be contorted and partial as well. Only if the mind is free of wounds and scars can it settle down comfortably and freely in the present and give rise to undistorted discernment.

This is where the five precepts come in: They're designed to heal these wounds and scars. Healthy self-esteem comes from living up to a set of standards that are practical, clear-cut, humane, and worthy of respect. The five precepts are formulated in such a way that they provide just such a set of standards.

Practical: The standards set by the precepts are simple- no intentional killing, stealing, engaging in illicit sex, lying, or taking intoxicants. It's entirely possible to live in line with these standards- not always easy or convenient, maybe, but always possible.

Some people translate the precepts into standards that sound more lofty or noble- taking the second precept, for example, to mean no abuse of the planet's resources- but even those who reformulate the precepts in this way admit that it's impossible to live up to them. Anyone who has dealt with

psychologically damaged people knows the damage that can come from having impossible standards to live by.

If you can give people standards that take a little effort and mindfulness but are possible to meet, their self-esteem soars dramatically as they find themselves actually capable of meeting those standards. They can then face more demanding tasks with confidence.

Clear-cut: The precepts are formulated with no ifs, ands, or buts. This means that they give very clear guidance, with no room for waffling or less-than-honest rationalizations. An action either fits in with the precepts or it doesn't. Again, standards of this sort are very healthy to live by. Anyone who has raised children has found that, although they may complain about hard and fast rules, they actually feel more secure with them than with rules that are vague and always open to negotiation.

Clear-cut rules don't allow for unspoken agendas to come sneaking in the back door of the mind. If, for example, the precept against killing allowed you to kill living beings when their presence is inconvenient, that would place your convenience on a higher level than your compassion for life. Convenience would become your unspoken standard- and as we all know, unspoken standards provide huge tracts of fertile ground for hypocrisy and denial to grow.

If, however, you stick by the standards of the precepts, then as the Buddha says, you're providing unlimited safety for the lives of all. There are no conditions under which you would take the lives of any living beings, no matter how inconvenient they might be. In terms of the other precepts, you're providing unlimited safety for their possessions and sexuality, and unlimited truthfulness and mindfulness in your communication with them. When you find that you can trust yourself in matters like these, you gain an undeniably healthy sense of self-esteem.

Humane: The precepts are humane both to the person who observes them and to the people affected by his or her actions. If you observe them, you're

aligning yourself with the doctrine of karma, which teaches that the most important powers shaping your experience of the world are the intentional thoughts, words, and deeds you chose in the present moment. This means that you are not insignificant. With every choice you take- at home, at work, at play- you are exercising your power in the ongoing fashioning of the world.

At the same time, this principle allows you to measure yourself in terms that are entirely under your control: your intentional actions in the present moment. In other words, they don't force you to measure yourself in terms of your looks, strength, brains, financial prowess, or any other criteria that depend less on your present karma than they do on karma from the past. Also, they don't play on feelings of guilt or force you to bemoan your past lapses. Instead, they focus your attention on the ever-present possibility of living up to your standards in the here and now.

If you live with people who observe the precepts, you find that your dealings with them are not a cause for mistrust or fear. They regard your desire for happiness as akin to theirs. Their worth as individuals doesn't depend on situations in which there have to be winners and losers.

When they talk about developing goodwill and mindfulness in their meditation, you see it reflected in their actions. In this way the precepts foster not only healthy individuals, but also a healthy society- a society in which the self-esteem and mutual respect are not at odds.

Worthy of respect: When you adopt a set of standards, it's important to know whose standards they are and to see where those standards come from, for in effect you're joining their group, looking for their approval, and accepting their criteria for right and wrong. In this case, you couldn't ask for a better group to join: the Buddha and his noble disciples. The five precepts are called "standards appealing to the noble ones."

From what the texts tell us of the noble ones, they aren't people who accept standards simply on the basis of popularity. They've put their lives on the line to see what leads to true happiness, and have seen for themselves, for example, that all lying is pathological, and that any sex outside of a stable, committed relationship is unsafe at any speed.

Other people may not respect you for living by the five precepts, but noble ones do, and their respect is worth more than that of anyone else in the world.

Now, many people might find cold comfort in joining such an abstract group, especially when they haven't yet met any noble ones in person. It's hard to be good-hearted and generous when the society immediately around you openly laughs at those qualities and values such things as sexual prowess or predatory business skills instead.

This is where Buddhist communities come in. They can openly part ways with the prevailing amoral tenor of our culture and let it be known in a kindly way that they value good-heartedness and restraint among their members. In doing so, they provide a healthy environment for the full-scale adoption of the Buddha's course of therapy: the practice of concentration and discernment in a life of virtuous action.

Where we have such environments, we find that meditation needs no myth or make-believe to support it, because it's based on the honest reality of a well-lived life. You can look at the standards by which you live, and then breathe in and out comfortably, as a full-fledged, responsible human being. For that's what you are.

On Ethics and Healing

We've all noticed that the mind of a good person has an ethical quality to it. In most of us, this ethical quality is mixed with delusions, or some corruption, in the form of greed, aggression, jealousy, pettiness, and so on.

In a person with some inner development, the moral quality is stronger, and in someone we'd call 'saintly' that ethical quality is there powerfully.

What is here being called ethical, or moral has two sides to it. One is the character of the life itself of a good person, and the other is the expression of ethics as it is taught. This second category of ethics, the outward form, is sometimes called 'precepts', or 'commandments', but they all amount to the same thing. They are guidelines for sane living. Here, 'sane' equates to health, because health on the inside brings peace and health on the outside as well.

On the subject of ethics, and its relationship to health, Lama Zopa Rinpoche says:

... one of the most important things you can do is to live a life of moral discipline. Do not deceive yourself by thinking that this is only a religious viewpoint - it is real protection.

For example, if you let your mind go crazy, your life is unprotected. Preventing your mind from going crazy is the way to protect your life. Just see how many problems plague a country where moral discipline is in short supply. The way to protect, or heal, your mind and body is to purify the causes of problems that you have already created, which lie in your mind.

Religious commandments, all by themselves, have gotten something of a bad reputation, as being for hypocrites, or as coming 'from on high' and not from within, and this criticism is at least partly deserved. As one

teacher put it, by the time something is merely a law, it's already too late, the Way has already been lost. And there's truth in that.

For ethical teachings to make sense and be a source of strength, these outer guidelines will always need to be brought together with inner education.

Another way though of looking at moral teachings is to consider them to be our inherited wisdom from those who have lived before us. Out of their hard earned experience and out of their compassion, our ancestors have left us guidelines for living well, and for having balance, harmony, happiness and health in our lives. It's for each of us individually to receive such teachings in one form or another, and work out the implications for our own lives.

In Buddhist teachings, there are five Precepts, which are: not to kill, steal, harm sexually, lie or take intoxicants. These can also be expressed positively, as in: protect life; live generously, with wisdom; honor sexuality and relationships; speak truthfully and constructively; and cultivate clarity.

(See Thich Nhat Hanh's contemporary expression of the Traditional Five Precepts)

From what I can tell, keeping precepts cultivates virtue, or positive energy, creates good karma, and protects our life. This can heal our life on a very deep level.

We've all made mistakes, and messes in our lives, and these can be corrected and healed by practicing ethics.

Guidelines in general are offered are to help us to find the way in our self. An outer teaching, at its best, can help to awaken in our self the sense of what is right. Then that teaching, a like medicine that helps awaken the body's natural healing function, has served its purpose.

The Dalai Lama has called ethics:

*Medicine to eradicate the misery of delusion,
An ointment to purify the stains of wrong conduct...*

And in a short treatise on ethics, he quotes one text known as
The Great Sutra on Entering into Parinirvana:

*Like the raised victory banner of all Dharmas,
moral discipline completely cuts off the paths of all negativities and unfortunate
rebirths.*

Like the medicinal tree, it cures all evil sickness.

*It is nourishment for those tired and weary on the paths of worldly existence; a
weapon for destroying the enemy of delusion.*

*It is a mystic spell which eliminates the poisonous snake of delusion,
a bridge for crossing over the waters of evil...*

He also quotes the Saint Tsong Khapa, saying:

*Moral discipline is water to clean away the stains of negative actions,
It is moonlight to cool the heat of delusion,
Magnificent like Mt. Meru in the midst of sentient beings,
it is the peaceful force uniting all sentient beings.*

We just need to watch our own mind to see how this works. We can see
that even just aiming at being kind and ethical right away calms the
turbulent emotions, and this immediately makes for better health, at least
to some extent.

Thich Nhat Hanh has said that precepts are like the north star - we dedicate
and aim to go in that direction and do the best we can.

Trying our best to live ethically and with wisdom brings a clear conscience,
and this then is the basis for even greater health and happiness.

It is because of all the good that can come from it, and because of how much these things are needed in our world today that I praise the precepts as taught, and practiced, and realized.

*Do no harmful actions.
Accomplish only what is good,
Purify your mind.
This is the teaching of the Buddha...*

*Virtue relieves the sufferings of samsara;
and brings happiness and peace visible even in this life.*

*Virtue is the basis of a higher rebirth in the human or deva realms,
and is the basis of each of the stages of liberation and enlightenment*

May I and all others accomplish only these.

From the Ritual for Taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts - a concise version

I call upon my teachers and spiritual ancestors
 Lord Buddha with your Retinue of Holy Ones,
 please come to this place

Especially now,
 May I receive your blessings
 May I receive your light, inspiration, and strength
 to be able to practice the precepts,
 for the next twenty four hours

* * *

I call upon my teachers and spiritual ancestors
 Lord Buddha with your Retinue of Holy Ones,
 please come to this place

Especially now,
 May I receive your blessings
 May I receive your light, inspiration, and strength
 to be able to practice the precepts,
 for these twenty four hours

(or - for this day and this night)

* * *

I call upon my teachers and spiritual ancestors
 May I receive your blessings to practice the precepts

From the Ritual for Taking the Eight Mahāyāna Precepts

I call upon my teachers and spiritual ancestors
 Lord Buddha with your Retinue of Holy Ones,
 please come to this place

May we all receive your blessings
 May we all receive your light, inspiration, and strength
 to accomplish this essential practice

Just as my teachers, the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Arhats before me
 made the commitment to live in virtue,
 following their perfect example, I will live guided by these precepts:

I will not kill, or cause harm to any living being

I will not steal {or possess anything that should belong to others}

I will not engage in sexual activity,¹

{or follow thoughts of attachment at this time}

I will not lie, {use harsh speech, or divisive speech, or engage in
 meaningless chatter}

and I will avoid intoxicants;

I will not sit on luxurious seats and beds.

¹ The Third Precept is traditionally given as ‘I will avoid sexual misconduct.’ There will be occasions also for the householder, such as when one is on a retreat, or engaged in more focussed practice, that require complete abstinence. When taking the Eight Precepts, this changes to ‘I will not engage in sexual activity, {or follow thoughts of attachment at this time}’, or, ‘I undertake the precept to refrain from any intentional sexual activity.’ The Eight Mahayana Precepts are can then be taken for a 24 hour period, and they can be renewed once a day during those times.

I will not eat food at the wrong times, an improper amount, or type of food
and I will avoid perfumes, garlands, and ornaments,
and wasting time with frivolous games, dancing, singing, and so forth.

*I will protect life in all circumstances,
heal all suffering and its causes,
and nurture all beings along the way*

*I will live generously,
giving my time, energy, and material resources
abundantly to those in need,
increasing their happiness*

*Abiding chaste, and not attached, quite secluded within,
highly praising this foundation of purity, coolness, and inner freedom,
I will continue to realize this sense of wholeness in myself,
with its safety, peace, and lasting benefit*

*I will speak as necessary,
truthfully, with kindness,
harmoniously, and meaningfully,
and practice kind and compassionate deep listening*

I will cultivate a clear mind.

And I will pursue only what is essential now.

*I take refuge in practicing the fullness of the Precepts,
the fullness of love and far seeing wisdom,
the Heart Treasure of the Noble Ones.*

{or concisely}

I will

cherish and protect life

live generously

abide chaste

speak truthfully, with kindness and respect

cultivate a clear mind

and pursue only what is essential now

From In Praise of the Precepts

Homage to the precepts that give life...

Homage to the virtue that heals

Praise to the moral conduct that liberates from the lower realms

and,

Homage to the ethics that is the foundation for all the good that arises in this world...

This is my contribution to the world, and to the happiness, health and peace of all sentient beings.

Dedication

Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, the buddhas, the bodhisattvas, and all other sentient beings, may I and all sentient beings be able to complete the paramita of morality by keeping it purely, and without pride.

A dedication prayer from the Avatamsaka Sutra

May all sentient beings be filled with the fragrance of morality,
and attain to the standards of the wise;
Emancipated from the world,
and living in the transcendent ways of enlightened beings,
May all sentient beings, by actualizing Right View and Right Conduct,
all accomplish the body of morality of the Buddhas.

From The Benefits of Taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, from the book Abiding in the Retreat

Taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts for the duration of even a finger snap collects infinite merit².

If the benefit of keeping the precepts for the duration of a finger snap were materialized, it wouldn't fit in space. It wouldn't fit in the great three thousand galaxies.

There are also benefits from the nature of morality. Even the great black nagas, poisonous snakes and other harmful vicious beings cannot harm someone who is living in morality, in vows.

Those who live in morality also create the cause to be able to meet a buddha.

Living in morality is like having legs: it allows you to go to whichever place you wish to go, even to liberation. Living without morality is like not having legs.

Broken morality is like a broken pot, which cannot be used to hold water. Living in morality is like an unbroken pot in which you can keep nectar.

By living in morality by taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts, you are protected by the devas who are beyond samsara and even worldly devas.

The white-side guardians naturally protect you day and night, even though you don't ask them to do so. Wherever you are, they protect you from interferences, from obstacles, day and night, all the time.

² Together with the traditional five precepts, the Eight Mahayana Precepts adds refraining from: indulging in comforts, eating at the wrong times, and engaging in superfluous, meaningless activities

Taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts has great benefit in terms of the merit you accumulate.

Another benefit is that your prayers will succeed. Any prayers you make during times you are living purely in your vows are very powerful. By taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts and keeping them without degeneration, you will definitely be able to accomplish whatever you pray for during the time of keeping the vows purely. That is the power of pure morality.

Even the ability to heal depends on how pure your morality is. With the power of pure morality you can benefit others by using mantras and other methods to stop disease and spirit harms, which make people crazy. You can also stop the problems of drought by doing naga pujas and so forth. Pujas have much more power if the person doing them lives purely in their vows.

Your work for other sentient beings through teaching and other activities is also much more effective. Your blessings also have great power. Human beings and even spirits, devas and protectors listen to a person who lives in pure vows and do what that person asks them to.

Taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts also has the incredible benefit of bringing a human or deva body in future lives. By keeping the Eight Mahayana Precepts even once you receive a special human or deva body.

The final benefit from taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts is that you achieve liberation and enlightenment.

Taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts has unbelievable benefits. You're not taking them only for yourself or only for the happiness of this life, for the happiness of future lives or for even liberation. You're taking them purely to free all sentient beings from all their suffering and lead them to enlightenment.

The Precepts are the path to liberation.

- Lama Thubten Yeshe

* * *

Refuge vows include a commitment to keeping the precepts.

Let us now practice the unified path of ethics, meditation, and wisdom.

From The Peace Beyond, by Ajahn Chah

We sit in meditation to establish peacefulness and cultivate mental energy... Insight meditation is sitting in samadhi itself.

At some places they say, 'Now we are going to sit in samadhi, after that we'll do insight meditation.' Don't divide them like this!

Tranquillity is the base which gives rise to wisdom, and wisdom is the fruit of tranquillity. To say that now we are going to do calm meditation, later we'll do insight you can't do that! You can only divide them in speech...

Morality is the father and mother of Dhamma. In the beginning we must have morality. Morality is peace. This means that one does no wrongdoings in body or speech. When we don't do wrong then we don't get agitated; when we don't become agitated then peace and collectedness arise within the mind.

So we say that morality, concentration and wisdom are the path on which all the Noble Ones have walked to enlightenment. They are all one.

Morality is concentration, concentration is morality. Concentration is wisdom, wisdom is concentration.

It's like a mango. When it's a flower we call it a flower. When it becomes a fruit we call it a mango. When it ripens we call it a ripe mango. It's all one mango but it continually changes.

The big mango grows from the small mango, the small mango becomes a big one. You can call them different fruits or all one fruit.

Morality, concentration and wisdom are related like this. In the end it's all the path that leads to enlightenment.

In this lifetime, may we build our life of practice
and heighten merit to solidify the foundations of practice in lives to come,
so that our highest career may be cultivated

From this point forward,
May we realize a completely pure and clear mind

The Advantages of Taking Vows

By Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Even living a lay life you can take a number of vows and live in good karma, morality, abstaining from several negative karmas, whichever you can. Even if you can't take and practice all five lay vows, from those five, take whichever you can. That's something to do. Every day of this life until you die, that is something to abide in, to live in whatever morality you can. This becomes the most practical thing to do in daily life. It is a very important thing to do in daily life, whether it's one vow of the lay precepts, or two vows, three vows or five, whatever.

