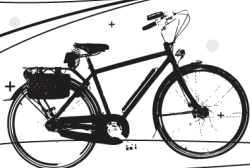




ONE *Life* FIVE PRECEPTS



Buddhist Ethics for Modern Living

VENERABLE FAXUN

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FOREWORD

We have this one, precious human life that doesn't last forever and yet has the potential to be highly meaningful. How best to make use of the opportunity this life affords us so that both while we are alive and at the end of our life, we have a sense of inner peace and satisfaction?

While allowing attachment and anger to determine our actions may bring some short-term delight – “I got what I want!” or “The sweet taste of revenge,” in the long-term we don't feel good about ourselves. We may try to mask this internal discomfort, but it is still there because our self-centered actions have damaged our self-respect and our sense of integrity and further obscured our beautiful Buddha nature. Even though some people may be impressed with our actions – “You closed the best business deal yet!” or “You hold your alcohol well” – at the end of the day, we are the ones who have to live with ourselves, and so acting contradictory to our ethical principles comes back to haunt us. Furthermore, from a Buddhist viewpoint in which past and future lives exist, our harmful actions (karma) leave seeds on our mind stream that influence what life form we will be born as and what will happen to us in our future lives. When we reflect on this deeply, it is easy to see that harming others out of greed, animosity, or ignorance harms ourselves and benefiting others with care and kindness benefits ourselves.

Thus ethical conduct is not a set of rules imposed on us from an external authority that we follow due to fear of punishment. Rather it is living in accord with what we know in our hearts is the honest and correct thing to do. For this reason, ethical conduct is essential not only for a happy life and good relationships now, but also is the basis for all further spiritual practices, such as cultivating single-pointed concentration, wisdom, love, and compassion.

The meaning of Buddhism in a nutshell can be expressed as “Benefit others as much as possible, and if you can’t do that, at least don’t harm them.” Taking precepts is a tool that helps us in this endeavor. Precepts are ethical trainings that we voluntarily undertake in order to make our actions more harmonious. Deciding to live according to precepts comes from reviewing our actions, their motivations, and their effects, and aspiring to change. With a clear and well-thought-out motivation, we then choose to abandon certain actions because we know they bring harm to ourselves and others. Taking these precepts in the presence of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas we have visualized before us connects us in a powerful way with the blessings of the holy beings and strengthens the force of our determination and our ability to change. We think:

1. From my own experience and examination, I know that harming others, specifically taking their lives, harms myself and others. Therefore, I undertake to protect life and to avoid killing. By my doing this, all beings will feel safe around me and peace in the world will be enhanced.

2. From my own experience and examination, I know that taking things that have not been given to me harms myself and others. Therefore, I undertake to respect and protect others' property and to avoid stealing or taking what has not been freely given. By my doing this, all beings can be secure around me and harmony and generosity in society will increase.
3. From my own experience and examination, I know that engaging in unwise sexual behavior harms myself and others. Therefore, I undertake to respect my own and others' bodies, to use my sexuality wisely and kindly, and to avoid sexual expression which could harm others or myself physically or mentally. By my doing this, all beings will be able to relate to me honestly and with trust, and mutual respect among people will ensue.
4. From my own experience and examination, I know that saying untrue things for the sake of personal gain harms myself and others. Therefore, I undertake to speak truthfully and to avoid lying or deceiving others. By my doing this, all beings can trust my words and friendship among people will increase.
5. From my own experience and examination, I know that taking intoxicants harms myself and others. Therefore, I undertake to avoid taking intoxicating substances – alcohol, recreational drugs and tobacco – and to keep my body and environment clean. By my doing this, my mindfulness and introspective awareness will increase, my mind will be clearer, and my actions will be thoughtful and considerate.

The precepts are an incredible blessing in our lives; they prevent us from doing what we have already decided we don't want to do. When our friends or business colleagues suggest we have a drink with them, we don't get confused. We politely decline and order something else to drink. When someone tries to get us involved in a shady business deal or pressures us to lie to close a profitable business deal, we don't think of how much money we could make and wonder if we should do it. We have already done that and decided with our wisdom not to. So we say, "No," with self-confidence that we are making the right decision. When we are married or in a committed relationship and we see an attractive single person, we don't let our mind wander and daydream about him or her because we have already concluded that such liaisons create a lot of problems for a little pleasure. In this way, the precepts help us go in a good direction in life without getting derailed by our greed or anger.

In this book, you will find a clear explanation of each precept and the benefits of living in accordance with it. Please think deeply about what you read and apply it to your own life experiences so that you understand yourself better. Use your mind of wisdom and compassion to contemplate your actions so that instead of living with the motivation "I want what I want when I want it, and it doesn't matter what I do to get it," you live with the intention "My life depends on the kind efforts of others. Therefore I want to reciprocate their kindness by not harming them. Furthermore, because I care about myself, I want to put the seeds of positive karma, not destructive karma, in my mindstream."

Then experience the joy that comes from living an ethical life...

Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron

Sravasti Abbey, 2011

PREFACE

I have been travelling between the East and West teaching for the past ten years and found that as the world becomes more globalised, human beings (both Eastern and Western) suffer from a greater spiritual vacuum. This book has been written to address social problems peculiar to this globalised age and how the **Buddhist Five Precepts**:

1. To abandon killing
2. To abandon stealing
3. To abandon sexual misconduct
4. To abandon lying
5. To abandon taking alcohol and illegal drugs and to
abandon misusing prescription drugs

... can be an ethical framework for modern living.

Traditionally, religion had great influence over society, and religious scriptures provided the guidelines for ethical behaviour within cultures. Today, as societies become seemingly more materialistic and economies more boundless, the role of religion has weakened tremendously. Modern society tends to view ethics and morality as limiting, and in some cases irrelevant. Some quarters might even have developed the extreme view that religious teachings are an

obstacle to individual and societal progress. Overall, I believe our moral values are in decline, particularly in Asia, where economies are booming and many people have replaced religion and moral values with consumerism. Shopping malls have become the new places of worship for the young, and branded goods, the new objects of their idolatry.

With religion losing its place of reverence in our lives, and with no alternative system of secular ethics to replace it, a spiritual vacuum has evolved. Compounding this new emptiness, we are constantly fed with commercial advertisements which nourish the seeds of desire and indulgence. As a result, we fill the blanks in our lives with shopping, eating, drinking, surfing the Internet, doing drugs, gambling, indulging in pornography, or even overworking, causing much confusion and suffering within self and society. We need a medicine for society, something to protect us from social illness and to make us physically, mentally and spiritually healthy again.

All human beings want happiness. To achieve happiness, I believe in Buddhist principles which are universal in nature, with which to direct our lives. The Five Precepts set forth by the Buddha are not commandments. Rather, they are practical guidelines that can govern our behaviour, helping us to live peaceful, wholesome and happy lives. They were developed by the wise via insights born from mindful observation and direct experience of suffering and happiness.

The Five Precepts are based on karma and the interconnectedness of all beings, whereby we take responsibility for our actions and live with respect for and in harmony with the people and natural environment around us. Karma refers

to our actions, which create the conditions for what we are experiencing. The Law of Karma is the universal guiding principle for good and bad. It is not based on the concept of reward and punishment, but rather, on self-responsibility, where we are ourselves solely responsible for our own physical, mental and verbal actions and thus, for what we experience due to them. Positive emotions and wholesome behaviours lead us to happiness, whereas negative, unwholesome emotions and behaviours lead us to suffering. In other words, we are responsible for our own happiness and suffering. The Five Precepts are based on the principle of non-harm – of self and others. It is the path to happiness for ourselves and others. Actually, they are universal ethics that go beyond culture and religion and are relevant at all times, even today. Abiding by them will certainly have a positive impact in making a person happier and healthier, and the world a better place to live in.

It is therefore important for practitioners to sincerely upkeep these ethical principles. Do you really care for yourself? Do you care about life? Do you care about the well-being of society? The Earth? We answer this question not by words alone, but through our actions, that is to say, we do not just study them at an intellectual level. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the values of ethics, one must integrate them into our lives with conviction and use them as a source of our inner strength. By doing this, we will then cultivate peace and develop the power of our minds, which are essential ingredients in living a happy and successful life.

***Shi Faxun (aka Bhikkhuni Shin),
Singapore/Malaysia, 2011***

THE AUTHOR



VENERABLE FAXUN graduated from Singapore's Ngee Ann Polytechnic in 1989 where she was President of the Buddhist Society. She was ordained in Taiwan in 1992

by Venerable Wu Yin of Luminary of Bhikkhuni Sangha and underwent five years of basic monastic education in the Luminary Buddhist Institute, also in Taiwan.

Upon completion of her monastic training, Venerable Faxun returned to Singapore in 1997 and served in the Sagaramudra Buddhist Society, where she conducted adult's and children's Dharma classes in English and Mandarin.

In 2001, Venerable continued to pursue her education by doing a Bachelor of Arts and Education degree at the University of Western Australia, where she majored in linguistics and Asian studies. While in Australia, she also taught meditation at the Sagaramudra branch in Perth, which she helped to manage. In 2009, she completed her Honours Degree with a thesis entitled The "Other" Path: The Bhikkhuni Quest for Liberation. Since then, Venerable has been teaching at various Buddhist centres in Singapore, Malaysia and Western Australia, and contributing articles to Buddhist magazines.

ETHICS AND INNER DISCIPLINE

His Holiness The 14th Dalai Lama:

I think that ethical behaviour is another feature of the kind of inner discipline that leads to a happier existence. One could call this ethical discipline. Great spiritual teachers like the Buddha advise us to perform wholesome actions and avoid indulging in unwholesome actions. Whether our action is wholesome or unwholesome depends on whether that action or deed arises from a disciplined or undisciplined state of mind. It is felt that a disciplined mind leads to happiness and an undisciplined mind leads to suffering, and in fact it is said that bringing about discipline within one's mind is the essence of the Buddha's teaching (Tenzin Gyatso, p32)

Many of us “know” that negative emotions and behaviour are unwholesome and lead to suffering, and that, in contrast, positive emotions and behaviour are wholesome and lead to happiness. Yet, even with this knowledge, few of us are dedicated practitioners, following the Buddhist Five Precepts faithfully and sincerely on a daily basis. In other words, there is a gap between “knowledge” and “practice”.