The next thing to understand is this. You can see how essential it is, and you can do this immediately. You don't have to have some high realizations. By having taken even one vow up to the death, you collect good karma, merit, day and night all the time. Even if you sleep for twelve hours your life is not wasted. You collect good karma continuously, even during sleep. By living in this one vow you are collecting merit all the time. While you are eating, you are collecting merit all the time; while you are walking, you are collecting merit all the time - twenty-four hours a day.

Even if you go into a coma, unable to move the body or communicate, even for years, you are still collecting merit all the time, making your life become meaningful all the time. Like that, you are making preparations for death all the time, creating the cause of happiness of your future lives all the time. It's the same with liberation and enlightenment, depending on the motivation. Then of course if you take more vows there is no question you create more merit.

The next very important thing to understand is that after the vow is taken, even just one, in everyday life whenever you collect merit by benefiting other sentient beings or by making offerings, circumambulations and

prostrations to the Guru, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, whenever you collect merit in your daily life, the merit is increased so much.

Before, when you hadn't taken any vow, the merit was like a handful of water, but now, after you have taken the vow, the merit that you collect with the sentient beings or with the holy objects is like the ocean, like the Pacific Ocean, the merit increases so much. That makes a big difference to your life, like the earth and the sky, a huge difference. Even by having taken one vow, when you collect merit in your daily life, the merit increases so much.

Another incredible profit in daily life by living in the vows is mentioned in the sutra called Heaps of Jewels. I used to imagine a heap of flowers, but I think that's mistaken. I think it's a jewel heap. The sutra is called Heap of Jewels, Piled up Jewels, Heaped Jewels.

If all the sentient beings of the desire realm, the form realm and the formless realm were to reincarnate and they all become wheel-turning kings, the most powerful and wealthiest beings in the universe, then each of them make offerings to the Buddha of oceans of butter, Mt. Merus of wax, making light offerings to the Buddha (I think might have mentioned that) for the length of time, eons equaling the number of sand grains of the River Ganga, the river in India - for that length of time, each of them make oceans of butter, Mt. Merus of wax, and light offerings to the Buddha.

Now, one person who has taken ordination makes offerings of butter the size of a mustard seed, wax the size of a hair and a tiny light offering to the Buddha. For that person who has taken ordination, their merit is far greater than all those other beings who were born as the most powerful wheel-turning kings in the world and who each make extensive offerings to the Buddha for an incredible length of time. So like this, it makes a huge difference. It makes life most profitable.

So now, those who are taking refuge, I normally emphasize taking the precept to not kill because what taking refuge in the Dharma involves is to not harm others. Therefore, I usually emphasize to take the precept to not kill but if you cannot take this precept, you can take another precept from the five, whichever is easier.

For some, to take the precept to not kill is very difficult but maybe to not to tell a lie is easy, or to not take alcohol is easy, or to not steal is easy. So for some people it is possible that stopping killing is difficult, but some other precept is easy. If so, you can take that. The main thing is to do less harm, to create less negative karma. That means less suffering for others and less suffering for you and more happiness.

The other thing is that, even if you take one vow, to abstain from one negative karma, whether it is sexual misconduct, whether it is killing, whether it is stealing, whatever it is, even if you take one vow, that means to not harm others.

Therefore from now on, whatever number of precepts you're going to take, that means from today you are not going to harm others. You are not going to give this harm to other sentient beings, by making the vow.

That means the human beings, the sentient beings in this world, don't receive that harm from you, whether it's killing, whether it's stealing or whatever it is, the sentient beings in this world don't receive this harm from you.

That means for the sentient beings in this world, there is so much peace and happiness. The numberless sentient beings in this world don't receive harm but they receive so much peace and happiness from you. The absence of harm is peace that they are receiving.

Even just one, abstaining from killing or sexual misconduct or telling lies- whatever it is- numberless sentient beings don't receive that harm from you

from today. That means they receive so much peace and happiness from you.

Therefore, however many precepts you are taking, this is the most practical contribution for world peace. From today, whatever number of precepts you're taking, this becomes the real practical contribution for world peace, including peace for your family, for your country, for the whole world and for all sentient beings. As you take this vow for the benefit of all sentient beings, all the sentient beings get benefit from you.

From The Chant On Protecting and Transforming

We have seen clearly that there is a beautiful path.
Therefore, we turn toward the light of loving kindness.
We bow deeply to the Buddha and our spiritual ancestors...

Awakened wisdom, bright like the sun and the full moon,
- immeasurable compassion, merciful and kind,
We resolve to live well throughout our life,
going for refuge to the Three Jewels.

With loving kindness,
we shall cross over the ocean of sufferings.
We shall use the torch of understanding
to come out of confusion.
With determination, we shall realize learning,
reflection, and practice.

Right View shall be the basis of actions, in body, speech, and mind.
Right Mindfulness will determine our walking,
standing, and sitting.

Every step enters the Pure Land,
every look sees the Dharmakaya.

With our habit energies transformed,
our hearts garden of awakening will bloom with one hundred flowers.

May we bring the feeling of peace and joy to every house.
May we plant wholesome seeds on ten thousand paths.

May we never leave the Sangha body.

May mountains and rivers be our witness
as we bow our heads and request the Lord of Compassion
to encompass us all.

From I live in this world

There are many people right now
 who are in need of the nectar of ethics in their lives,
 the medicine of ethics,
 the food of ethics,

their vows restored,
 the attainment of coolness,
 strength, self control
 light, and peace,
 wisdom, purity,
 transformation, and release

* * *

I live in this world where the vast majority of people are completely
 without any Dharma

Dharma:

deep Buddhist teaching, or contemplative teaching;
 the result of deep Buddhist practice or contemplative practice;
 the experience of freedom,
 light, and wisdom –
 that can alleviate and can bring about
 the complete cessation of suffering
 for one and all,
 true medicine for the ills of the world

Teachings on Right Effort

On Right Effort I

On the nature of Right Effort

Selections on Guarding the Sense Bases

From The Path of Awakening, by Piya Tan

From Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness, by Bhante Gunaratana

From The Noble Eightfold Path, by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Three Governing Principles

The Two Bright Dhammas That Guard the World

The Frontier Fortress

On Right Effort - I

And what is right effort?

There are four: to guard and prevent, to relinquish, to cultivate, and to maintain and increase.

The effort to guard and protect is when a person generates enthusiasm, and makes efforts so that harmful states that have not arisen do not arise;

The effort to relinquish is when a person generates enthusiasm, and makes efforts, so that harmful states that have arisen are given up, abandoned, relinquished;

The effort to cultivate is when a person generates enthusiasm, and makes efforts so that beneficial, skillful qualities that have not yet arisen do arise;

And the effort to maintain and increase is when a person generates enthusiasm, and makes efforts so that beneficial, skillful qualities that have arisen remain, and are not lost, but increase, mature, and are fulfilled by development.

This is called right effort.

On the nature of Right Effort

There are these four right efforts: *The effort to guard and prevent, the effort to abandon, the effort to develop, and the effort to maintain and increase.*

“And what is the right effort to guard and prevent?”

This is where a person, on seeing a form with the eye, does not grasp at any sign, by which, if he were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the eye, harmful, unskillful states such as craving might develop. He practices restraint, and protects himself by guarding the eye, and similarly with the ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. This is called the right effort to guard and prevent.

“And what is the right effort to abandon?”

This is where a person does not accept, for example, a thought of attachment that has arisen in him. He lets go of it right way, abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, wipes it out of existence.

Neither does he accept any thought of anger, or any harmful states that have arisen in him. He lets go of them right away, abandons them, destroys them, dispels them, wipes them out of existence. This is called the right effort to abandon.

“And what is the right effort to develop?”

This is where a person awakens in himself a clear intention, and begins to develop positive, beneficial qualities. This is called the right effort to develop.

“And what is the right effort to maintain and increase?”

This is where a person maintains these positive, beneficial qualities he has begun to cultivate; he keeps them going, develops and increases them, and brings them to fulfillment. This is called the right effort to maintain and increase.” - AN 4:14

Selections on Guarding the Sense Bases

From The Path of Awakening, by Piya Tan

The right effort to prevent the hindrances or to mitigate, even remove, them, is that of sense-restraint.

This is given in a well known stock passage that essentially instructs us to at once turn our attention away from the source of distraction- that is, any sight, sound, smell, taste, touch or thought, saying,

We should grasp neither its sign nor its detail

The “sign” here is our very first glimpse of an object signified by “thinking” (vitakka), or “first thought,” while the “detail(s)” refers to our “pondering” (vic.ra) or examining it.

This is our front-line defense against mental distractions.

* * *

From Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness, by Bhante Gunaratana

The Buddha advised his disciples not to notice the “signs and features” of any external stimulus that might give rise to unwholesome mind states. “Sign” refers to the hook, the thing that catches your eye and makes you want to observe something more closely in order to rouse up some unwholesome state. “Feature” refers to specific qualities of the object of your attention that may further stir up the unwholesome state...

If you are able to maintain continuous mindfulness, nothing will upset you.

* * *

From The Noble Eightfold Path, by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Since an uncontrolled response to sensory input stimulates the latent defilements, what is evidently needed to prevent them from arising is control over the senses. Thus the Buddha teaches, as the discipline for keeping the hindrances in check, an exercise called the restraint of the sense faculties (indriya-samvara):

When he perceives a form with the eye, a sound with the ear, an odor with the nose, a taste with the tongue, an impression with the body, or an object with the mind, he apprehends neither the sign nor the particulars. And he strives to ward off that through which evil and unwholesome states, greed and sorrow, would arise, if he remained with unguarded senses; and he watches over his senses, restrains his senses.

Restraint of the senses does not mean denial of the senses, retreating into a total withdrawal from the sensory world. This is impossible, and even if it could be achieved, the real problem would still not be solved; for the defilements lie in the mind, not in the sense organs or objects.

The key to sense control is indicated by the phrase "*not apprehending the sign or the particulars.*" The "sign" (nimitta) is the object's general appearance insofar as this appearance is grasped as the basis for defiled thoughts; the "particulars" (anubyanjana) are its less conspicuous features.

If sense control is lacking, the mind roams recklessly over the sense fields. First it grasps the sign, which sets the defilements into motion, then it explores the particulars, which permits them to multiply and thrive.

To restrain the senses requires that mindfulness and clear understanding be applied to the encounter with the sense fields.

Three Governing Principles

“There are these three governing principles. Which three? Having the self as a governing principle, having those with higher perceptions as a governing principle, and having the Dhamma as a governing principle.

“And what is it to have the self as a governing principle? There is the case where a person, having gone to a wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, reflects in this way:

‘Aah, It is not for the sake of simple clothing that I study, reflect, and meditate; it is not merely for the sake of food, or lodgings, or for the sake of this or that state in the future. Rather, it is simply because I am beset by birth, aging, and death; by sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair, and that I aim to put an end to this entire mass of suffering.

Now, if I were to seek the same sort of sensual pleasures as before, that would not be fitting for me.’

So he reflects: ‘My persistence will be awakened and will be strong; my mindfulness established and not confused; my body calm and not agitated; my mind collected and gathered into one.’ Having made himself his governing principle, he abandons what is harmful, develops what is positive and beneficial, and looks after himself well.

This is called having the self as a governing principle.

“And what is to have those with higher perceptions as a governing principle? There is the case where a person, having gone to a wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, reflects as before...and that,

Great is the community of this cosmos. And in this great community there are contemplatives and brahmans endowed with psychic power, clairvoyant, skilled in reading the minds of others. They can see even from

afar. With their awareness they know the minds of others, and if I were to go in a wrong direction, they would know this of me, and say:

“Look, my friends, at this person who- although he has set forth- remains overcome by harmful states.”

And so he reflects, as before...

‘My persistence will be awakened and will be strong; my mindfulness established and not confused; my body calm and not agitated; my mind concentrated and gathered into one.’ Having made those with higher perceptions his governing principle, he abandons what is harmful, develops what is positive and beneficial, and looks after himself well.

This is called having those with higher perceptions as a governing principle.

“And what is it to have the Dhamma as a governing principle?

There is the case where a person, having gone to a wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, reflects in this way:

‘Aah, It is not for the sake of simple clothing that I study, reflect, and meditate; it is not merely for the sake of food, or lodgings, or for the sake of this or that state in the future. Rather, it is simply because I am beset by birth, aging, and death; by sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair, and that I aim to put an end to this entire mass of suffering.

Now, the Dhamma is well-taught by the Blessed One; it is to be seen here and now; it is timeless, inviting all to come and see; it is relevant now, and is to be seen by the wise, each for themselves.

There are fellow practitioners of the chaste life who dwell knowing and seeing the Dhamma. If I- having gone forth in this well-taught Dhamma

and Vinaya- were to remain lazy and heedless, that would not be fitting for me.'

And so he reflects:

'My persistence will be awakened and will be strong; my mindfulness established and not confused; my body calm and not agitated; my mind concentrated and gathered into one.' Having made the Dhamma his governing principle, he abandons what is harmful, develops what is positive and beneficial, and looks after himself well.

This is called the Dhamma as a governing principle.

"These are the three governing principles." — AN 3:40

The Two Bright Dhammas That Guard the World

“Monks, these two bright dhammas guard the world. Which two? Having an awakened conscience, and knowing the standards of the wise. - AN 2:9

The Frontier Fortress

“Just as the royal frontier fortress has a moat, both deep and wide, for the protection of those within and to ward off those without; in the same way, the disciple of the noble ones has an awakened conscience.

He would feel embarrassment (shame, horror, and revulsion) at even the thought of engaging in harmful actions of body, speech, or mind.

With an awakened conscience as his moat, the disciple of the noble ones abandons what is harmful, develops what is positive and beneficial, and looks after himself well....

“Just as the royal frontier fortress has an encircling walls, both high and wide, for the protection of those within and to ward off those without, in the same way, the disciple of the noble ones is protected by knowing the standards of the wise.

He cherishes in his heart the ethical guidelines entrusted to him by tradition, by his parents, wise teachers, elders, and respected members of his community;

and, aiming to uphold these standards, he abandons what is harmful, develops what is positive and beneficial, and looks after himself well....

“Just as the royal frontier fortress has a large army stationed within, for the protection of those within and to ward off those without; in the same way, a disciple of the noble ones with an awakened conscience, and who knows

the standards of the wise practices continually to guard against what is harmful; he cultivates what is positive and beneficial, and looks after himself well.” — AN 7:63

Basic Morality, from *In This Very Life*, by Sayadaw U Pandita

We do not practice meditation to gain admiration from anyone. Rather, we practice to contribute to peace in the world. We try to follow the teachings of the Buddha, and take the instructions of trustworthy teachers, in hopes that we too can reach the Buddha's state of purity. Having realized this purity within ourselves, we can inspire others and share this Dhamma, this truth.

The Buddha's teachings can be summed up in three parts: *sīla*, morality; *samādhi*, concentration; and *paññā* intuitive wisdom.

Sīla is spoken of first because it is the foundation for the other two. Its importance cannot be overstressed. Without *sīla*, no further practices can be undertaken. For lay people the basic level of *sīla* consists of five precepts or training rules: refraining from taking life, refraining from taking what is not given, refraining from sexual misconduct, refraining from lying, and refraining from taking intoxicating substances. These observances foster a basic purity that makes it easy to progress along the path of practice.

A Basic Sense of Humanity

Sīla is not a set of commandments handed down by the Buddha, and it need not be confined to Buddhist teachings. It actually derives from a basic sense of humanity. For example, suppose we have a spurt of anger and want to harm another being. If we put ourselves in that other being's shoes, and honestly contemplate the action we have been planning, we will quickly answer, "No, I wouldn't want that done to me. That would be cruel and unjust." If we feel this way about some action that we plan, we can be quite sure that the action is unwholesome.

In this way, morality can be looked upon as a manifestation of our sense of oneness with other beings. We know what it feels like to be harmed, and out of loving care and consideration we undertake to avoid harming others.

We should remain committed to truthful speech and avoid words that abuse, deceive or slander. As we practice refraining from angry actions and angry speech, then this gross and unwholesome mental state may gradually cease to arise, or at least it will become weaker and less frequent.

Of course, anger is not the only reason we harm other beings. Greed might make us try to grab something in an illegal or unethical way. Or our sexual desire can attach itself to another person's partner. Here again, if we consider how much we could hurt someone, we will try hard to refrain from succumbing to lustful desire.

Even in small amounts, intoxicating substances can make us less sensitive, more easily swayed by gross motivations of anger and greed. Some people defend the use of drugs or alcohol, saying that these substances are not so bad. On the contrary, they are very dangerous; they can lead even a goodhearted person into forgetfulness. Like accomplices to a crime, intoxicants open the door to a host of problems, from just talking nonsense, to inexplicable bursts of rage, to negligence that could be fatal to oneself or others. Indeed, any intoxicated person is unpredictable. Abstaining from intoxicants is therefore a way of protecting all the other precepts.

* * *

In fact, in this world there is no greater adornment than purify of conduct, no greater refuge, and no other basis for the flowering of insight and wisdom. *Sīla* brings a beauty that is not plastered onto the outside, but instead comes from the heart and is reflected in the entire person. Suitable for everyone, regardless of age, station or circumstance, truly it is the adornment for all seasons. So please be sure to keep your virtue fresh and alive.