The purpose of Dharma education is not the accumulation of knowledge, but the use and application of knowledge to bring about change within us. The teachings of Dharma help us develop a good heart and true happiness for the benefit of ourselves as well as for others. True happiness requires training and a certain degree of inner discipline. We need to train the intellect and feelings, as well as the heart and mind. In this process we undergo a transformation of our attitudes, and our entire outlook, as well as our approach to living. Buddhism provides the framework and guidance to work towards this transformation.

However, such transformation does not come naturally. As human beings, we have many negative mental traits; we need to address and counteract each of these and there is no easy way out. We are unlike computers, where a simple push of a keyboard button can delete a negative trait from our mind. As humans, we need to apply a variety of approaches and methods, such as observing the precepts, meditation and so forth to deal with our varied and complex negative mental traits. Observing the Five Precepts is one of the very basic methods, a set of guiding principles with which to counteract our negative traits. The Five Precepts also help to guide our bodily actions, our speech and our mental attitudes. It is a

systematic means of actualising our aim of purifying our body, speech and mind. The process of transformation requires commitment and perseverance. We need to constantly apply various techniques and take time to familiarise ourselves with the practices. Determination and inner discipline are important qualities we need to develop if we are to bring about successful transformation.

The training process encompasses faith, understanding, practice, experience and realisation. First, we need to have a certain degree of faith to enter the path. We need to have faith that the Five Precepts will lead us to happiness and that we can uphold them. Next, we need to learn the value of upholding the precepts, and how this can be accomplished by understanding their contents and principles. Learning the precepts helps us to understand the importance of becoming more ethical in our behavior and increasing our mental discipline. Subsequently, we transform this knowledge into action, that is, keeping the precepts sincerely on a daily basis. Determination and inner discipline are very important in upholding the precepts. By learning, understanding and upholding the precepts, we change our perception of the world, and most importantly of ourselves. As a result, our interactions with others and the way we conduct our daily lives will become positive, fruitful and light. Such experience and realisation will further enhance our understanding and faith in the precepts.

In the beginning, positive changes may be very minor. The negative influences that we have held for so long within our minds remain strong, leading us to continue to violate the precepts. We have to be patient with ourselves and keep

working at it. Little by little, our life will come into alignment with wisdom. With growing wisdom, we will become more mindful (aware) of our thoughts and actions. Negative actions that we once committed with little or no awareness are suddenly revealed to us. As a result, it becomes easier to maintain the precepts. Just like learning to ride a bicycle, we will fall often. However, with constant practice, we will get there eventually. Observing the Five Precepts is an ethical discipline which will require constant effort from ourselves, as old negative habits are replaced with new, positive ones. We need to work with ourselves and be patient. No one saves us but ourselves, and the Buddha merely guides the way!

THE BUDDHIST FIVE PRECEPTS IN A NUTSHELL

The Five Precepts were recommended by the Buddha for anyone who wishes to lead a life of peace, while also contributing to the happiness of family and society. The Five Precepts are voluntarily observed by lay Buddhists; they are not commandments that have to be strictly abided by. They form the basis of universal morality outlined in the Noble Eightfold Path, which is very important, especially when one is beginning to follow the Buddhist way.

WHAT ARE THE FIVE PRECEPTS?

THE FIRST PRECEPT: ABSTAIN FROM KILLING

Respect Life, Not Kill and Being Compassionate

I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking life, so that I will practise compassion by protecting and benefiting all life.

THE SECOND PRECEPT: ABSTAIN FROM STEALING

Respect Personal Property, Not Steal and Being Generous

I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking what is not given, so that I will practise generosity by sharing and giving away my material and spiritual wealth.

THE THIRD PRECEPT: ABSTAIN FROM SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

Respect Personal Relationships, Not Indulge the Senses and To Be Content

I undertake the training rule to abstain from misconduct regarding objects and subjects of sense pleasures, especially adultery, so that I will practise contentment and channel my energies towards spiritual development.

**THE FOURTH PRECEPT:
ABSTAIN FROM UNTRUTHFUL SPEECH**
**Respect Truth, Not Lying and Being Truthful in
Speech**

I undertake the training rule to abstain from false speech, and other unwholesome modes of speech, so that I will communicate positively.

**THE FIFTH PRECEPT:
ABSTAIN FROM CONSUMING
INTOXICATING DRINKS AND DRUGS**
**Respect Mental and Physical Well-being, Not Taking
Intoxicants and Being Mindful**

I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking alcohol, and that which causes intoxication, so that I will be more healthy and not break the precepts through loss of mindfulness.

The First Precept:

ABSTAIN FROM KILLING

THE PRECEPT

*Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ
samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the training rule to abstain
from taking life.

I will respect all living beings.