Even if we refine our speech and actions to a large extent, however, sīla is not sufficient in itself to tame the mind. A method is needed to bring us to spiritual maturity, to help us realize the real nature of life and to bring the mind to a higher level of understanding. That method is meditation...

The Mind That Cools, from The Six Perfections, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

The Tibetan word *tsultrim*, meaning “righteous or correct action,” refers to keeping pure virtue through mindfulness and awareness, which is also the meaning of the Sanskrit word *shila*, which literally means “cool.” When we feel hot and a breeze blows through the house, it cools us down, relieving us of the suffering of being hot. In the same way, samsaric suffering is agitated and hot, and *shila*, morality, is the breeze that cools that suffering.

Whereas the heat of nonvirtue and suffering is created by our negative mind, as Buddhists we have our vows to protect us. By living in the vows, our confusion is overcome and we have no wish to commit actions that are the opposite of morality. While others about us are involved in the worldly affairs that cause them to become agitated and confused and to commit nonvirtues due to desire and so forth, our protecting vows keep us subdued and “cool.”

Therefore not only do we not harm others when we live in morality but we also protect ourselves from suffering- and, moreover, we purify negative karma we have created in previous lifetimes.

...

The term *morality* sounds very good, doesn't it? It suggests a very kind heart, something very positive.

The description of what morality is- *not* creating any negative actions, *not* harming others- might seem a negation, a *not doing*, but in fact by keeping our vows and overcoming the blocks to better rebirths, liberation, and enlightenment, we are doing the most positive thing we can. The purpose of observing morality is to stop all the hindrances on the path to enlightenment in order to achieve the fully awakened mind. Even so, living a moral life by keeping our vows and not harming others also brings

immediate benefits; we naturally feel lighter and happier and less problems come.

...

Like charity, morality is a state of mind. Shantideva explained that it is one that wishes to forsake any harm to other beings...

The incredible wish in the hearts of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas is that no sentient being at all ever receives any harm at all. When we have this constantly and strongly in our own heart we can say we have attained the perfection of morality.

They say in Buddhism that a person has four kinds of nutriments – those of bodily food, sense impressions, states of consciousness, and their intentions. When I heard this last one in a teaching, I felt like I knew exactly what it meant. Our dreams, even if not yet manifest, nourish and sustain us on a deep level. Even if we're not able to accomplish our wishes, just having a righteous goal in mind feels complete in itself. We can set our aim, and be uplifted by it.

Bringing delight to the mind, brightening it with qualities of well-being is a very necessary part of the development of the mind. It's not just kind of bashing away at the mind and making it submit. There's a necessity to learn how to allow the mind to really delight in the practice, in the dhamma, in stillness, because on a certain level, it's the antithesis of what we are familiar with.

We're familiar with finding our happiness, pleasure, delight in the world outside, around us, outside us, and even if it's sort of an internal happiness, it's still sort of outside in the sense that it's focused on the realm of thought, proliferation, movement, propping up fantasy, ideals, a sense of self.

And gladdening of the mind through the meditation and through dhamma is one of relinquishment, of settling, of a sense of contentment, and peace.

So these are qualities to be bringing up for reflection, or remembering. At this point there doesn't need to be a lot of reflection, investigation, thought processes going on. This is more *the feeling tone* of the internal illumination of the mind itself.

The earlier stages of the practice are much more actively engaged in this bringing up of objects, and themes for reflection. This is a bit more subtle...

There is always this need to brighten the mind, to gladden the mind. It is just so easy for the mind to lose balance, and if it gets too absorbed into experience and investigation, then it's easy to get caught up in the details of things.

And one needs to brighten the mind again, to bring it back to a point of balance, and this is a subtler balance than before. It is ja finer degree of balance, a fine tuning of the mind.

- Ajahn Pasanno

Whichever practice one is cultivating, ask,

Is there suffering or freedom from suffering that results from my practice?

How does it work for me?

That is always the bottom line in the Buddha's teaching.

Am I happier, or am I experiencing suffering?

Is my mind clearer or more confused?

Is it peaceful or agitated?

These are the guidelines.

- Ajahn Pasanno

{Reaffirming my commitment to the precepts}

In Praise of the Precepts

{Note: in this piece, one can substitute the words sila, vinaya, ethics, ethical sense, moral sense, morality, virtue, fundamental goodness, discipline, conduct, moral guidelines, or any other term with the same meaning.}

Homage to the precepts that give life

I praise the sila that heals, that soothes, and pacifies,
and that is the foundation for all the good that arises in this world

Homage to the moral conduct that protects the mind and the body from
suffering, and that brings peace to oneself and to others in the community

Homage to the Noble conduct that restores the balance of the elements

I praise this fundamental goodness that gives health
that gives strength
and that purifies all beings

I praise and celebrate the pratimoksha-precepts,
the guidelines and embodied ways of living
that are the basis for individual liberation

that are the expression of great respect between people
that are the expression of reverence for life,
that are the expression of this wisdom

Praise to the virtue that is the manifest essential character of all good people, and that is the guardian and protector of oneself and of all beings

Homage to the morality that supports meditation
that tames the mind, and keeps it humble
and that awakens the sense of innate dignity

Homage to the ethical integrity that is cool and refreshing
whose practice ennobles
whose practice uplifts
whose practice purifies and transforms,
whose practice beautifies the world

Homage to the sila that is true wealth

I praise and celebrate those wholesome instincts, those good roots,
that bring safety to self and others
and that bring freedom from fear to self and others

Homage to the wise, compassionate, disciplined conduct
that creates the causes for happiness,
now and in the future,
for oneself and for others

I praise and celebrate the far-seeing, impeccable morality whose beneficial influence, when practiced by even just one person, reaches far

Praise to the kindness and decency that clarifies the mind,
and that is a true compass for life in the world

Even the worst person,
as soon as they turn their mind to ethical conduct,
gains some improvement in their mind

Praise to the goodness that is the essential nature of the nectar that relieves
the sufferings of the six realms

Praise to the sila that liberates

I praise and celebrate the vinaya - precepts from their origin in wisdom,
and as spoken, written, practiced, and realized

Any person in whom the moral sense is strong is an object of refuge,
whether they be a layperson or ordained
They are a source of safety and strength
Even without speaking, their presence alone comforts, and can heal

Homage to the virtue that is the essential,
abundantly clear character of all good persons,
and that is perfected in all Buddhas and arhats, bodhisattvas and saints

I praise the practice of ethics that nourishes,
that heals, that revitalizes,
and that brings happiness

Teachings on Ethics, by His Holiness The Dalai Lama

Homage to Gotama the monk,
 Sun radiating truth, the eye of living beings,
 A moon soothing sorrow; a treasure of nectar,
 An incomparably supreme teacher,
 A divinity amongst divinities.

Out of respect to him herein is set forth
 A drop of advice on the Pratimoksha -
 {the ethical guidelines
 and vows of individual liberation we have received,}
 Medicine to eradicate the misery of delusion,
 A heavenly balm to purify the stains of wrong conduct.

The three higher trainings refer to moral discipline, meditative concentration, and wisdom. The first of these, the training in moral discipline is said to be the basis of the other trainings and the foundation of all perfections.

Not only is moral discipline the basis of all practice, the Pratimoksha in particular is said to be the very essence of the Buddha's doctrine. Therefore it is said that whenever there is a monk observing the vows of full ordination, in that place the Buddha's doctrine exists and that place is said not to be lacking the presence of Buddha.

This was said by the compassionate Master himself in a Sutra:

*Wherever there is a monk observing the vinaya,
 {the training rules of conduct}
 that place is luminous, it is radiant,
 I see that place as not empty,
 I myself abide there peacefully.*

Likewise, the scripture, In Praise of the Vinaya, states:

*Just as the earth is the basis of life,
And gives birth to all that grows,
Likewise, good vinaya is the basis of those striving to restrain
And it even gives birth to merits.*

*Discipline is understood as the source of every excellence
And the abidance of that is said to be vinaya.
As long as the complete vinaya,
the supreme treasure, abides,
The lamp of Dharma shall abide.*

*Just as all crops are faultlessly grown
In dependence upon the earth,
Similarly, the supreme white (cloud of) Dharma
Based upon discipline and moistened by compassion,
Grows to full maturity.*

Also, it is said in The Great Sutra on the Entering into Parinirvana:

*Moral discipline is the staircase leading to every wholesome Dharma.
It is the basis as the earth is the basis of trees and so forth.*

*Just as a chief of merchants moves in front of all other merchants,
it moves before all the other wholesome Dharmas.*

*Like the raised victory banner of Indra,
it is the victory banner of all Dharmas;*

it completely cuts off the paths of all negativities and unfortunate rebirths. Like the medicinal tree, it cures all evil sickness.

*It is nourishment for those tired and weary
on the paths of worldly existence;
a weapon for destroying the enemy of delusion.*

*It is a mystic spell which eliminates the poisonous snake of delusion,
a bridge for crossing over the waters of evil...*

Also, the great Sakya Lama Drakpa Gyaltsen wrote:

*If moral discipline is learned from the beginning,
One possesses the root for achieving higher rebirth,
A staircase for achieving liberation,
An antidote eliminating misery and sorrow.
Without discipline there is no method.*

The incomparable Kargyupa master Dakpo (Gampopa) wrote in this Lam Rim treatise, The Jewel Ornament of Liberation,

If one does not possess moral discipline, one will not gain liberation from the realms of samsara. As the path to Buddhahood is not complete, full and perfect Enlightenment cannot be attained. Conversely, if one possesses moral discipline, one gains a fully endowed body. If one possesses moral discipline, one lays the foundation of every joy and goodness. It is like the fertile earth, by relying on which the harvest of every good quality is increased.

Moreover, the omniscient Nyingmapa master Long Chen Rabjampa states in his A Treasury of Oral Teachings:

*The root of the doctrine is known as moral discipline,
and not to guard moral discipline leads to evil.*

*Without this protection and restraint to secure oneself,
the root of Dharma practice will rot.*

*Moral discipline is to be understood as the basis
of every good quality,
as a ladder leading to higher states of being,
as a mount on which to ride to liberation,
therefore make every effort to cherish
the guarding of pure discipline.*

The mighty Lama Jamgon Tsong Khapa also wrote:

*Moral discipline is water to cleanse the stains of negative actions,
Moonlight to cool the heat of the delusions,
Magnificent like Mt. Meru in the midst of sentient beings,
The peaceful force uniting all sentient beings.
Knowing this, having well received moral discipline,
Superior beings, please guard it as you would your very eyes.
I, as yogi, practiced like this,
You, O liberation seeker, should do likewise.*

Thus it was commonly instructed by all the learned and accomplished Teachers of the Snowy Mountains, (Tibet).

Moreover, by relying upon the practices of moral discipline, the stream of one's mind will evolve from high to higher. One's training will come to equal that of the great Bodhisattvas, and one will attain to the immaculate, omniscient wisdom free from the two obstructions together with their seeds.

The ornament of moral discipline generates happiness in all people, young, middle-aged, and elders, therefore, it is the best of all ornaments. The famed perfume of moral discipline travels in all directions, not only in the direction of the wind, therefore it is the best of all perfumes. The balm of moral discipline soothes the hot pains of delusion, therefore it is the best of all balms. Although bearing equal signs of ordination, the monk with pure moral discipline excels all others.

The Master Acharya Vira wrote:

*Moral discipline is a path establishing special achievement
equal to those with instincts of compassion.*

*Moral discipline is in the nature of excellent pure wisdom,
Therefore it is called the best ornament, free from faults*

*It is the sweetest perfume in all three realms,
and it is the balm not contradicting (the law)
of the ordained ones.*

*Although their traditions may be the same,
it is the one who possesses moral discipline
who will be magnificent among men.*

There are immediate benefits of guarding moral discipline. The main function is that it restrains many negative activities of body and speech, and consequently one experiences pacification of coarse mental wandering to external objects, and to such meaningless endeavors as vanquishing enemies and protecting friends. Thus one will abide with joy in this life.

By the power of constantly relying on alertness and awareness of practice and abandonments, discipline becomes an excellent collection of causes for the quick and easy accomplishment of concentration.

Again:

How appropriate it is
for the followers of Buddha,
the pure and mighty lord of speech,
to engage with a pure mind
in pure ways beyond reproach.

Externally and internally pure,
 this is the Buddhist Tradition,
 which produces every temporary and
 ultimate benefit.

How auspicious to have met with
 this medicine benefitting both self and others.

This opportunity is found but once
 and is difficult to find again.

Since interest is very weak,
 make firm efforts in your heart
 and apply yourself to the path of pure ways,
 by making a hundred endeavors.

Since without a doubt such a path
 can easily subdue the extremely coarse delusions,
 what need to mention that it frees from the sufferings
 experienced in householder's life?

With discipline as the root,
 what cannot be produced
 from the mighty tree of the Mahayana path,
 the altruistic thought of supreme enlightenment,
 samatha and vipassayana combined,
 and the practices such as samadhi?

The extremely quick, ultimate, secret path
 is a magnificent and praiseworthy
 method for transforming strong poison
 into medicine.

The foundation of this too
 is laid by (moral discipline).

E Ma! Cherish this discipline,
 it is even the cause of quickly attaining
 the inseparable union of emptiness and compassion,
 the state of Vajradhara.

Therefore, O friends with intelligence,
 do not disparage or regard as minor
 the various Pratimoksha disciplines,
 which originate from the shravaka (Pali) scriptures.

Discipline is the basis and root of the Doctrine,
 therefore, know how praiseworthy it is.

One should strive to maintain it carefully,
 by study, analysis, meditation, alertness,
 awareness, modesty, conscientiousness, and respect.

Do not stand idle in apathy
 lest you lose the root of lasting happiness.

By the kindness of the Holy Father
 Jamgon Lama and my kind and qualified Gurus,
 this has been written with the thought to benefit,
 lest the purpose be diminished.

A man from Do-kham, East Tibet,
 the Buddhist Monk Tenzin Gyatso has written this
 with respect from the heart for these very practices.
 It leaves aside sophistication in composition,
 and aims at ease of comprehension.

By any merits it may have,
 may all mother sentient beings in general,
 and especially many young intelligent Tibetans

touch the ground of supreme Enlightenment
through the practice of this path.

May Auspiciousness Increase!

The Benefits of Living the Five Precepts

by Ajahn Nyanadhammo, the Abbot of Rattanawan Monastery, Thailand

Although the Buddha praised merit making very much as generosity is important, it doesn't help one to escape from falling to a lower realm. Some people with a big heart and a sporty mind like to give alms, but still have not yet abandoned unwholesome deeds through body and speech. If one is still acting sinfully with one's body and words, one would not have escaped from a lower realm, but if we keep the five precepts, then it is a way for virtue to arise.

The first benefit is that after death, one could be born in a good family. The second benefit is that one could be born as a human and in a good family, but if not born in a good family, one could become an angel. Ah! Born as an angel, enjoying life in that heavenly world! If one is not born into a good family or born as a deity, then Nirvana must be the only thing left of the three benefits. Therefore, these are the three virtues of keeping the five precepts. It shuts all lower realms' doors because we abandon all akusala kamma (unwholesome causes of action).

Abandoning unwholesome deeds that lead to the lower realms is very important. We will abandon our unwholesome kamma by keeping our bodies and our speech not to transgress that five precepts which is why the teachers keep speaking over and over again. Having to keep speaking of the five precepts is because they want the faithful devotees to have happiness and prosperity in both this life and the next, and it will enable the stream to Nirvana. It could make wealth happen. It could make possible to enter the stream of Nirvana. We will be a perfect human being in this life, and so on in order to be able to continue practicing goodness with our body and mind to be in virtue.

From Towards Eternal Peace, by Pa-Auk Sayadaw

The Noble Path has the power to eradicate mental defilements, which are the real causes of suffering. With the eradication of defilements, selfishness and hatred will also have been completely eradicated. When selfishness and hatred no longer exist, envy and possessiveness no longer exist.

When envy and possessiveness no longer exist, the meditator will have attained eternal peace for himself. But if such effort is exerted so that the majority of world citizens attain such eternal peace, each one for himself, then eternal peace in the whole world will be an undeniable reality.

When envy and possessiveness no longer exist, no one will resent the wealth, prestige, knowledge, etc. of others, but everyone will rejoice in others' success. And no one will find it unbearable to share their wealth, residence, relatives, prestige, knowledge, etc. with others, but everyone will gladly and generously share whatever they have with others.

No one will find it unbearable that others should become as wealthy, prestigious, knowledgeable, etc. as themselves, but everyone will rejoice in others' success. When everyone rejoices in the success of others, and gladly and generously shares whatever they have with others, it is inevitable that no one will criticize, threaten, attack, or ruin others. It is inevitable that there will be eternal world peace.

Such world peace as a palpable reality can be attained right now, if all world citizens observe five precepts of moral training. That is, if they take upon themselves not to engage in five kinds of actions:

1. Not to engage in any kind of killing for any reason.
2. Not to engage in any kind of stealing for any reason.

3. Not to engage in any kind of sexual misconduct for any reason.

4. Not to engage in any kind of lying for any reason.

and

5. Not to engage in the drinking of any kind of wine or liquor.

That is the first step of the Buddhist training, and we may say it is found in some form or other in the right practice of almost all religions.