The pali word *panna* means “that which breathes.” A living being is one that has breath and consciousness, including human beings, animals and insects. Plants are excluded as they do not have consciousness. This precept prohibits the killing of living beings. In broader terms, it should also be understood to prohibit injuring, maiming, and torturing a living being.

Conditions Under Which A Violation Is Considered to Have Occurred

- *Object:* The fact and presence of a living being, human or animal
- *Knowledge:* The knowledge that the object is a living being
- *Intention:* The intent or resolution to kill
- *The Act:* The act of killing
- *Consequence:* A resulting death

Exceptions

- By accident - no intention

The act of killing can take place through action of the body, or speech, such as commanding someone to kill, resulting in the death of a living being. The key factor for the violation of this precept is intention. The mental factor is the propeller while the body only functions as the channel for actualising the intent to kill. A complete act of killing constituting a full violation of the precept needs to involve the five conditions stated earlier. Let us first look at the first condition: Object. There is violation

only when a living being is present and one perceives it as a living being. Here is a straightforward example to illustrate this idea. In a demonstration or riot where mobs are very angry with a political leader, they might burn the photos and/or slash the statue of the political leader. In this case, there is no killing as the rioters only perceive the photo or statue as a living being. Intending to kill one being and killing another by mistake also does not constitute a full transgression.

The second condition, Knowledge, denotes that killing occurs only when the killer is aware that the object of his action is a living being, not a photo or statue. So, if we step on an insect we do not see, the knowledge (awareness) of a living being is not there and hence full violation has not occurred.

The third condition, Intention, ensures that the taking of life is intentional. There is no violation if there is no intent to kill, for example accidentally killing a fly when we try to keep it away.

The fourth condition holds that the action must be directed towards killing and the fifth, that the being (human or animal) dies as a result of this action. Full violation of the precept is not deemed to have happened if there is no resulting death.

Underlying Motivations for Killing

- Greed
- Hatred
- Delusion

An example of killing motivated primarily by greed is killing for material gain, such as hunting; or to gain enjoyment, such as fishing or eating seafood. Killing motivated by hatred is evident in cases of vicious murder – out of strong aversion, cruelty, or jealousy. Killing motivated by delusion can be seen in the case of animal sacrifices in certain religious practices, or in holy wars, where one kills followers of other religious beliefs, and believing that to be a sacred act.

How the Precept is Violated

- Committed by oneself
- By commanding or instructing
- Rejoicing in the act

The precept could be violated by taking a life, or by commanding someone else to do so verbally or with gestures. A common example of instructing someone else to kill on our behalf is by ordering “live” seafood in a restaurant.

Sometimes we may rejoice in the act of killing, for example, rejoicing in the murder of someone we do not like. When reading the news that an enemy has been killed, we must be careful not to rejoice in it.

The Intensity / Severity of Violation

- “Spiritual Nobility” of the victim
- Size of animal
- Type of animal

There is a difference between killing a human being and an animal. Killing a human being is certainly a more serious violation than killing an animal. Within the category of humans, it is a more serious violation to kill one's parent or benefactor, than a stranger. In the case of animals, the severity of violation is said to be proportional to the size of the animal, that is, killing a larger animal is more reprehensible than killing a small animal (such as a tiny insect). It also matters if the animals are domesticated or wild, and if they have a gentle or vicious temperament. Of all killings, the most culpable is the killing of an arahant/arahantini (a fully liberated being), and of one's parents.

The Purpose of the Precept

- To respect life
- To have compassion

The purpose of this precept is to respect all living beings. In doing so, we learn to be kind and compassionate to all living beings and live in harmony with them. By upholding the precept of not killing, we give all living creatures security and freedom from danger.

Quotes from Scriptures

Giving up killing, we abstain from taking the life of any living being; laying aside stick and sword, modest and merciful, he lives kind and compassionate to all living beings. (DN.1)

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, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and 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, will never be open to suspicion, and is unfaulted by knowledgeable contemplatives and priests. (AN8.39)

The First Mindfulness Training by Thich Nhat Hanh

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating 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 condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.

Thich Nhat Hanh has extended the First Precept of not killing humans and animals (sentient beings) to the protection of plants and minerals, which are technically not sentient beings though they are part of nature. The essence of observing this precept is to respect life, cultivate loving kindness and to live in harmony with our ecosystem and environment. In view of the consumerist world we live in, driven often by greed, this mindfulness training can help in our reflection on how we live, and how our actions contribute to harming our environment and the planet.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FIRST PRECEPT

What is the Buddhist perspective on suicide?

Chan Master Sheng Yen: According to the Buddhist teaching of cause and effect, since one has not realised the truth of all phenomena, or is not liberated from life and death, suicide is pointless. When one's karmic retribution is not exhausted, death by suicide only leads to another cycle of rebirth. This is why Buddhists do not support suicide, and instead, encourage constructive living, using this life to diligently practise good, thus changing the present and the future for the better.

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama: Some people commit suicide; they seem to think that there is suffering simply because there is the human life, and that by cutting off the life there will be nothing... But, according to the Buddhist viewpoint, that's not the case; your consciousness will continue. Even if you take your own life, this life, you will have to take another body that again will be the basis of suffering. If you really want to get rid of all your suffering, all the difficulties you experience in your life, you have to get rid of the fundamental cause (greed, hatred and delusion) that gives rise to the aggregates that are the basis of all suffering. Killing yourself isn't going to solve your problem.

Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda: Taking one's own life under any circumstances is morally and spiritually wrong. Taking one's own life owing to frustration or disappointment only

causes greater suffering. Suicide is a cowardly way to end one's problems of life. A person cannot commit suicide if his mind is pure and tranquil. If one leaves this world with a confused and frustrated mind, it is most unlikely that he would be born again in a better condition. Suicide is an unwholesome or unskillful act since it is encouraged by a mind filled with greed, hatred and delusion. Those who commit suicide have not learnt how to face their problems, how to face the facts of life, and how to use their mind in a proper manner. Such people have not been able to understand the nature of life and worldly conditions.

Ven. S. Dhammika, Good Question Good Answer, 2008, p26: When one person murders another they might do it out of fear, anger, fury, greed or some other negative emotions. When a person kills himself or herself they might do it for very similar reasons or because of other negative emotions like despair or frustration. So whereas murder is the result of negative emotions directed towards another, suicide is the result of negative emotions directed towards oneself, and therefore would be breaking the Precept. However, someone who is contemplating suicide or has attempted suicide does not need to be told that what they are doing is wrong. They need our support and our understanding. We have to help them understand that killing themselves is perpetuating their problem, surrendering to it, not solving it.

To keep the precept of not killing, must we be vegetarian?

There are various opinions among the different Buddhist traditions with regards to this question. The Buddha, himself, was not a vegetarian. Traditionally, Theravadin monastics live on alms food; they receive whatever is put into their alms bowl. In other words, they have no control over their diet. However, in the *Jivaka Sutta* (MN 55), it is mentioned that the Buddha only allowed meat to be taken on the condition that it is pure in three aspects – that the monastic:

1. did not see the animal being killed
2. did not hear the cry of the animal being killed
3. did not suspect that the animal was killed specifically for the monk/nun

Although these conditions technically apply only to monastics, they are often used as a reasonable guide by devout lay people. The Mahayanists relate these three types of “purified meat” (三淨肉) to the nurturing of compassion. If we see the suffering of the dying animal, we should be compassionate towards them and try to relieve their suffering. It is against the principle of compassion if we do not help them, and indeed, even go ahead to consume their meat.

Exceptions have also appeared in Tibetan Buddhism. In Tibet, people traditionally lived as nomads and it was, and probably still is, difficult to grow vegetables in the high altitudes, making it difficult to be vegetarian. Hence, monastics from the Theravadin and Tibetan traditions are generally not vegetarian.

When Buddhism spread to China, the idea of compassion was developed further in the Chinese Mahayanist tradition, and the Bodhisattva vow of not taking meat was strongly emphasised and made compulsory. Chinese Mahayanist monastics are therefore vegetarian, and so are many devotees who have taken the Bodhisattva precepts.

Today, more and more Theravadin monastics are encouraging vegetarianism, and His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama also encourages Tibetan monastics living outside Tibet, and who have control over their diet, to be vegetarian.

In my opinion, vegetarianism should be encouraged, but not imposed on others.

**Are we not contributing to killing by eating meat?
Isn't the meat in restaurants and supermarkets
killed for our consumption?**

Let us look at the example of poultry farming. In the old days, chickens were allowed to roam freely and grow in a natural environment. They were only sent for slaughter when naturally fully grown. In other words, the production of meat was not human-controlled but based on the natural growth of the animals.

Today, driven by demand in capitalist economies, poultry is “produced” in controlled high-tech conditions. Poultry and other animals are now raised in large-scale factory farms, deprived of natural conditions which allow them to move around and seek food freely in a natural environment. They are fed solely by humans and/or machines and kept

in cages or pens, just big enough for them to stand in, day and night. Driven by human greed, some poultry farmers, for example, speed up the growth of the chickens to generate more income, causing tremendous pain and suffering to the poultry. By creating longer days and shorter nights with the use of indoor lighting, the animals are misled into eating more often than normal. Under these factory farming conditions, these animals suffer greatly. Some reports say these animals attack each other, pecking out of frustration and wounding their mates, causing each other to bleed and suffer. To prevent them from attacking each other, farmers cut their beaks off, inflicting even more pain and suffering to the poor chickens.

During festive seasons, there is massive slaughter of animals to satisfy the sensual pleasures of humans. So, if we look deeply into the consumption of meat, we could be indirectly contributing to the act of killing, because the production of meat today is dependent on demand in the market. Therefore, if we can reduce our meat consumption, it will certainly reduce the demand for meat, and thereby minimising animal slaughter.

If we are truly concerned for the well-being of animals and not wanting to contribute to the cruelty of modern industrial farming, we will naturally develop a kind heart and compassion towards animals. The practice of the First Precept – to abstain from killing – is a celebration of life. We do not support any act of killing, and we can extend it further by teaching others not to. Being mindful of what we eat and what we buy, and making an effort in our diet are ways of preventing killing.