If all world citizens then take upon themselves to develop meditative concentration, in lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and impartiality, the world peace that as an undeniable reality can be attained will be more lasting, but it will still be only a temporary world peace.

If all world citizens take upon themselves to develop Path-Wisdom, however, the undeniable reality will be indestructible, eternal world peace.

These facts about the gradual attainment of peace for the individual human being are not just so many theoretical concepts, so many philosophical or metaphysical ideas. They are potentially palpable realities to be realized by any person who undertakes the threefold training mentioned earlier: the training in morality, concentration, and wisdom.

Many people have, throughout the ages, taken upon themselves those three trainings, and have with success realized for themselves the peace that they yield: the initial peace of morality, the more lasting peace of meditation, and the eternal peace of wisdom. And those three trainings can also today be undertaken, and the fruits be enjoyed by anyone who is willing sincerely to strive strenuously for eternal peace.

In order that such individual eternal peace may be enjoyed by the majority of world citizens, and thereby eternal world peace be achieved, an earnest

appeal is herewith made for everyone to undertake the Noble Practice as taught by the Buddha.

May all beings attain eternal peace.

The Moral Foundation for Jhana, from *The Jhanas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation*, by Bhante Gunaratana

A disciple aspiring to the jhanas first has to lay a solid foundation of moral discipline. Moral purity is indispensable to meditative progress for several deeply psychological reasons. It is needed first, in order to safeguard against the danger of remorse, the nagging sense of guilt that arises when the basic principles of morality are ignored or deliberately violated.

Scrupulous conformity to virtuous rules of conduct protects the meditator from this danger disruptive to inner calm, and brings joy and happiness when the meditator reflects upon the purity of his conduct (see A.v,1-7).

A second reason a moral foundation is needed for meditation follows from an understanding of the purpose of concentration. Concentration, in the Buddhist discipline, aims at providing a base for wisdom by cleansing the mind of the dispersive influence of the defilements. But in order for the concentration exercises to effectively combat the defilements, the coarser expressions of the latter through bodily and verbal action first have to be checked. Moral transgressions being invariably motivated by defilements - by greed, hatred and delusion - when a person acts in violation of the precepts of morality he excites and reinforces the very same mental factors his practice of meditation is intended to eliminate. This involves him in a crossfire of incompatible aims which renders his attempts at mental purification ineffective. The only way he can avoid frustration in his endeavor to purify the mind of its subtler defilements is to prevent the unwholesome inner impulses from breathing out in the coarser form of unwholesome bodily and verbal deeds. Only when he establishes control over the outer expression of the defilements can he turn to deal with them inwardly as mental obsessions that appear in the process of meditation.

Temporary and Ultimate Antidotes to the Afflictions

From Steps on the Path to Enlightenment, Volume Two, by Geshe Sopa

pages 75 and 230

One powerful antidote to nonvirtue is to temporarily suppress the obscuring afflictions, which instigate negative action, by means of the so-called "mundane path." This requires some explanation. Through the practice of single-pointed concentration and the attainment of a high degree of meditative stabilization, you can temporarily become free of worldly attachment. This is achieved by means of what is called the mundane path, through which you strive to achieve levels of meditative stabilization associated with the four concentrations and the four formless absorptions. Attaining one of these higher meditative states temporarily subdues the obscuring afflictions associated with that level. In this way meditators can temporarily subdue all the afflictions of the desire realm. Then, gradually attaining higher meditative states, they subdue the afflictions of the four concentrations of the form realm, then the four absorptions of the formless realm, right up to what is called the "peak of existence," a level having afflictions that cannot be pacified by the mundane path.

This practice is a powerful antidote to nonvirtue because it suppresses the afflictions motivating negative action. It does not eliminate afflictions from the root; that can only be achieved by the uncommon, supermundane path of the Buddha, which leads to the realization of emptiness and the attainment of the arya stage. But ordinary individuals (non-aryas), and even nonBuddhists, can practice this mundane path, which temporarily subdues the afflictions by means of single-pointed concentration.

The ultimate antidote to the afflictions is direct realization of the truth of emptiness, or Sunyata. This antidote completely eliminates all obscuring

afflictions from the root. All of the other antidotes we have mentioned are temporary (provisional). They cannot eliminate afflictions from the root, but they can subdue them for a time, lessen their frequency, force, or ability to instigate harmful actions. Once you attain the arya stage by realizing the true nature of self and of all phenomena, the afflictions will be removed from the root. Then there will no longer be any motivating causes to create negative karma.

* * *

What is the best way to get full satisfaction, perfect satisfaction, everlasting and unchanging happiness? Where is the pure cause of pure satisfaction? That is what you should be looking for. The root of all the sufferings of cyclic existence is ignorance. From there, the obscuring afflictions and karma lead you down the road of endless sorrow. Therefore, to get at the cause of samsara you must remove ignorance from the root, and you do that through the cultivation and realization of wisdom. All of these meditations are designed to reveal the true causality of cyclic existence, and the true causality of emancipation. Is it possible to achieve complete cessation of the cycle of samsara? What is the method to do that? These are the things you need to concentrate on. When these are realized, all of your actions will be turned around and you will begin to behave in ways that, instead of leading to endless disappointment and pain, ultimately lead to genuine, lasting happiness.

From A Treatise on the Paramis, by Acarya Dhammapala

The perfection of virtue should be reflected upon as follows:

"Even the waters of the Ganges cannot wash away the stain of hatred,
yet the water of virtue is able to do so.

Even yellow sandalwood cannot cool the fever of lust,
yet virtue is able to remove it.

Virtue is the unique adornment of the good,
surpassing the adornments cherished by ordinary people,
such as necklaces, diadems, and earrings.

It is a sweet-scented fragrance superior to incense
as it pervades all directions and is always appropriate;

It is a supreme magical spell which wins the homage of devas,
and of powerful lords of great wealth,

a staircase ascending to the world of the gods,
to the heaven of the Four Great Kings,

a means for achieving the jhanas and the direct knowledges;

a highway leading to the great city of nibbana;
the foundation for the enlightenment of disciples,
paccekabuddhas, and perfectly enlightened Buddhas.

And as a means for the fulfillment of all one's wishes and desires,
it surpasses the tree of plenty and the wish-fulfilling gem."

Virtue should be reflected upon as the basis for joy and ease;
as granting immunity from fear of self-reproach,

the reproach of others,
temporal punishment,
and an evil destination after death;

as praised by the wise;
as the root-cause for freedom from remorse;

as the basis for security;
and as surpassing the achievements of high birth,
wealth, sovereignty,
long life, beauty, status,
kinsmen, and friends.

For great joy and ease arise in the virtuous man
when he reflects on his own accomplishment in virtue:

"I have done what is wholesome,
I have done what is good,
I have built myself a shelter from fear."

The virtuous man does not blame himself,
and other wise men do not blame him,
and he does not encounter the dangers of temporal punishment
or an evil destination after death.

To the contrary,
the wise praise the noble character of the virtuous man,
and the virtuous man is not subject to remorse

Virtue is hence the supreme basis for security,
It is the foundation for diligence,
a blessing,
and a means for achieving great benefits,
such as preventing the loss of wealth, and so on.

Accomplishment in virtue surpasses birth in a good family,
 since a virtuous man of low birth deserves to be worshipped
 even by great, and powerful persons.

Virtue surpasses material wealth,
 for it cannot be confiscated by thieves,
 follows one to the world beyond,
 produces great fruit,
 and acts as the foundation for such qualities as serenity, and so on.

Because it enables one to achieve supreme sovereignty
 over one's own mind,
 virtue surpasses the sovereignty of lords of great wealth, and others,

And because of their virtue,
 beings attain sovereignty in their respective orders.

Virtue is superior even to life,
 for it is said that a single day in the life of the virtuous
 is better than a hundred years of life devoid of virtue;

and there being life,
 the disavowal of the training (in the holy life) is called (spiritual) death.

Virtue surpasses the achievement of beauty,
 for it makes one beautiful even to one's enemies,
 and it cannot be vanquished by the adversities of aging and sickness.

As the foundation for distinguished states of happiness,
 virtue surpasses such distinguished dwellings as palaces,
 mansions, and so on,
 and such distinguished social positions as that of a king,
 prince, or general.

Because it promotes one's highest welfare
and follows one to the world beyond,
virtue surpasses kinsmen and friends,
even those who are close and affectionate.

Again, in accomplishing the difficult task of self-protection,
virtue is superior to troops of elephants, horses,
chariots, and infantry,
as well as to such devices as mantras,
spells, and blessings,
for it depends on oneself,
does not depend on others,
and has a great sphere of influence.
Hence it is said:

"Dhamma protects the one who lives by Dhamma" (Thag.303).

When one reflects in this way
upon the numerous noble qualities of virtue,
one's unfulfilled achievement of virtue will become fulfilled,
and one's unpurified virtue will become purified.

On Ethical Discipline, from Steps on the Path to Enlightenment, volume 3,
by Geshe Sopa

A Mahayana practitioner takes the bodhisattva vow solely for the purpose of benefiting other sentient beings. His or her goal is to bring all sentient beings to highest enlightenment. Because engaging in pure ethical discipline will result in reaching buddhahood, a bodhisattva must help others to practice perfect conduct.

Successfully encouraging others to practice ethical discipline depends upon practicing it oneself. If one does not have practical experience, one cannot effectively teach others to practice the perfection of ethical discipline.

Furthermore, if we act in a negative way we will be born in a lower realm. Because in the lower realms we will endure extremely painful suffering, we will not be able to do anything at all for others. So a bad rebirth is not just losing out for ourselves; it is also a loss for all other sentient beings. In this sense ethical conduct is not merely in one's own self-interest.

Keeping our actions virtuous and our body healthy builds the strength necessary to help others. Without it we cannot benefit others, much less ourselves. Therefore, it is important for bodhisattvas to maintain ethical discipline. Nagarjuna's great disciple Aryasura says in the *Compendium of the Perfections* that if we want to help others spiritually, it is very important to practice religious conduct first:

*Those endeavoring to help all living beings
Attain complete enlightenment adorned with pure conduct,
Must first practice ethical discipline themselves.
Pure ethical discipline produces the power to succeed.*

*If their conduct degenerates they cannot accomplish their own goal,
So how could they be able to accomplish the goal for others?
Therefore those who make an effort to accomplish others' welfare*

Must not slacken proper practice of ethical discipline themselves.

Tsongkhapa says that pure ethical discipline is to do positive activity and turn away from the negative side. The ability to do this depends upon mental strength. In this context mental strength means that we protect our conduct as instinctively as we protect our eyes from wind or dust.

In Tibetan we say, "Protect it the way a yak protects his tail." This saying may not have much meaning for you if you are unfamiliar with yaks! Yaks are very proud of their tail hair. If a single strand of their tail gets stuck on a thorny bush, they will not pull away; they just stand there because they do not want to lose a single hair. We should always be this watchful of our conduct. This strong awareness keeps us from slipping into any negative behavior.

Most people do not have this mental strength. How do we develop this powerful desire always to do certain things and avoid others? It comes from a firm understanding of what we are doing and why we are doing it. We never do anything unless we understand the purpose and the result of our actions. We want to know what we will get out of doing something. If we clearly see great disadvantages, we are opposed to doing it. If we see immense benefits, then we want to do it. Furthermore, we have to be convinced that these benefits are achievable through our actions. Together these lead to a firmness of mind and our physical and verbal actions will follow.

In this case, in order to have the desire to practice ethical discipline, we must recognize the faults of doing nonvirtuous actions and the benefits of doing virtuous ones. That is why we start by examining the disadvantages of each of the negative actions and concentrate on the advantages of avoiding them. This requires acceptance of karma and the existence of past and future lives.

According to Buddhism, all our experiences are the result of our prior actions. If one believes in future lives, then it is easier to accept that our present actions will affect our future. In particular, we believe that if we engage in negative conduct we are creating the causes for trouble later. That conviction makes it easier to maintain pure ethical discipline.

It is more difficult for those who do not believe these things. However, even those who do not believe in karma and reincarnation admit that, in an ordinary worldly sense, our actions produce results, or consequences. For example, murderers worry that they will be put in jail or that someone may harm them in revenge. (Of course, in the Buddhist world view, killing someone will have many bad results in one's next life as well.) Merely understanding the details of causality is not enough. We have to think about our negative behavior from the point of view of the suffering we will have when reborn in a miserable life. Then we will be motivated to act ethically. The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

*Seeing the unending fearsome consequences of your actions
Makes you feel it worthwhile to avoid even a small thing
to be abandoned.*

If we do not believe in causality, we continue to do bad things without fear of repercussions. We ignorantly enjoy ourselves because we do not see the disadvantageous consequences of our actions.

We usually think fear is a bad thing and do not want to have any worries, but certain types of fear are positive because they prevent us from doing something stupid. Such fears should be produced. Seeing the relationship between nonvirtuous actions and unpleasant consequences will make us afraid of what will happen in the future, and makes us determined to regulate our behavior now. It also makes us try to remedy the negative things that we have already done. Such fear, therefore, is the antidote to many faults.

If we avoid certain activities because we are afraid of their consequences, then eventually we will reach the permanently fearless state. Being stupidly fearless, however, is the cause of disaster; with such a wrong attitude we will not avoid negative actions and will not do meritorious actions.

For proper fear to arise we must contemplate the faults of the ten nonvirtues. First we get a general idea; some points may take a long time to become clear while others are easier. The clarity of one's understanding determines how much one practices. A firm understanding results in decisive action. This is the purpose of analytical meditation.

The Buddha suggests that we consider how karmic causality is analogous to external causality. A small seed can grow into a tree so large that thirteen wagons can park in its shade; a single karmic seed can result in a rebirth into the lower realms. There is a detailed explanation of karma and its results, both negative and positive, earlier in the *Lamrim Chenmo* (volume 2, Chapter 2); here Tsongkhapa just reminds us that ethical discipline will become easy if we see that doing something small may bring about an almost unthinkable experience.

Tsongkhapa also prompts us to remember the benefits of practicing good conduct by explaining a number of stanzas from the *Compendium of the Perfections*:

*Heavenly goods, human wealth that gives joy.
Bliss, excellent food, and god-like riches
Are brought about by pure conduct.
This is no surprise.
But look, even the excellent qualities of buddhahood arise from it!*

It is not easy to be born in the realms of the gods. Such a rebirth is the result of a special purity of conduct. Even human qualities such as an attractive body, inner beauty that everyone finds appealing, wealth, and pleasure are brought about by virtuous conduct. It is no surprise that

ethical discipline results in these worldly assets. More wonderful is that ethical discipline also yields the highest pure qualities of buddhahood.

There is no way to attain buddhahood or nirvana without ethical discipline; it is the foundation of the entire path. In the beginning, avoiding causing injury to others is based on compassion. This attitude develops into the bodhisattva motivation; bodhisattvas want to do more than just avoid harming others, they want to bring others freedom and bliss. In this way practicing ethical discipline takes one to the level of a bodhisattva. Gradually, every facet of one's mental, physical, and verbal conduct becomes purer; one gets rid of the seeds of negative activity and develops pure wisdom. In the end, every aspect of a buddha's perfect body, mind, and environment arises from the purification of conduct.

There are various poetic images in the *Compendium of the Perfections* praising pure conduct. Ethical behavior that avoids even the smallest non-virtue is called the best ornament we can wear. Usually we drape ourselves in special clothes, lovely colors, and jewelry to make us attractive to others. Ordinary adornments can be nice in some situations, but they look strange in others.

Some things look good on young people but are unattractive on someone old; other things are the reverse. Some things are appropriate for women and would look laughable on men. Some things are right for monks and nuns but not for laypeople. All these decorative things, even if they cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, have no essence and are but a sham, but pure conduct is suitable for everyone all the time. It never changes under various conditions. It is the real source of beauty within. It is natural beauty and liked by everyone.

Another example is that unlike the scent of ordinary perfume that follows a breeze in one direction only, the sweet smell of the reputation of ethical conduct pervades everywhere. Another comparison is to scented healing lotions that may be suitable to heal a layperson's burn but its use would

break the vows of monks or nuns. In contrast, religious conduct is a salve suitable for everyone; it is the ointment that protects us from the heat of the mental afflictions.

Finally, practicing ethical discipline is like possessing wealth. In the world someone who possesses a lot of money is often considered to be better than those who have less. Pure conduct is real wealth; it is superior to any type of property. If all people wore identical valuable garments, they would look the same on the outside; nevertheless, some people are worth more than others. It is the person with ethical conduct who is superior. As stated in the *Compendium of the Perfections*:

*Ethical conduct is the path of special attainment,
Making us equal to those who have a compassionate nature.
Its nature brings pure wisdom.
It is the supreme ornament free of faults.*

*Its delightful perfume pervades the three realms.
It is not inappropriate for even the ordained.
Among those dressed the same, the one with pure conduct
Is the best among men.*

Those who practice ethical discipline purely will somehow always have enough to survive. Their needs seem to be met naturally; they always have enough food, shelter, and necessities.

Ordinary people and governments sometimes expend a lot of effort to get worldly goods. They may threaten individuals or small countries, "You had better do this or you will be harmed, or jailed, or the army will invade." This can force others to fall in to line, but those with pure conduct never have to resort to such threats. They get what they need without engaging in flattery or coercion because people like to share with those who have pure conduct.

They are naturally attractive to others because they have true beauty and kindness. Their relatives and friends of course care for them, but even those unrelated to them, and those they have not helped in the past, like them and want to assist them as soon as they meet them.

People have so much respect for this type of person that they even value the dirt under their feet. You may not have this custom, but in India it is a mark of great respect to touch the ground at someone's feet and bring that dust to the top of your head. It is not that the ground is holy, but pure religious practice has the power to make the place around the practitioner peaceful. People and animals do not have to be compelled to bow down; they naturally incline their heads when someone with pure ethical discipline passes.

This does not mean that we should practice good conduct in order to get honor and possessions. It is the nature of religious ethical conduct, however, that these things do happen. This is reiterated in another passage from the *Compendium of Perfections*:

*You do not need to use words or labor,
Necessities just come to you.
Without threats all the world is respectful.
You obtain dominance without effort or toil.*

If we keep the advantages of ethical discipline and disadvantages of a lack of good conduct in mind, whenever we are tempted to do something negative our knowledge of the consequences of our actions will enable us to stop right away. Until this becomes spontaneous we should try to become more familiar with this topic. This is where the motivation to actually practice comes from. This is the method to enter into the practice of pure conduct. Those who have thought this through are wise, skilled masters.

So what should we do? What is the Mahayana practice of ethical conduct? The *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

*It is not out of attachment to their own happiness
That bodhisattvas avoid breaking pure ethical discipline worthy
of protection.
With this self control you are happy.
The wise protect this conduct praised as an ornament.*

The wise who are practicing good conduct are not attached to their own enjoyment and peace. This does not mean that practicing to achieve one's own true happiness is not religious conduct. Remember that there are three different levels of motivation on the Buddhist spiritual path. The initial or lowest spiritual level is willingness to practice virtue in order to save oneself from what one fears most- rebirth in the lower realms.

A little better is the intermediate level of motivation. This is being concerned with more than a good next rebirth; it is wanting to stop cycling in all of samsara. Both of these reasons for practicing ethical discipline are merely for one's own sake. They are incomplete when compared to the greatest level of motivation for practice: a bodhisattva does everything out of concern for others.

Bodhisattva ethical discipline is perfect because one forgets oneself and acts for the benefit of all others. Here we are talking about ethical discipline on this high level, but do not look down on the other ones. You should not get the impression that practicing that way is almost sinful. It is perfectly correct for beginners to have the first two levels of motivation. The lower goals are valid and important; even bodhisattvas have to equip themselves to work for the benefit of other sentient beings.

To do all kinds of things to solve others problems, we must have a high rebirth with certain kinds of good conditions. Practicing ethical conduct to attain that kind of rebirth as the basis to help others is no problem for a

bodhisattva; but to work for that goal for one's own sake is only the general, common form of good conduct. After taking the bodhisattva vow, these lower motivations interrupt a bodhisattva's practice.

The selfish attitude is the main enemy target of the bodhisattva because the primary purpose of Mahayana practice is to benefit other sentient beings. If at any point bodhisattvas think, "I will do this for myself", they are not practicing Mahayana ethical discipline, even though their conduct may be meritorious. If they have attitude they will have gone astray from a bodhisattva's pure conduct.

There is no comparison between the benefit of one hour of a bodhisattva's conduct and many years of good conduct done for one's own enjoyment. We should not have any pride that we are doing this for the benefit of all others. Thinking "I'm so great because I have that motivation", weakens one's practice. Although the mind usually gravitates to selfishness, we can and should exert control over this tendency.

Once we start to think and practice we will be mentally prepared and have power over the mind. We will know what is correct and what is not, and we will do the correct action with confident happiness. This is how to guard pure ethical conduct, say wise bodhisattvas.

According to the *Compendium of the Perfections*:

*One is said to have the perfection of ethical discipline
By practicing pure conduct for the benefit of the world,
And wanting to lead all the sentient beings
In measureless worlds to practice good conduct.*

*Clear away your fear of lower rebirths and
The desire to obtain wealth and high rebirth for yourself.
Protect perfect stainless ethical conduct and
Rely on ethical discipline in order to benefit all others in the world.*

All the misery of every living creature in the world is a result of not having practiced ethical conduct. To eliminate their problems, all sentient beings must be led to practice ethical discipline. For that purpose we should try to do it ourselves and spread it to others.

In summary, Tsongkhapa says we will practice if we see that our hard work will benefit us. We develop a desire to practice ethical discipline by seeing the negative consequences of acting badly and the positive ones arising from pure conduct. When we are familiar with the consequences of negative behavior, wisdom will direct us away from negative actions. We also must study the benefits of ethical conduct.

The highest practice of ethical discipline is practice unconcerned with oneself. It is conduct motivated by the desire to be the great savior of all mother sentient beings.

In a stanza of the *Condensed Lamrim*, Tsongkhapa summarizes some of the analogies we have seen before:

*Ethical discipline is like pure clean water.
It is the moonlight cooling the heat of the passions.
An ethical person is a mountain among men;
All men bow down before his power.
Seeing that all these good qualities come from pure conduct,
Guard your conduct like noble ones who are wise.*

* * *

In the beginning we will not be able to inspect every action or comment precisely, but we can recognize and try to avoid the most harmful ones. As one's practice becomes more serious, one will become more accustomed to checking what one is doing and what one has done. It will become natural to think, "Oh, I did that again. I should be more aware of that so I do not repeat it."

When one cannot help oneself from doing something, one will feel uncomfortable about it. This is a good thing. If you did not know any better, you might do something negative and think that you've done something great. Rejoicing in a bad action makes the negative karma even stronger. In contrast, feeling uneasy that one has done something wrong is part of the antidote.

Our practice will slowly become better; first we will be able to eliminate the gross level of wrong action, then the intermediate, and finally the most subtle. The time will come when we will be able to look back at our day and find that we did not do even one nonvirtuous action. That is really wonderful. That is the highest level of practice.

From A Treatise on the Paramis II

If, due to their cumulative force,
states antithetical to virtue,
such as aversion,
should arise from time to time,
the aspirant should reflect:

"Did you not make the resolution to win full enlightenment?
One defective in virtue cannot even succeed in mundane affairs,
much less in supramundane matters.

You should reach the peak of virtue,
for virtue is the foundation for supreme enlightenment,
the foremost of all achievements.

You should always be well behaved,
safeguarding your virtue perfectly

Further, by teaching the Dhamma,
you should help beings to enter
and reach maturity in the three vehicles

But the word of a morally dubious man
is no more reliable than the remedy of a doctor
who does not consider what is suitable for his patients.

How can I be trustworthy,
so that I can help beings to enter
and reach maturity in the three vehicles?
I must be pure in character and in virtue.

How can I acquire the distinguished attainments such as the jhanas,
so that I will be capable of helping others
and of fulfilling the perfection of wisdom?

The distinguished attainments such as the jhanas,
are not possible without purification of virtue.
Therefore virtue should be made perfectly pure."

{In The Treatise on the Paramis}

Renunciation is mentioned immediately after virtue, because renunciation perfects the achievement of virtue.

Renunciation (letting go, relinquishment) has the characteristic of departing from sense pleasures and (samsaric) existence;

its function is to verify their unsatisfactoriness;

its manifestation is the withdrawal from them;

a sense of spiritual urgency (samvega) is its proximate cause.

The perfection of renunciation should be reflected upon by first discerning the dangers in household life

Then, in the opposite way, one should reflect upon the benefits in going forth

The perfection of *energy* should (then) be reflected upon thus:

"Without energy
a man cannot even achieve success in worldly works
directed to visible ends.
But there is nothing the energetic,
indefatigable man cannot achieve.

One lacking energy
cannot undertake to rescue all beings
from the great flood of samsara;

even if his energy is only moderate
he will give up in the middle.
But one bristling with energy
can achieve perfection in all he undertakes."

The noble qualities of energy should be further reviewed as follows:

"One intent on rescuing himself alone from the mire of samsara
cannot fulfill his ideal if he relaxes his energy;
how much less one who aspires to rescue the entire world."

And,

"Through the power of energy, wrong thoughts such as the following are
kept away, such as,

'It is quite right that I alone escape from the suffering of samsara'

In addition: We are ever mindful that the host of defilements
is as difficult to restrain as a herd of mad elephants,

the kamma caused by them is like a murderer with drawn sword,

the evil destinations based on these actions stand constantly before you with open doors,

and evil friends are always around to enjoin you in those actions and admonish you to practice them.

Therefore, with mindfulness and energy, we pacify the hindrances, and with samatha and vipassana we eliminate them.

And we reflect,

"If even full enlightenment can be achieved by one's own energy, what can be difficult?"

From A Treatise on the Paramis III

Since Great Men and Women desire to adorn beings
with the adornment of the virtue of the omniscient,
at the beginning they must first purify their own virtue.

Virtue is twofold as avoidance, and performance.

Esteeming virtue as the foundation for all achievements
- as the soil for the origination of all the Buddha-qualities,
the beginning, the footing,
head, and chief of all the qualities issuing in Buddhahood

- and recognizing gain, honor, and fame
as a foe in the guise of a friend,
a bodhisattva should diligently and thoroughly perfect his virtue

through the power of mindfulness and clear comprehension
in the control of bodily and vocal action,
in the taming of the sense-faculties,
in purification of livelihood,
and in the use of the requisites.

The practice of virtue *as performance*
should then be understood as follows:

Herein, at the appropriate time,
a bodhisattva practices salutations,
rising up, respectful greetings,
and courteous conduct toward good friends worthy of reverence.

At the appropriate time he renders them service,
and he waits upon them when they are sick.
When he receives well-spoken advice he expresses his appreciation.

He praises the noble qualities of the virtuous
and patiently endures the abuse of antagonists.

He remembers help rendered to him by others,
rejoices in their merits,
He dedicates his own merits to the supreme enlightenment,
and always abides diligently in the practice of wholesome states.

When he commits a transgression
he acknowledges it as such and confesses it to his co-religionists,
and afterward he perfectly fulfills the right practice.

He is adroit and nimble
in fulfilling his duties toward beings
when these are conducive to their good.

He serves as their companion.

When beings are afflicted with the sufferings of disease, and so on,
he prepares the appropriate remedy.

He dispels the sorrow of those afflicted by the loss of wealth,

Of a helpful disposition,
he restrains with Dhamma those who need to be restrained,
rehabilitates them from unwholesome ways,
and establishes them in wholesome courses of conduct.

He inspires with Dhamma those in need of inspiration.
And when he hears about the loftiest,
most difficult, inconceivably powerful deeds
of the great bodhisattvas of the past,
issuing in the ultimate welfare and happiness of beings,
by means of which they reached perfect maturity

in the requisites of enlightenment,
he does not become agitated and alarmed, but reflects:

*Those Great Beings were only human beings.
But by developing themselves
through the orderly fulfillment of the training
they attained the loftiest spiritual power
and the highest perfection in the requisites of enlightenment.*

*I, too, should practice the same trainings in virtue, and the other paramis. In that
way I, too, will gradually fulfill the training
and in the end attain the same state.*

Then, with unflagging energy preceded by this faith,
he perfectly fulfills the training in virtue, and the other Perfections

Again, he conceals his virtues and reveals his faults.
He is few in his wishes,
content, fond of solitude,
aloof, capable of enduring suffering,
and free from anxiety.

He is not restless,
puffed up, fickle,
scurrilous,
or scattered in speech,
but calm in his faculties and mind.

Avoiding such wrong means of livelihood as scheming, and so on,
he is endowed with proper conduct and a suitable resort.

He sees danger in the slightest faults,
and having undertaken the rules of training,
trains himself in them,

energetic and resolute,
without regard for body or life.

He does not tolerate even the slightest concern for his body or life
but abandons and dispels it;
how much more then excessive concern?

He abandons and dispels all the corruptions such as anger,
malice, and so on, which are the cause for moral depravity.

He does not become complacent
over some minor achievement of distinction
and does not shrink away,
but strives for successively higher achievements.

In this way the achievements he gains
do not partake of diminution or stagnation.

The Great Man serves as a guide for the blind,
explaining to them the right path.

To the deaf he gives signals with gestures of his hands,
and in that way benefits them with good.

So too for the dumb.

To cripples he gives a chair,
or a vehicle,
or some other means of conveyance.

He strives that the faithless may gain faith,
that the lazy may generate zeal,
that those of confused mindfulness may develop perfectly clear
mindfulness,

that those with wandering minds
 may become accomplished in concentration,
 and that the dull-witted may acquire wisdom.

He strives to dispel sensual desire, ill-will,
 sloth-and-torpor, restlessness-and-worry,
 and perplexity in those obsessed by these hindrances,

and to dispel wrong thoughts of sensuality, ill-will, and aggression
 in those subjugated by these thoughts.

Out of gratitude to those who have helped him,
 he benefits and honors them with a similar or greater benefit in return,
 congenial in speech and endearing in his words.

He is a companion in misfortune.
 Understanding the nature and character of beings,
 he associates with whatever beings need his presence,
 in whatever way they need it;

and he practices together with whatever beings need to practice with him,
 in whatever way of practice is necessary for them.

But he proceeds only by rehabilitating them from the unwholesome
 and establishing them in the wholesome, not in other ways.

For in order to protect the minds of others,
 bodhisattvas behave only in ways which increase the wholesome.

So too, because his inclination is to benefit others,
 he should never harm them,
 abuse them, humiliate them,
 arouse remorse in them, or incite them to act in ways

which should be avoided.

Nor should he place himself in a higher position than those who are of inferior conduct.

He should be neither altogether inaccessible to others, nor too easily accessible, and he should not associate with others at the wrong time.

He associates with beings whom it is proper to associate with at the appropriate time and place.

He does not criticize those who are dear to others in front of them, nor praise those who are resented by them.

He is not intimate with those who are not trustworthy. He does not refuse a proper invitation, or engage in persuasion, or accept excessively.

He encourages those endowed with faith with a discourse on the benefits of faith; and he encourages as well those endowed with virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom with a discourse on the benefits of those qualities.

If the bodhisattva has attained to the direct knowledges, he may inspire a sense of spiritual urgency in the negligent by showing them the fate of those in hell, or other sorrowful states, as is fit.

Thereby he establishes the faithless (the immoral, the ignorant, the stingy, and dull-witted) in faith

(virtue,
learning,
generosity, and wisdom).

He makes them enter the Buddha's Dispensation
and brings to maturity those already endowed with these qualities.

In this way, through his virtuous conduct,
the Great Man's immeasurable flood of merit and goodness
ascends to ever increasing heights.

The detailed explanation of virtue
is given in diverse ways
but here,
because the discussion is intended for great bodhisattvas,
it should be explained making compassion
and skillful means the forerunners.

Just as the Great Man or Woman does not dedicate the merits
from their practice of virtue to their own release
from affliction in the unfortunate destinations,
or to their own achievement of kingship in the fortunate destinations,
or to becoming a world-ruling monarch,

rather they dedicate it only for the purpose
of becoming an omniscient Buddha
in order to enable all beings to acquire
the incomparable adornment of virtue.

This is the method of practicing the perfection of virtue.

From The Sutra of Contemplation of the Dharma Practice of Universal Sage Bodhisattva, also known as The Sutra on the Meditation of Samantabhadra

*The whole ocean of hindrances from past actions
arises from illusion.*

*If you want to repent, you should sit upright
and reflect on the true nature of things.*

*All evils are like frost and dew.
The sun of wisdom can dissipate them.*

A Clear Conscience

Ananda asked what were the purposes and blessings of virtue. The answer was: to be free of self-reproach, free of guilt feelings, with a clear conscience. But Ananda asked further, what were the purposes and blessings of a clear conscience. The Buddha replied, that it would bring joy in wholesome thoughts and actions, happiness with progress made and incentive for further striving. And what would result from that? One would experience exaltation in one's heart, being drawn towards the good and perfect bliss; and from that would further result deep calm and insight (AN 10.1)

- From Ananda - Guardian of the Dhamma

The immediate result of living in conformity with these guidelines to right action is the arising of a sense of freedom from remorse. Remorse, a feeling of regret over moral transgression and neglect, tends to provoke guilt, agitation, and self-recrimination. When, through close adherence to the precepts, the mind is freed from remorse, an ease of conscience and "bliss of blamelessness" set in born of the knowledge that one's actions are

beyond reproach. Thence the Buddha declares wholesome rules of conduct to have freedom from remorse as their benefit and reward. The joy that comes through realizing one's purity confirms the confidence originally placed in the teaching. Thereby it arouses still stronger faith and a desire for further application to the practice.