Many Buddhists find that as they develop in their spiritual

path, they have a natural tendency to become vegetarian. By doing so, they live up to the Buddha's teaching on loving kindness. This energy of loving kindness brings feelings of safety, health and joy to them and all sentient beings.

What did the Buddha say about vegetarianism?

(Taken from Ven. Sangye Khadro's article, Mandala Magazine, June 2007)

There is a lot of debate within Buddhism about this issue. There are some Buddhists who are vegetarian (no meat or fish), and some who are vegans (no animal products at all, including dairy products and eggs). And there are some Buddhists who do eat meat.

What did the Buddha himself say about eating meat? Well, it seems that he said different things at different times. This may sound like he contradicted himself, but the Tibetans say that the Buddha was a very skilful teacher who understood the minds and needs of his listeners and would teach them accordingly. So to some, the Buddha said it was okay to eat meat, provided that they did not kill the animal themselves, or order it to be killed. But to others, the Buddha said that if you are a follower of the bodhisattva path, and truly compassionate, you should not eat meat. To these people he spoke of the harmful consequences of doing so.

In fact, there is an entire chapter in the *Lankavatara Sutra* (a Mahayana sutra which has been translated into English) in which the Buddha spoke very strongly against meat-eating. So as I understand it, the Buddha did not actually forbid his followers to eat meat, but left it up to each person to decide this issue for him/herself. In a way, that was compassionate of

the Buddha, because some people live in places and conditions where it would be extremely difficult to abstain from meat, and if they had to be vegetarian in order to be Buddhist, they probably would not be able to do it.

Also, some people are unable to be strictly vegetarian because of their physical make-up or their health. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama is an example of this. He tried to be vegetarian, but his health suffered and his doctors advised him to eat meat. But I am sure he eats as little as possible, because in his teachings he often encourages people (especially the Tibetans, who are quite fond of meat) to either give up or at least cut down on the consumption of meat. His advice seems to be working, because I have noticed in the last few years an increase in the number of Tibetans who have given up meat, as well as Tibetan-run organisations promoting vegetarianism. I even heard that Sera Monastery in South India is a meat-free zone!

Is abortion a form of killing? Isn't it better to end a pregnancy if the couple is not ready?

Abortion is medically defined as the expulsion of a not yet viable foetus in humans as well as animals before the end of pregnancy, during which the foetus is not capable of maintaining an independent existence.

Is abortion a form of killing? To answer this question, we need to understand when life begins. According to Buddhist teachings, the existence of a human being begins from the mind's "first arising," that is, from the first moment of the existence of consciousness in a foetus. In other words, life

begins from the moment of conception, when an egg is fertilised by a sperm. Hence, abortion is indeed a form of killing.

However, according to Buddhism, abortion is allowed only in situations where it is the most humane alternative; for example, in order to save the life of the mother. But let us be honest, most abortions are performed simply because the pregnancy is inconvenient, or an embarrassment (pre-marital pregnancy or the result of adultery). These are very poor reasons for the destruction of a life.

Abortion is never a good solution to unwanted pregnancies. Prevention is better than cure. Education is the long term solution. Educating couples on sexual responsibility is a better option than destroying a life. Couples entering into sexual activity should think carefully beforehand. Are they ready to bring a new life into this world? Are they financially ready to bring up the child? Sexual activity should not be carried out without long term commitment; that is, if pregnancy occurs, the couple must be responsible for their act of bringing a new life into the world.

What if a woman is raped?

A child conceived as a result of rape is entitled to live and be loved just as any other child. The baby (foetus) is innocent. He or she should not be killed simply because their biological father committed a crime. In dealing with unwanted pregnancy, the child could be given away or adopted by others.

How should I deal with an infestation of ants or cockroaches?

Our intention is not to kill. We try our best to bring the least harm to all living creatures. We can avoid using harmful pesticides by using organic/natural ones that do not kill the creatures. For example, fresh pandan (*pandanus*) leaves are good for keeping cockroaches away without killing them. We also need to be aware of actions that may invite pests into our house. Some people have the habit of leaving dishes and cutlery in the basin after meals. Some wash the dishes only when there are no more clean plates and spoons in the cupboard. This will certainly invite ants and cockroaches into their homes. When their house is infected with ants and cockroaches, they start spraying pesticides. We need to be mindful and responsible for our actions. If we make an effort to keep our environment clean and dry, and keeping food out of reach, it will certainly reduce the incidence of pests. At other times when it is unavoidable, we just need to be patient and tolerant. With mindfulness and perseverance, we can do our best to minimise harm to living creatures. Refer to Appendix 1 (p87) for tips on how to keep insects away without killing them.

Some detractors say, “You Buddhists are too concerned about ants and bugs.”