- From Transcendental Dependent Arising - A Translation and Exposition of the Upanisa Sutta, by Bhikkhu Bodhi

O good man! The Bodhisattva has no repentance in his mind when he sees that the shila [morality] he upholds is steadfast. As there is no regret, there is joy in his mind. As he has joy, his mind is happy. As he is happy, his mind is at peace. As his mind is at peace, there comes about an immovable samadhi [concentration]. As the samadhi is immovable, there is true knowing and seeing. Due to true knowing and seeing, there is parting from birth and death. Parting from birth and death, he achieves emancipation. As a result of emancipation, he clearly sees the Buddha-Nature.

- The Nirvana Sutra

Morality - The Heart of the Path, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Compassion is the foundation of Buddha's teaching, and the heart essence is to abandon harming other sentient beings, by abandoning such actions as the ten non-virtues, for example. Realizing the shortcomings of all the harms you cause others - and yourself - through the ten non-virtues, you should live in the vow of not committing the ten non-virtues. You should live in moral conduct, avoiding harm to others. This is the very heart of Buddhadharma. As Lama Tsongkhapa explains in *The Foundation of All Good Qualities*, the lam-rim prayer in Jorchö:

Even if you have generated bodhichitta, if you do not train your mind in the three types of morality, you cannot achieve enlightenment.*

(*refraining from wrongdoing, cultivating virtue, and benefitting living beings)

The definition of whether or not the teaching of Buddha exists in a country does not depend on having Buddhist scriptures, libraries with all the Kangyur and Tengyur. It does not depend even on the existence of people with intellectual understanding of the entire path of sutra and tantra. Even though there is a need to understand the words, this does not define the existence of the teachings. The existence in the world of Buddha's teaching, and even of the unmistakable understanding of the meaning of the teaching, depends on realizations of the path to enlightenment.

Liberation from samsara (everlasting liberation from all suffering and causes of suffering, karma and disturbing thoughts) depends on the realizations of both tranquil abiding and great insight. By developing these realizations, one can cease the obscurations.

Great insight involves the analysis of emptiness and brings rapturous ecstasy, extremely refined mental and physical pliancy. With these

experiences, whenever you analyze emptiness, your mind naturally abides in equipoise meditation on emptiness. This is the unification of tranquil abiding and great insight.

Achieving these realizations, which directly remove obscurations, depends on a foundation of moral conduct. These three higher trainings - moral conduct, concentration, and great insight - form a part of the realizations of the graduated path of the being of intermediate scope. The three higher trainings, which are practiced with the renunciation of samsara but without bodhichitta, comprise the path of self-liberation.

Whether or not the Buddha's teaching exists in a country is mainly defined by the existence of vinaya teachings, of people living in the practice of moral conduct. It is not that someone can explain the scriptures; the teaching exists in a country if there are people living in the practice of vinaya, such as the eight different levels of pratimoksha vows. It is extremely important to devote your whole attention to the very heart of the teachings: avoiding harm to others, which means living in the pratimoksha vows.

The teachings explain that disciplining evil-doers and not allowing them to do non-virtuous actions develop the perfections of a country: there are good crops, the king who maintains discipline becomes famous, and the people in that country experience much happiness and peace.

The last time I went to Tibet, I examined the country on the way to Lhasa by truck. The people who live there created so much negative karma through destroying monasteries, holy objects, and holy beings; they caused much harm to other sentient beings. Because so much negative karma was created, the whole place had become very barren and depressed - even the mountains looked depressed! Many mountains had cracks with water coming out. Countryside doesn't have mind, but still to me it looked upset. There was something missing. Negative minds and actions affect the country, destroying the richness, the essence, of a place. In the same way

the protein content of food is decreased, and even medicines have less power. The food is more difficult to digest, and very easily becomes the cause of sickness.

If there is no discipline in a country - or in a nunnery or monastery - to control evil-doers, these beings continuously accumulate negative karma and harm themselves and others. Therefore, even in terms of the benefit to the world, it is very important to put much effort into the very heart essence of Buddhadharma, practicing moral conduct and avoiding harm to others.

If you are a monk or nun, there is no question that this is your main practice, your main responsibility. However, even if you are a lay person with one, two, three, four, five, or eight precepts, you should put all your effort into preserving them. Remember your vows and feel this responsibility: "If I don't control my mind and live in the discipline of moral conduct, I harm other sentient beings. Besides destroying my own chance to achieve liberation and enlightenment and continuing the endless suffering of samsara, I harm others so much, and even pollute the place where I live. My own negative mind and immoral actions affect the place where I live and prevent the development of the enjoyments of others, as well as myself." This is explained in the teachings.

Inner and outer elements

If a person has a negative mind, with harmful and non-virtuous thoughts, the wind within his body, which is the vehicle of that mind, also becomes negative. The negative wind then causes the four elements (earth, water, fire, air) within the body to become unbalanced and disturbed. Because of the disturbance of the four inner elements, the four outer elements of earth, fire, water, and air become unbalanced and violent, resulting in floods, earthquakes, fires, volcanic eruptions, and cyclones, which can destroy whole cities and kill many thousands of people.

An inner imbalance affects the four external elements, making them unbalanced and dangerous. The very rough, disturbed weather from a cyclone results from disturbance of the four elements. Imbalance of the four inner and outer elements also causes epidemic diseases and famines. Imbalance of the four inner elements also affects the wider outside world - even the planets, sun, and moon can become disturbed and harmful.

Living in the essence of the teachings, the discipline of moral conduct, protects us from the objects that cause non-virtues to be accumulated. If you live in morality, your mind always abides in virtue, with righteous thoughts and the correct way of thinking, so the wind, the vehicle of the mind, does not become negative. In this way, the four inner elements cannot be disturbed and harm you. For example, disease does not arise, and you are healthy - even physical health comes from the mind. The actual evolution begins with the mind. The best way to be healthy in this life and all future lives is to live in morality, the essence of the teachings.

In this way, the four inner elements do not become disturbed and harmful, and do not affect the outside world: the planets, sun, moon, and weather, causing them to become violent and harmful. All the dangers of floods, earthquakes, famines, and epidemic diseases then do not happen, and there is peace in the country, in the world. Without these dangers, sentient beings enjoy happiness. All this happiness and peace is dependent on each of us, on how much control we have over our mind, on how much we practice Dharma. So much is dependent on how well we live in the essence of the teaching by practicing moral conduct.

Remember this evolution when you have done something immoral and are feeling mentally or physically unhealthy. Your ill health affects the outside world and other beings so that they also become unhealthy. Remembering these examples, think: "I am responsible for the happiness of other sentient beings. Their happiness depends upon me." As much as possible, put all your effort into practicing moral conduct. Protect the vows you have taken. Also, take more vows - increase and develop them.

The pot, the water, and the reflection

As Lama Tsongkhapa says:

Even if you have generated bodhichitta, if you do not train your mind in the three types of morality, you cannot achieve enlightenment.

If you degenerate or tear your morality, you become like a pot with no bottom - no matter how much delicious food you put in such a pot, it cannot stay there but runs straight through. If you have no base of morality, you are like a pot without a bottom. You have no base for attainments, for realizations.

Lama Tsongkhapa also says in his lam-rim teachings:

There is no practice other than the morality of living in the vow of not harming others. If you degenerate your morality, immediately purify it. This should be understood. This behavior is pleasing to the learned ones.

The main practice is the morality of the pratimoksha vows. Without this, there can be no realizations. The purer your practice of the pratimoksha vows, the more quickly you are able to achieve realizations of lam-rim, the three principles of the path, and tantra. Geshe Sengye, the present abbot of Sera Monastery in Tibet, from whom I received many teachings, often said this.

Geshe Sengye also said that the pratimoksha vows are like a pot, the bodhisattva vows like water contained in the pot, and the tantric vows like a reflection in the water. Without the pratimoksha vows, there is no way to practice the bodhisattva vows, and then no way to practice tantric vows. Without the pot, there is no place to put the water, so there can be no reflection.

Many tantric texts, such as the Manjushri Tantra root text, mention that without living in the moral conduct of the pratimoksha vows, one cannot achieve enlightenment. The teachings also mention that not liking pratimoksha vows but liking tantra is a sign of the degeneration of the teachings. In his lam-rim teachings Lama Tsongkhapa mentions that a person who keeps full pratimoksha vows is the best practitioner of tantra.

Living in the ordination of the pratimoksha vows is very helpful, enabling you to practice Dharma. Living well in the pratimoksha vows, you are able to practice bodhisattva and tantric vows well; if you are unable to practice the pratimoksha vows well, you cannot practice bodhisattva and tantric vows. As explained in Geshe Sengye's example, these depend on each other: the pratimoksha vows are the pot, the bodhisattva vows, water in the pot, and the tantric vows, the reflection in the water.

Even during meditation and concentration, the clarity of our mind depends on how well we practice pratimoksha vows. The more purely we practice, the less sinking thought - one of the obstacles to concentration - we will experience. Gross sinking thought means the object of meditation is not clear; subtle sinking thought, that there is concentration on the object of meditation, but no strength in regard to the mind focusing on the object. The object is seen very clearly, but there is no intense concentration focusing the mind on the object. Living in the moral conduct of pratimoksha vows can stop the causes of sinking thought and attachment-scattering thought.

Renouncing samsara

Since they are taken with the motivation of renouncing samsara, pratimoksha vows should also be practiced with the thought of renouncing samsara. Even if there is no actual realization of renunciation, at least there should be a simulated thought of renouncing samsara. Renouncing samsara means renouncing all suffering, including all temporal samsaric pleasures. Constantly be aware of the six types of suffering, the three types

of suffering, and that samsaric pleasures are only in the nature of suffering. Even though you may see something as pleasant, there should be the understanding in your heart that it is only suffering. With this awareness of the shortcomings of samsara, attachment does not arise.

By living in the practice of moral conduct with the thought of renouncing samsara, you do not create the cause for sinking thought and attachment-scattering thought. If you are able to keep the pratimoksha vows purely, your mind is clear and calm, so your concentration is very good. This is very easy to understand. When you have no thought of renouncing samsara, you look at samsara as beautiful and see samsaric enjoyments as true happiness. All these enjoyments are impermanent in nature. When you are hallucinated by samsara, your mind clings to samsara and samsaric enjoyments, rather than seeing them as completely suffering in nature, like being in the center of a fire. Of the shortcomings of samsara, particularly remember that nothing is definite - even today, even this minute.

Also remember that enjoying samsaric sense pleasures can become the cause of liberation and enlightenment, or the cause of samsara. Enjoyment itself is not necessarily negative; it becomes negative, the cause of samsara, when you enjoy samsaric pleasures with a mind grasping at the happiness of the self.

As Lama Tsongkhapa explains in *The Great Lam-rim Commentary*, following desire and enjoying samsaric pleasures are meant to bring satisfaction, but result only in dissatisfaction. You do these actions expecting to find satisfaction but, in reality, the result is only dissatisfaction. After one experience of sense pleasure, you want more. Hoping to find satisfaction, you think: "I'll try once more. I'll try again." But the result is the same - only dissatisfaction. You expect to find satisfaction, the fulfillment of your desire, and be completely happy - but again the result is dissatisfaction.

Lama Tsongkhapa also says that following desire brings many other disturbing thoughts. This is easy to understand. Because of desire for some object or person, jealousy, anger, pride and many other disturbing thoughts arise, and you can experience many heavy problems for an incredible length of time.

By following desire that one time, expecting to find satisfaction, you experience only dissatisfaction. Not only that, following desire brings many other harmful, disturbing thoughts, and you experience misery for a long time. As long as you follow desire, there is no end to suffering. There is no satisfaction, so there is no end. This is the worst, most pitiful suffering. Following desire endlessly is the greatest suffering. While you are experiencing suffering, it is very important to realize that your suffering comes from following desire and not finding satisfaction.

As Lama Tsongkhapa says in a lam-rim prayer:

Enjoying samsaric perfections and not finding satisfaction is the door to all sufferings. There is nothing to trust in samsaric perfections. Please grant me blessings to realize the shortcomings of samsaric perfections and to generate the strong thought seeking the happiness of liberation.

Of the six types of shortcomings of samsara, it is especially important to meditate extensively on these two: 1) following desire results only in dissatisfaction, and 2) nothing is definite. Lama Tsongkhapa's words in this verse are unbelievably clear, and so true. This verse describes very clearly our whole life story. The sufferings of other samsaric beings, of the whole world, which every day we hear about or see in the newspapers or on TV, and even the day-to-day suffering in our own lives are contained in these two major problems.

With the suffering of change, you should have the definite understanding that these samsaric pleasures are only in the nature of suffering. The base on which you label "pleasure" is only suffering. With constant awareness of

this, you will be able to practice moral conduct well. Asanga explains ten ways in which Dharma happiness transcends samsaric happiness, which is temporary, cannot be developed or completed, and is entirely dependent on external objects.

Developing perfect concentration

Practicing moral conduct with the thought to renounce samsara stops the obstacles to concentration. To have the actual realization of shamatha, or tranquil abiding, you need to live very purely in morality. For perfect concentration you need to cut off the obstacles to concentration, such as sinking thought and attachment-scattering thought, so that your mind abides peacefully on the object of concentration. By cutting off these, you are able to focus on the object without any difficulty or effort. There are nine levels of tranquil abiding. To achieve even the ninth level, which is similar to but still not the actual tranquil abiding with full characteristics, you need to live very purely in the moral conduct of the pratimoksha vows.

Many Tibetans interpret meditation as meaning only tranquil abiding; this is the usual concept held by someone who has studied Buddhist scriptures and philosophy. Some years ago, many questions concerning meditation were arising from other Buddhist countries and especially from the West. His Holiness the Dalai Lama sent Geshe Rabten Rinpoche to Dalhousie to see if any meditators there had attained shamatha. Geshe Rabten Rinpoche was one of Lama Yeshe's teachers, and also mine. Besides ordaining me, he gave me my very first explanation of Dharma and teachings on debating at Buxaduar in India. Geshe Rabten Rinpoche taught Western students for many years in Dharamsala, then lived for many years in Switzerland, where he founded a monastery, which is still existing, in Vevey, Mont-Pèlerin.

So, Geshe Rabten Rinpoche went to Dalhousie to check the meditators. In Dalhousie there was a group of ascetic monks guided by one very high lama who had achieved the clear light stage of tantra. This lama and all his

disciples practiced vinaya very strictly and led solitary ascetic lives. On the basis of strict vinaya practice, they experimented on the lam-rim and tantric paths.

At that time, I think His Holiness asked many meditators to practice tranquil abiding. According to the general view, Gen Jampa Wangdu started to practice shamatha from that time. After he began practicing shamatha, Gen-la had a dream in which he was riding a horse on a road round a mountain; after some time, the horse fell down. Gen-la thought: "This might mean that I won't achieve shamatha." Actually, I think it was a good sign indicating that Gen-la would be able to overcome the physical and mental obstacles to shamatha, that he would be able to destroy the obstacles to perfect concentration. Because of the dream, Gen-la thought that he would not succeed, but this implies that Gen-la did accomplish the realization. The dream actually indicated success. Gen Jampa Wangdu achieved tranquil abiding in Dalhousie.

Gen Jampa Wangdu often praised refined mental and physical ecstasy, which means that he had the attainment of tranquil abiding. Gen-la often used to say that once you had achieved this experience of rapturous ecstasy, any other concentration you might have called meditation is not meditation. This means that by comparison it is not meditation. From time to time Gen-la used to talk about his experiences like this.

However, Gen Jampa Wangdu also used to say that to succeed in perfect meditation on tranquil abiding, a practitioner needed the foundation to stop obstacles - in other words, pure moral conduct. Recently, during the thought-training teachings, Chopgye Rinpoche also said that in order for a person to achieve perfect shamatha, there should be no discomfort at all in his heart regarding moral conduct. The practitioner should be fully confident that he has kept his pratimoksha vows purely.

With tranquil abiding, you can concentrate perfectly, like a candle flame that is steady and unmoved by wind. With steady light from a candle

flame, you can see a drawing in a book very clearly. With the realization of tranquil abiding, you can see absolute nature, or emptiness, very clearly. Without any difficulties or obstacles, you can concentrate continuously on emptiness. By having tranquil abiding, you can then develop the realization of great insight.

To have illumination and dispel darkness you need such causes as electricity, gas, kerosene, or wax. Without these, you cannot have and enjoy light. Moral conduct is similar to the materials that make it possible to have light. Moral conduct, the pratimoksha vows, is the root of liberation from samsara. Actually, you can tell from your own experiences how extremely important moral conduct is. When your mind is very disturbed and unclear, it is very difficult to concentrate. And if you check for degeneration of moral conduct, you will find you have made some mistake in your pratimoksha vows. There is a very clear correlation.

If you check, you can see this from your own experience. If you do not practice moral conduct well, your mind is overwhelmed by disturbing thoughts, and you cannot meditate. Even when you say prayers, you cannot meditate on the meaning of the prayers. Your mind is like a cyclone. Or like a bird swept along by a strong wind, unable to stay still in space for even one minute.