(Taken from Ven. S. Dhammika, Good Question Good Answer, p25)

Buddhists try to develop a compassion that is indiscriminating and all-embracing. We see the world as a unified whole where each thing and creature has its place and function. We believe that before we destroy or upset nature’s delicate balance, we should be very careful. Where emphasis has been on exploiting

nature to the full, squeezing every last drop out of it without putting anything back, conquering and subduing it, nature has revolted. The air is becoming poisoned, the rivers polluted and dead, so many animals and plants are heading for extinction, the slopes of the mountains are barren and eroded. Even the climate is changing. If people were a little less anxious to crush, destroy and kill, this terrible situation might not have arisen. We should strive to develop a little more respect for all life. And this is what the First Precept is about.

What if we are practicing non-violence and someone breaks into our house and threatens us? What should we do?

It all depends on your level of cultivation. If you are an experienced practitioner who practises non-violence in your daily life, the chances are you will be more likely to react calmly and intelligently without harming anyone. The compassion one generates could influence the intruder to be less violent. But in order to be able to react in an intelligent and non-violent way, our day-to-day training is important. It may take years to develop. If you wait till a crisis happens, it will be too late. And at that crucial moment, even if you know all the teachings – to embrace compassion, to be non-violent, it is only intellectual knowledge. Since it is not an intrinsic part of your being, you may not be able to act in a non-violent manner. The self-centred cherishing attitude, the fear and anger in you will likely obstruct you from acting that way. Hence, it is important to transform our knowledge into practice and to embrace loving kindness and compassion in our daily life. Here is the story of a practising Buddhist reacting in a non-violent way when confronted with a robber.

Home Intrusion and the Protection by the Triple Gems

(The following article is extracted from the Buddhist Society of Western Australia Newsletter, Feb/Mar issue, 2010)

On that fateful night of 19 January 2010, a masked intruder armed with a knife, garden fork and a hammer walked into my house through an unlocked door around 9 p.m. I was cooking in my kitchen and happened to turn around to be confronted by this strange looking masked man standing about 4 feet away holding up his weapons.

Extreme terror came over me. I let out two blood curdling screams in quick succession. In a split second, I went into denial as I stared into his face to see if it was my husband, Sunny dressed up like that to frighten me.

Hearing the screams, Sunny came flying into the kitchen to investigate. The intruder ordered both of us to lie down on the kitchen floor and not to look at him. He told us to just look at his feet to know where he was.

As we went down on the floor, Sunny started chanting “om mani padme hum,” the Buddha of Compassion’s mantra, and I joined him in chanting quietly under our breaths.

At that point I was shaking with fear. Thoughts of being robbed, bashed senseless, raped or even killed ran amok in my mind. Minutes later a calmness came over me. I even questioned myself then as to why I was feeling so calm.

The first thing I said to the intruder was “We are peaceful people. Just tell us what you want and we will give it to you but please do not harm us.” His reply to that was, “I am also a

peaceful person. If you do as I tell you, I will not harm you.”

That was cold comfort to us as he was the one holding the weapons and looked quite agitated and menacing. He added, “I want money. My wife is pregnant and I am homeless.” To that Sunny said, “I have \$50 in my wallet.”

When he opened the wallet, he only found a \$20 note. So then I gave him my purse which contained \$30. At that point I thought he would ask us to drive him to the nearest ATM to get more cash and then will probably finish us off, but surprisingly there were no demands from him for more cash or anything else.

He was quite happy with the \$50 cash, mobile phone and our car. He said he would return the car keys another day and leave them in our letter box. He later changed his mind, saying he would drive to Warwick Station and leave the keys under the car seat.

During our half hour ordeal, he apologised numerous times and asked for forgiveness. Twice he sounded as though he was about to cry for putting us through all this. Before leaving he asked for my name and I said “Lee Chew,” upon which he said “Oh, Mr and Mrs Lee Chew. Give me a minute to pray, God please forgive me. I am very very sorry.”

Immediately I said to him, “We have forgiven you. I will pray for you and I wish you all the best.” Even when he had reversed the car out onto the road he called out to us to come to him and apologised one more time before driving off.

After he left, we felt no anger towards him. In fact we were thankful to him for not physically hurting us. We also felt a little sorry for him for having to commit such negative actions which will definitely bring great suffering to him in the future.

The TV reporters who turned up at my house the next morning requested to interview us because according to them it was a bizarre story. Initially I turned them down but when they explained that our TV appearance will serve to warn and benefit others, we reluctantly consented for that reason only.

Looking back now we actually had a gentleman robber who showed concern for his victims. Although we had the negative karma to experience this terrifying ordeal, we also had a lot of good karma to protect us from a worse outcome.

We can still rejoice in the fact we now have one less negative imprint to experience. One of my Dharma friends wrote in an email to me saying, “If there is one thing she had learnt from our misfortune, it is the power of mantras, the power of forgiveness and the power of staying calm”.

If the story appeared bizarre to viewers with the aggressor saying sorry and asking for forgiveness, it is equally bizarre with the victims expressing forgiveness, offering prayers for the aggressor and wishing him all the best.

As I have told him I will pray for him, I have been faithfully dedicating my daily merits to him and for him to find peace, happiness, contentment in accordance with the Dharma and to immediately cease to create terror in other peoples’

minds, to have every opportunity to hear the Dharma and be transformed by the Dharma. This is my sincere wish for him.