Preserving the teachings

The ability of our organization, the FPMT (the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition), and each of us to bring happiness to other sentient beings depends on the existence and development of the teachings in our minds. The teachings have to exist and be preserved within us, and then we have to spread the teachings we are preserving to the minds of others. In this way, they too will have happiness by protecting karma: abandoning negative karma and practicing good karma by living in the vows. When the teachings exist in the minds of sentient beings, they enjoy happiness, now and in the future. This depends on our first

preserving the teachings within our minds. You may recite many mantras and prayers or read many scriptures; however, the teaching of Buddha is not in the mouth but in the mind. It is the mind that makes the determination to practice moral conduct, and then you live by this determination.

The basic teaching involves living in the pratimoksha vows, avoiding giving harm to others, avoiding the ten non-virtues, and keeping whatever number of vows you have taken. Through this, you actualize the Paramitayana path and live in the bodhisattva vows. On the basis of living in the tantric vows, you then actualize the tantric path. Feel: "I am responsible for the happiness of all sentient beings. How much I can benefit other beings depends on how much of the teaching of Buddha I am able to preserve within my mind."

Protecting the mind

Not protecting the mind creates samsara; the oceans of samsaric suffering come from not protecting the mind. Being careless about your own mind and allowing it to be controlled by delusion create the oceans of samsaric suffering, which you have been experiencing without beginning and which you will also experience without end if you don't protect your mind.

If you protect your mind, you will get everything that you want: temporary happiness and ultimate happiness, including enlightenment.

Remembrance, which is like a rope, and awareness, or conscientiousness, which is like a hook, protect your mind. It's said that if you have both of them, you will obtain any virtue that you wish, including enlightenment. This is from a stanza in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

*However, if the elephant of my mind is firmly bound
On all sides by the rope of mindfulness,
All fears will cease to exist
And all virtues will come into my hand. (Ch. 5, v. 3.)*

*This being so,
I shall hold and guard my mind well.*

Also, in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* it says,

*What is the need of so many conducts,
except the conduct of protecting the mind."*

There are so many disciplines, or rules, that are labeled spiritual, but they often have to do with external changes, such as ways of dressing. If you are learning Buddhism and become a Buddhist, you dress like a Tibetan. If you are following the Hindu religion, you dress in Hindu saris. However, what

is the need for so many rules of conduct, except for the conduct of protecting the mind?

Shantideva is saying that if the mind is not protected, nothing happens; there is no development. Even if you lock your body up in a room or a cave, if you don't protect your mind, it simply becomes a prison.

This verse can be understood in many different ways. Even if you have taken vows, or precepts, if you don't protect your mind they become like a burden. If the practice of protecting the mind is not there, the vows you have taken become a burden, a prison. Living in ordination becomes like living in a prison for you if the practice of protecting the mind is not there. You feel that all those rules are suffocating you; you feel as if you are living in a prison. The mind then becomes wild, like a mad elephant.

It's different once the practice of protecting the mind is there, once you meditate strongly on the shortcomings of delusions and the objects of delusions - in other words, on the shortcomings of samsara, on how samsara is suffering in nature - and on the skies of benefits from living in vows. Not only do you achieve good rebirth in future lives, all the temporary happiness of this life and future lives, with freedom from all the relationship and other emotional problems that lead people to commit suicide or engage in many negative karmas, liberation from the oceans of samsaric suffering and its cause, delusion and karma, and full enlightenment, but also you are able to work perfectly for other sentient beings, bringing each and every single one of the numberless sentient beings to enlightenment.

By seeing all these skies of benefit, you then protect your own mind very happily, very joyfully. Living in the spiritual disciplines that protect your mind, such as vows and so forth, then comes from your heart. You do it with a very happy mind. You don't feel obliged to do it; you don't see it as a burden but like going to the land of wish-granting jewels and picking up one of the jewels. You do it very happily.

From The Benefits of Keeping Vows, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

From Teachings From the Medicine Buddha Retreat

In the past, when it was not a degenerate time and Buddha's teaching was flourishing in this world, it was much easier to practice and to keep vows than now, when the Buddha's teaching is setting like the sun. Since there are so many obstacles now, keeping one precept for one day creates far greater merit...

I normally explain that living in precepts, in vows, is the best contribution to world peace, even though you're not someone famous in the world for having won the Nobel peace prize.

Usually people consider social service to be paid or voluntary work to help children or old people, such as cleaning in a hospital and so forth. It usually involves being seen in public helping people. But if you think very broadly, like the sky, and very long-term. . . . Of course, you can do both...

Now, if you take the five lay precepts, others receive so much less harm from you. Since those numberless other beings don't receive all that harm from you, they receive so much peace and happiness from you. And they are numberless, not just a few people or a few animals. You can see how practical this is.

Another point is the positive effect on an area, a country and the world from someone living in vows...

It is a great blessing for an area and a country when there are Sangha, ordained people, living there, especially if they're living in pure vows. The more Sangha there are, the more it affects the economic development of the country. There are many stories of this happening in the past...

If someone is Sangha, because the number of vows is many more, you can see how other sentient beings don't receive harm from that person, directly or indirectly, and how much peace and happiness other sentient beings receive from them. You can understand the positive effect, or benefit, to the country. It makes the devas, nagas and all those other beings happy. That is one explanation...

It is a most practical thing and brings extensive benefit. Abstaining from that many negative karmas and stopping giving that many harms to other sentient beings by living in that number of vows bring incredible benefit to others.

The purer the life you live, the less negative karma you create. Because of that you have the possibility of having good concentration. (Now I am explaining more deeply the social service for sentient beings.) The basis of success in *shamatha*, or calm abiding, is pure morality. The purer your morality, the more success you have with calm abiding. You achieve perfect concentration when you attain the ninth level, where you experience extremely refined, rapturous states of body and mind. You finalize calm abiding after that realization.

The purer your morality, the more success you have in achieving perfect concentration. It is only by having the higher training of concentration that you then have a chance to have great insight, which involves deriving extremely refined bliss by doing analysis on emptiness unified with shamatha.

So, only after attaining shamatha do you gain the realization of great insight. When you build a house, you first prepare the ground, and attaining shamatha is like preparing the ground. On the basis of this you can then enter the arya path by achieving the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, which directly ceases the defilements. You achieve the path of seeing and then the path of meditation.

With these two paths, if it's the Lesser Vehicle path, you cease the disturbing-thought defilements; and if it's the bodhisattva's path, you also cease the subtle defilements and your mind then becomes omniscient. During your time as a bodhisattva, of course, you work more and more deeply for sentient beings, especially when you are an arya being.

The more qualities you have, the deeper your benefit to sentient beings. When you then become a buddha, you spontaneously, effortlessly, have the motivation to benefit others. It's natural, like the sun rising. When the one sun rises, its beams cover the whole world and dispel darkness everywhere. As a buddha you continuously, naturally, work for sentient beings until every sentient being becomes enlightened. Not only do you free beings from the sufferings of the lower realms but from the entire samsaric suffering. You then cease even their subtle defilements and bring them to enlightenment.

You can now see how living in pure vows becomes the foundation for all those realizations, so that you're able to benefit other sentient beings more and more deeply and, ultimately, you're able to enlighten numberless sentient beings.

If you think deeply in that way of the benefits of living in vows, you see how everything is built up on that foundation. All the realizations, up to enlightenment, are built up on that basis, as well as your working for sentient beings after enlightenment. There are all these benefits of living in vows, of living in morality, whether as a lay person living in lay vows or as an ordained person living in ordination.

You can now see how much benefit there is for sentient beings from someone living in their vows, even if they don't do any work, any study or anything else apart from the three functions of eating, sleeping and going to the toilet. You can see how practical it is. Even if they're living in the mountains like an animal in hiding so that nobody sees them, you can see the benefit that sentient beings get from them. The benefit happens even if

the person spends their whole life hiding in the mountains in Afghanistan, where bin Laden is, or on Mount Kailash.

I'm just trying to emphasize the unbelievable benefit for sentient beings. Even if a person living in vows doesn't see anybody or do anything, their service to other sentient beings is very extensive. Service to others doesn't happen only when you mix with people and do something physically for them. Of course, if you can do both, that's great. Of course, in your life you do what you can to serve other sentient beings. But what I am saying is that you should also understand this deeper benefit. Even if that person lives their whole life on Mount Kailash or Mount Everest and sees nobody during their whole life, if they are living in their vows or ordination, there is incredible benefit to sentient beings. That's all I'm trying to say.

From The Six Perfections, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

It is traditionally said that a country can only thrive when morality is observed by the people of that country...When there is morality, on the other hand, the people and the environment prosper.

Therefore, even in terms of the benefit to the world, it is very important to put great effort into the very heart of Buddhadharma, into practicing moral conduct and avoiding harming others. There is no question that this is the main practice, the main responsibility, for an ordained person, but even a layperson must try hard to live a moral life and preserve whatever vows they have taken.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo said that whether the teachings exist depends on whether the root exists. When he said “root,” he was specifically referring to the morality of keeping the pratimoksha vows. If no fully ordained monks or nuns exist, then no matter how many bodhisattvas or tantric practitioners there are, it cannot be said that the teachings exist. Just as he was about to enter parinirvana, the Buddha was asked by Ananda who could guide them when he was gone. He replied,

*It may be, Ananda, that to some of you the thought may come,
“Here we have the words of the teacher who is gone;
our Teacher we have with us no more.”
But Ananda, it should not be considered in that light.*

*What I have taught and laid down, Ananda,
as Dharma and Discipline,
this will be your teacher when I am gone.*

In other words, their guide should be their own morality, based on his teachings on morality and the rules, the Vinaya, he gave to the Sangha. This is all we need to live an ethical life and have peace and harmony in the world.

Letting Go As a Skillful Means

When it comes to separating from attachment to sense pleasures that bring us suffering as well, Buddhism is very practical. There's a method called simply 'letting go' that anyone can experience the benefits of, which is encouraging every step of the way.

We don't have to give up everything at once, but when we let go even a little, it creates more space inwardly, and some peace as well. In the teachings on meditation, this is a factor that makes it easier to settle the mind, and cultivate clarity.

A skillful means in Buddhism is a way to accomplish our aims. Once we see the benefits of letting go of sensuality, and views, and contention, and find greater peace and well being, it leads onward. I especially like how accessible this practice is, and how we can see the results right away.

In Revisiting the Jhanas I wrote that

Nekhamma, is sometimes translated as relinquishment, renunciation, or letting go. Bhante Gunaratana describes this factor as generosity, but also describes it in his talks as temporarily giving something up. This can be taken all the way up to the renunciation of all of samsara, but there are levels to it along the way that are helpful to know about and to practice.

He says, for example, that we can give up something as simple as a single piece of chocolate, and once we begin looking for attachments, or thoughts and interests we can set aside for a time, we find that we are creating a sense of space, and freeing up our energy to practice.

Bhante makes clear in his book, *Beyond Mindfulness in Plain English*, that we can consider the setting aside of interest or involvements as something

temporary, and provisional, as in, for the purpose of getting us from one place to another.

Until we practice deep meditation and develop insight, we are suspending the activity of the kilesas, or hindrances. We are pacifying them for a time. Their roots are still there in us, and are only removed later. This practice, of jhana, and all that it consists of, is a means to that end, and to the end of all suffering.

In Meditation - Advice to Beginners, Bokar Rinpoche says

The correct view regarding thoughts is to be conscious of the production of thoughts, but neither to follow them nor try to stop them, and simply not to worry about them.

Whether or not there are thoughts is not important; we simply remain relaxed. This is the way to overcome distraction: by keeping the mind relaxed in the present...

This is so much more skillful than wrestling with our negative, destructive emotions. Setting them aside for a time is do-able, and what's more, it introduces us to other before unimagined possibilities, other paradigms, not thought of before.

We need a method that allows us to approach and actualize a new way of being. Letting go works very well here.

Part of the problem, I think, when it comes to transforming the deeper level of the mind and emotions is the identification one some level with an I or an ego that has acted or experienced in the past. In a subtle way, this perpetuates suffering of a kind. Ajaan Pasanno said

If there is any hint of self, a position is then taken and the whole realm of samsara unfolds.

The practice of simply letting go as a skillful means avoids all this. It's something we can do and feel the effects of almost immediately, of greater peace and well being.

There's another teaching that relates here, on what they call *the nutriments*. If we can practice *the withdrawal of interest and attention* from the objects of our attachment, the feeling fades. We can do the same with objects of aggression. Withdrawing energy brings relief, and allows us to settle down more deeply. We are withholding the energy these need to be sustained, or to grow, and so, like a plant we don't water, whatever feelings there are of anger, or compulsion, or attachment, whither and then vanish. We can experience this as an enjoyable, temporary liberation, and this is onward leading. It allows for other possibilities.

It's with good reason that modern teachers warn us of what they call spiritual bypassing. This is where a person avoids what is difficult, and maybe even believes they have overcome that problem, only to have it return. Buddhism is deeper than modern psychology though, and only those who meditate know and experience its deeper benefits.

From letting go, as a provisional means, we are able to settle more deeply, touching peace in a new way, and being nourished by that. Beyond that even, by cultivating insight, we are able to uproot the very causes of suffering themselves.

In *The Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree* Buddhadasa Bhikkhu outlines the progressive method in full:

The Buddha spoke first of nekkhamadhatu (the element of renunciation) as the cause for the withdrawal from sensuality;

Seeing nekkhamadhatu, the element of renunciation, is the cause for the withdrawal from sensuality because it is its antithesis. Seeing the element that is the antithesis of sensuality is called seeing nekkhamadhatu. Being unconsumed by the fire of

sensuality is nekkhamadhatu. The mind that withdraws from sensuality is a mind that contains nekkhamadhatu.

The Buddha wanted us to completely withdraw from those things, to use nekkhamadhatu (the element of renunciation) as the means to withdraw from sensuality, to use arupadhatu (the formless element) as the means to withdraw from absorptions of the fine-material plane, and finally to use nirodhadhatu (the element of cessation) as the means to withdraw from the conditioned, so that all the manifold types of confusion converge in emptiness. (the wisdom realizing liberation)

This is what is offered in full by taking up the skillful means of letting go.

May all beings benefit.

The Sutra on the White - Clad Disciple

The Upasaka Sutra, no. 128 of the Madhyama Agama

Translated by Thich Nhat Hanh

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when he was staying at the monastery in the Jeta Grove near Sravasti that had been donated by the layman Anathapindika. On that day, Anathapindika came with five hundred other lay students of the Buddha to the hut where Sariputra resided. They all bowed their heads in reverence to Sariputra and sat down respectfully to one side. Venerable Sariputra offered them skillful teachings, bringing them joy and confidence in the Three Jewels and the practice of the true Dharma. Then, Sariputra and the five hundred laymen and women went together to the hut of the Buddha, where Sariputra, Anathapindika, and the other five hundred laymen and women prostrated at the Buddha's feet and sat down to one side.

When he saw that everyone was seated, the Buddha addressed Sariputra, saying,

"Sariputra, if lay students of the Buddha, those who wear white robes, study and practice the Five Precepts and the Four Contemplations, they will realize without hardship the capacity to abide happily in the present moment. They know they will not fall into the realms of hell, hungry ghosts, animals, and other suffering paths.

"Such men and women will have attained the fruit of stream-enterer, and they will have no fear of descending into dark paths. They are on the way of right awakening. They will only need to return to the worlds of gods or men seven more times before attaining perfect liberation and the end of suffering.

“Sariputra, how do lay students of the Buddha, those who wear white robes, study and practice the Five Precepts and the Four Contemplations?

“Lay students of the Buddha move away from killing, put an end to killing, rid themselves of all weapons, learn humility before others, learn humility in themselves, practice love and compassion, and protect all living beings, even the smallest insects. They uproot from within themselves any tendency to kill. In this way, lay students of the Buddha study and practice the first of the Five Precepts.

“Lay students of the Buddha move away from taking what has not been given, put an end to taking what has not been given. They find joy in being generous without expecting anything in return. Their minds are not obscured by greed or craving. They constantly guard their own honesty and uproot from within themselves any tendency to take what has not been given. In this way, lay students of the Buddha study and practice the second of the Five Precepts.

“Lay students of the Buddha move away from sexual misconduct, put an end to sexual misconduct, and protect everyone - those under the care of their father, mother, or both father and mother; their elder sister or elder brother; their parents-in-law or other in-laws; those of the same gender or other gender; the wife, daughter, husband or son of another; and those who have been raped, assaulted, or sexually abused, or who have been or who are prostitutes. Lay students of the Buddha uproot from within themselves any tendency to commit sexual misconduct. In this way, lay students of the Buddha study and practice the third of the Five Precepts.

“Lay students of the Buddha move away from saying what is not true, put an end to saying what is not true. They say only what is true, and they find great joy in saying what is true. They always abide in truth and are completely reliable, never deceiving others. They have uprooted from within themselves any tendency to say what is not true. In this way, lay students of the Buddha study and practice the fourth of the Five Precepts.

“Lay students of the Buddha move away from taking intoxicants, put an end to taking intoxicants. They uproot from within themselves the habit of taking intoxicants. In this way, lay students of the Buddha study and practice the fifth of the Five Precepts.

“Sariputra, how do lay students of the Buddha attain the Four Contemplations and abide happily in the present moment with ease and without hardship?

They practice being aware of the Buddha,

as one who is truly and fully awakened, and who is without any attachments;

as one whose understanding and practice are perfect;

as the Well - Gone One;

as one who knows and fully understands the world;

as one who has attained the very highest;

as one who has tamed what needs to be tamed;

as a teacher of humans and devas;

as an Awakened One;

and as a World-Honored One.

When they meditate in this way, all unwholesome desires come to an end, and impure, sorrowful, or anxious elements no longer arise in their hearts.

As a result of contemplating the Buddha, their thoughts are clear, they feel joy, and they arrive at the first of the Four Contemplations, abiding happily in the present moment, with ease and without any hardships.

“Sariputra, the lay students of the Buddha practice being aware of the Dharma, meditating as follows:

the Dharma is taught by the Lord Buddha with great skill;

it can lead to complete liberation;

it can lead to a state of no afflictions;

there is not the pain of heat in it - instead it is cool and refreshing;

its value is timeless.

When lay students of the Buddha meditate on and observe the Dharma in this way, all unwholesome desires come to an end, and impure, sorrowful, or anxious elements no longer arise in their hearts.

As a result of contemplating the Dharma, their thoughts are clear, they feel joy, and they arrive at the second of the Four Contemplations, abiding happily in the present moment, with ease and without any hardship.

“Sariputra, the lay students of the Buddha practice being aware of the Sangha, meditating as follows:

the noble community of the Tathagata is advancing in a good direction;

it is on an upright path - a path of righteousness;

it is oriented toward the Dharma, and lives the teachings in the way they are meant to be lived.

In that community, there are the Four Pairs and the Eight Grades - realized Arhats and those who are realizing the fruit of Arhatship, non-returners and those who are realizing the fruit of non-returning, once-returners and those who are realizing the fruit of once-returning, and stream-enterers and those who are realizing the fruit of stream-entry.

The noble community of the Tathagata has successfully realized the practice of the Precepts (sila), the practice of concentration (samadhi), and the practice of insight (prajña).

It has liberation and liberated vision.

It is worthy of respect, honor, service, and offerings.

It is a beautiful field of merit for everyone.

As a result of contemplating the Sangha, their thoughts are clear, they feel joy, and they arrive at the third of the Four Contemplations, abiding happily in the present moment, with ease and without any hardship.

“Sariputra, the lay students of the Buddha practice being mindful of the Precepts, meditating as follows:

the Precepts have no drawbacks, flaws, impurities, or unsound points;

and they help us abide in the Pure Land of the Tathagata.

The Precepts are not of the nature to deceive.

They are always praised, accepted, practiced, and guarded by the holy ones.

As a result of contemplating these Precepts, the students’ thoughts are clear, they feel joy, and they arrive at the fourth of the Four Contemplations,

abiding happily in the present moment, with ease and without any hardship.

“Sariputra, remember that white - clad disciples of the Buddha who practice in this way will not descend into hell realms, hungry ghost realms, animal realms, or any other realms of suffering. They have experienced the fruit of stream-entry, which means not falling into paths of hardship or wrongdoing. Having entered the stream, they cannot help but go more and more in the direction of right awakening. They will only need to return to the world of gods or humans seven more times before they arrive at complete liberation and the end of sorrow.”

At that time, the Lord, the World-Honored One, pronounced these verses:

*An intelligent man or woman who lives a family life
and realizes how fearful the hell realms are,
is encouraged to receive and practice the right teachings,
and put an end to paths of suffering.*

*She studies and learns to deepen the practice -
not killing living beings,
speaking of things as they really are,
and not taking what is not given.*

*He is faithful to his spouse,
moving away from the habit of sexual misconduct,
determined not to ingest intoxicants,
keeping his mind frenzy-free,
and free of further obscurations.*

*She is always aware of the Buddha,
the Dharma, and the Sangha.
Contemplating the Mindfulness Trainings,
her mind arrives at peace, joy, and freedom.*

*If he wants to practice generosity
in order to cultivate the garden of happiness,
then his guideline is learning the path
of liberation and awakening.*

*Sariputra, listen carefully
with regard to this point:
Look carefully at the herd
of oxen over there.*

*Some oxen are both white and yellow.
Some are black and red.
Some are brown with yellow spots,
while others are gray like pigeons.*

*Whatever their color
or place of origin,
their value lies to us
in their ability to transport.*

*Healthy and strong ones
who pull carts vigorously
can make many journeys
and are most useful.*

*In our human world,
there are Brahmans, warriors,
scholars, tradesmen,
and artisans.*

*But the truly virtuous men and women
are those who practice the Wonderful Precepts
and are able to realize liberation.
Like the Well - Gone One, they live in true freedom.*

*There is no need to discriminate
according to family or caste
{race, gender, or nationality}
To realize the greatest happiness
is to make offerings to those who are truly virtuous.*

*A person who lacks virtue
or who is poor in insight
cannot light the way for others.
To make offerings to such a one
bears little fruit.*

*Sons and daughters of Buddha
who practice the way of insight
and have their minds directed to Buddha
have strong, stable roots
and are reborn only to be happy.*

*Returning to the worlds of gods and humans
no more than seven times,
they eventually realize nirvana,
transforming all their suffering
into joy and purity.*

Thus spoke the Buddha. The Venerable Shariputra, the other monks and nuns, the layman Anathapindika, and the other five hundred laymen and laywomen heard these words and were delighted and put them into practice.

Metta and Ethics

It's taught that two of the ways we can bring the benefits of a retreat, or our spiritual practice into daily life are by focusing on Right Speech, and on the Precepts. This essay examines how The Five Mindfulness Trainings are the expression of metta.

When we have cultivated metta or loving kindness in our heart, we have an inner standard for how to act in the world. In a way, it's radical, because it makes us independent moral agents. We have our own conscience as a reference point. We add to this the guidance and inspiration of our teachers, and traditions, as they tell us ways we can express values of love and compassion.

In 2009, Thich Nhat Hanh offered his version of the Five Precepts in a talk that was broadcast to the Parliament of World Religions, in Melbourne Australia. In his talk, titled, A Collective Awakening, Thay referred to these Five Mindfulness Trainings as representing 'the Buddhist vision for a global spirituality and ethic.'

The complete text he presented and commented on will follow this paper.

As in the earlier versions of the traditional precepts offered by him, this is an expansive, interpretive document, one that I don't believe is intended to merely become a formula that is recited. Instead, as I hear it, we're being encouraged to look at our own lives in the light of these principles.

Compared to the brief form of the precepts, of not to kill, steal, engage in sexual misconduct, lie, or take intoxicants, there are two features that are present in Thich Nhat Hahn's version of the precepts that I feel deserve special attention. One of these is that he explicitly states the positive aspect of each of the precepts. So, for example, in the first mindfulness training, that he calls, 'Reverence for life', we have,

I am determined not to kill,

and also:

not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, or in my way of life.'

This means, clearly, that we have to examine our lives. What is it that metta would have us do? *What are the moral imperatives of love?*

Vowing to protect life is implied in 'do not kill', but if we leave it only as a negative, as a prohibition, that part of it is not as strong as it could be. Phrasing it positively as he does - '*I will learn the ways to protect life*' - helps that part of it to wake up in us. If Thay's version of the precepts did nothing else, that alone would be a very great thing.

The second precept offered here begins,

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression...

and this goes much farther than 'I vow not to steal'. Again it is asking us to look at our own lives, at our economies and education, leisure and religion, in the context of this whole world. This pattern follows for the other precepts as well.

A traditional chant from the Pali says:

*I will abide
pervading the world with loving kindness...*

If we are looking for ways to connect our metta loving kindness with our greater family, and our social relationships, in concrete terms, Thay is telling us that this is exactly the domain of the mindfulness trainings.

One of the precepts of his Order of Interbeing says, *'Do not close your eyes before suffering...*, which can be heard also as *'Open your eyes'*. Look at the world and the how people live and treat each other here, and then see what you can do to relieve suffering and bring well being to others. Only when we do this can we be said to be living responsible lives with the metta we have.

Being essentially a religious document, Thay's version of the precepts is primarily a statement of principles we can use to accomplish our aims. As such, he doesn't directly mention any particular president, or government's abuses of power, or corporation's destructive effect on our lives, but they are implied. It's up to each of us to work out the details.

Read these precepts and then any newspaper or news website, and the corruption and dishonesty both here in this country and abroad stand out in bold relief. These ethical principles are meant to be handed from generation to generation, and acted on to bring social justice . We're called to have courage, because of love.

A second feature of Thay's version of the precepts that stands out to me is that it includes the contemplative dimension. So often when we hear commandments, or precepts, no mention is made of the deep causes we need to address to really remedy problems on a deep level. The result is that we may struggle just to uphold or enforce an ideal, without it having a well established roots in ourselves, or in society.

Long ago, Lao Tsu pointed out how such an approach is bound to fail:

*When people lost sight of the way to live
Came codes of love and honesty...*

The answer is to restore the roots of Right Action, and this can only come through each individual's insight. For that reason, it's wonderful that Thay explicitly adds to the traditional precepts lines such as:

I will practice looking deeply to see that the happiness and suffering of others are not separate from my own happiness and suffering...

When anger is manifesting in me, I am determined not to speak. I will practice mindful breathing and walking in order to recognize and look deeply into my anger...

and,

I will practice Right Diligence, to nourish my capacity for understanding, love, joy, and inclusiveness, and gradually transform anger, violence, and fear, that lie deep in my consciousness.

Introducing the contemplative dimension to a discussion of the mindfulness trainings as the method of bringing metta into all areas of our lives completes the circle of practice. We may have started with an insight into our real nature, and had the wish to live a righteous life according to what we have found within. We're then encouraged to look, and to learn as much as we can about what's going on in this world, and to respond from our own love, compassion, and intelligence.

Completing the circle, we're urged to understand and transform in ourselves these very same forces we see at work in the world. Then we'll really have something to offer that can bring long term benefit. We can help others to the way, leading from life to life.

The Buddha taught,

Do no harmful actions.

Accomplish as much good as you can.

Purify your own mind.

For metta to be complete in us, we need these three aspects of it.

Thay's teachings have always been a great gift for me personally, and I delight in knowing it's been this way for many others as well. One of the most extraordinary and inspiring things about him is that he keeps practicing, and deepening his understanding, and sharing what he's learned with others. You can hear it in how he'll change one word or a phrase in a teaching you've heard before over the years. More than anything else, his approach to living teaches by example. Like him, I hope to always be looking for ways to bring metta into this world, and finding practical ways for it to flourish.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings

The Five Mindfulness Trainings represent the Buddhist vision for a global spirituality and ethic. They are a concrete expression of the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths, and the Noble Eight-fold Path, the Path of Right Understanding and True Love, leading to healing, transformation, and happiness for ourselves and for the world.

To practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings is to cultivate the insight of interbeing, or Right View, which can remove all discrimination, intolerance, anger, fear, and despair. If we live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are already on the Path of a Bodhisattva. Knowing we are on that Path, we are not lost in confusion about our life in the present, or in fears about the future.

The First Mindfulness Training – Reverence for Life

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating the insight of interbeing, and compassion, and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals.

I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, or in my way of life.

Seeing that harmful actions arise from anger, fear, greed, and intolerance, which in turn come from dualistic and discriminative thinking, I will cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views, in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in myself, and in the world.

The Second Mindfulness Training - True Happiness

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to practicing generosity, in my thinking, speaking, and acting. I am determined not to steal, and not to possess anything that should belong to others, and I will share my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need.

I will practice looking deeply to see that the happiness and suffering of others are not separate from my own happiness and suffering, that true happiness is not possible without understanding and compassion, and that running after wealth, fame, power, and sensual pleasures can bring much suffering and despair.

I am aware that happiness depends on my mental attitude, and not on external conditions, and that I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy.

I am committed to practicing Right Livelihood, so that I can help reduce the suffering of living beings on earth, and reverse the process of global warming.

The Third Mindfulness Training – True Love

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility, and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society.

Knowing that sexual desire is not love, and that sexual activity motivated by craving always harms myself as well as others, I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a deep, long-term commitment, made known to my family and friends.

I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse, and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

Seeing that the body and mind are one, I am committed to learning appropriate ways to take care of my sexual energy, and cultivating loving kindness, compassion, joy, and inclusiveness, the four basic elements of true love, for my greater happiness, and the greater happiness of others.

Practicing true love, we know that we will continue beautifully into the future.

The Fourth Mindfulness Training – Loving Speech and Deep Listening

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech, and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech, and compassionate listening, in order to relieve suffering, and to promote reconciliation and peace, in myself, and among other people, ethnic and religious groups, and nations.

Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to speaking truthfully, using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope.

When anger is manifesting in me, I am determined not to speak. I will practice mindful breathing and walking in order to recognize and look deeply into my anger. I know that the roots of anger can be found in my wrong perceptions, and lack of understanding of the suffering in myself, and the other person.

I will speak and listen in a way that can help myself and the other person transform suffering, and see the way out of difficult situations.

I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain, and not to utter words that can cause division or discord.

I will practice Right Diligence, to nourish my capacity for understanding, love, joy, and inclusiveness, and gradually transform anger, violence, and fear, that lie deep in my consciousness.

The Fifth Mindfulness Training – Nourishment and Healing

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society, by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming.

I will practice looking deeply into how I consume the four kinds of nutriments – namely edible foods, sense impressions, volition, and consciousness.

I am determined not to gamble, or to use alcohol, drugs, or any other products that contain toxins, such as certain websites, electronic games, tv programs, films, magazines, books, and conversations.

I will practice coming back to the present moment, to be in touch with the refreshing, healing, and nourishing elements in me and around me, not letting regrets and sorrow drag me back into the past, nor letting anxieties, fear, or craving pull me out of the present moment.

I am determined not to try to cover up loneliness, anxiety, or other suffering by losing myself in consumption. I will contemplate interbeing, and consume in a way that preserves peace, joy, and well being in my body and consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family, my society, and the earth.

A Dedication Prayer by Thich Nhat Hanh

In this lifetime, may we build our life of practice
and heighten merit to solidify the foundations of practice in lives to come,
so that our highest career may be cultivated
until understanding and love spring up, fresh and lovely.

May we always be born as humans.
And may we meet the teachings and live a life of true practice.

May we be guided on the path of practice by an enlightened teacher.
Equipped with true faith, may we join an authentic Fourfold Sangha.
May the six sense faculties and the Three Actions be in balance and
harmony.
May we not run after people of the world,
causing us to be caught in bondage.

Wholeheartedly and diligently, may we practice the teachings of our loving
Root Teacher,
holding to brahmacharya and leaving behind all worldly actions.
May we practice fine manners and right conduct until they shine brightly.

With a heart of loving kindness, may we protect the life of even the smallest
beings.
May we always create sufficient wholesome causes and conditions
so that countless misfortunes can dissipate like the morning mist.

With one-pointed mind, may we make the aspiration to develop bodhicitta
so that the Lotus Throne of the true understanding may manifest.

With our constant practice,
may we witness the awakening to the highest truth
and become capable of transmitting the True Mind.

May we go beyond the cycle of drowning in the ocean of rebirth,
developing the practice of the Paramitas in order to rescue beings.

May we open practice centers in many places
so that the nets of doubt can be destroyed
and people and the environment can be purified.

May we subdue all unwholesome spirits,
transmitting the lamp of the Dharma and carrying on the lineage infinitely.

May we be happy to serve the Buddhas in the Ten Directions,
and not be discouraged because of weariness or toil.

However many deep and wonderful Dharma doors there are,
may we realize them all to rescue ourselves,
and then bring that merit and wisdom to rescue other beings,
so that the fruit of Buddhahood is experienced by all.

May we adapt ourselves to circumstances in the ordinary world,
realizing numberless bodies to rescue, little by little, all living beings.

May the nectar of loving kindness rain on the realms of gods and men
so that the ocean of actions and vows to rescue beings becomes vast.

Everywhere, may the various regions of the world,
whether near or far away, be in harmony.

By proclaiming the wonderful Dharma doors may we rescue all beings,
may the light of understanding shine forth,
making wholesome the realms where devas, humans, animals,
plants, and minerals suffer.

May ten thousand species upon seeing our form and hearing our name
be released from bondage and pain.

May we give rise to our deepest aspiration
so that the suffering of Ten Thousand Realms will dissipate.

However many wrong actions there are,
committed by myself or others,
leading to unspeakable harm and injustice,
however many sufferings there are in the animal realms,
through our love and compassionate care,
may they all vanish like the dew on the green mountain
when dawn appears.

May we give medicines to the sick in urgent need.
May we give food and clothes to the destitute.
May so many benefits arise and flourish.

May peace and joy be realized right in the cycle of samsara.
May all beings regardless of race or belief,
whether they are friends or enemies,
be given all they need to cross over the ocean of afflictions.

May we leave behind unwholesome attachment forever,
having untied the knots which bind body and mind.

May we cultivate the wholesome conditions for our highest career so that,
together with numberless other species,
we turn in the direction of freedom.

A dedication prayer from the Avatamsaka Sutra

May all sentient beings be filled with the fragrance of morality,
and attain to the standards of the wise;
Emancipated from the world,
living in the transcendent ways of enlightened beings.
May all sentient beings, by Right Conduct,
all accomplish the body of morality of the Buddhas.