Lastly we'd like to thank all our Dharma teachers for imparting Lord Buddha's precious teachings that must have influenced the way we handled ourselves at a time like that.

Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu.

Lee Chew

The Second Precept:

ABSTAIN FROM STEALING

THE PRECEPT

*Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ
samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the training rule to abstain
from taking what is not freely given.

I will respect the property of others.

Conditions Under Which A Violation Is Considered to Have Occurred

- *Object:* Anything belonging to another legally
- *Knowledge:* The perception of the item as belonging to another
- *Intention:* The thought/intention of stealing
- *The Act:* The action of taking the item
- *Consequence:* The actual misappropriation of the article, and thinking of the article as our own

A complete act of stealing constituting a full violation of the precept involves these five factors.

Exceptions

- One has legal rights to the property or its use
- The “stealing” was a mistake
- Between parties in a relationship of trust/intimacy
- With regards to discarded/abandoned articles
- Borrowing something

There is no offense if you have legal rights over the article and are therefore at no fault for using it. For example, in a work situation, you may have the legal rights to use something even if you are not the owner of the item. However, if you use it for unethical purposes or in ways the owner did not give

permission for it to be used, then there is an offense. There is also no offense if an identical item is taken by mistake, such as an umbrella or stationery. When an item taken from a person with whom one has a relationship of trust or intimacy, such as between husband and wife, siblings or close friends, or when one can be sure that the other party would not mind, then also there is no offense. If an item has no owner, such as a discarded article (garbage), no offense is committed. Similarly, there is no offense when one borrows an item with permission. However, there is an offense if one borrows an item and does not return it.

How the Precept is Violated

- Committed by oneself
- By commanding or instructing others to do it
- Rejoicing in the act

The violation can be committed directly by one, by asking someone else to steal, or by facilitating the theft. One could also violate this precept by rejoicing in the act, perhaps out of revenge.

Categories of Stealing

- Robbery
- Cheating
- Fraud
- Coercion
- Embezzlement

Stealing is basically taking what is not given, either without the knowledge or the consent of the owner. Examples are shoplifting in the supermarket, burglary, pick pocketing, etc. Robbery is taking by force what is not given, either by snatching or by compelling another to hand over their property under threat. Cheating is using deceptive means for material gain, such as when storekeepers use false weights and measures. Fraud is making false claims or telling lies in order to gain possessions belonging to someone else. Coercion or embezzlement happens when an unethical official misappropriates an item, exerts control over the item, or asks for a bribe.

The Intensity / Severity of Violation

- Value of the stolen item
- “Spiritual nobility” of the victim

Stealing under any circumstances is always an offense. The severity of the offense is also dependent on the motivation behind the theft. If a person steals out of survival or poverty, then the karmic effect is less intense than a person stealing out of greed. Stealing out of hatred is also more serious than stealing out of greed.

In addition, the severity of the offense will also depend on the value of the stolen item and the “spiritual nobility” of the victim. Stealing five million dollars is certainly a more serious violation than stealing five dollars. Stealing from a person of high virtuous qualities (for example an arahant/arahantini) is a more serious offense than stealing from an ordinary person with lesser virtuous qualities. Likewise, stealing from

a personal benefactor is more serious than stealing from an unrelated person.

If someone steals an alms bowl from a mendicant monastic, who depends on the bowl for receiving alms with, the offense is certainly more severe than stealing an expensive bowl from a rich person. If someone steals from the donation box in the temple, again, the ensuing karma will be heavier than stealing from a rich person. This is because the temple collects donations from many people, and so, stealing the donation box is as good as stealing from many people, hence creating very bad karma. Also, the temple is using the money for the benefit of many people, so this stealing affects many people.

The Purpose of the Precept

- To respect others' property
- Social justice
- To guard against greed
- To encourage honesty and right livelihood

The fundamental purpose of the precept is to protect the property of individuals from unjustified confiscation by others. It exhorts us to abide by right livelihood, which, in an ethical way, brings about honesty and justice in society. Not only do we learn to live simply and not to take more than our share, we learn not to enrich ourselves at the expense of others. By abstaining from stealing, we free others from fear. The belongings of others are also safe with us, and those around us would have no reason to fear that we would steal what belongs to them. This precept

guards us against our own greed. By not stealing, we do not create the bad karma that leads to poverty in future lives.

Quotes from Scriptures

Furthermore, abandoning taking what is not given (stealing), the disciple of the noble one abstains from taking what is not given. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression. This is the second gift, the second great gift... (AN8.39)

Second Mindfulness Training by Thich Nhat Hanh

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I will practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

If we are not mindful, there is also a possibility of violating this precept subtly. For example, it is not right when one brings home from our workplace small items such as office supplies, over which we have no rights as these are meant to be used at

work. An employee may idle away time on the job for which he or she is being paid, and conversely, an employer could violate this precept by not adequately compensating employees for work done, and/or exploiting the employees. When we use someone else's telephone to make long-distance calls without the consent of the owner and leaving the owner to take care of the bill, this too is a transgression. Similarly, it is a violation when one brings articles into a country without declaring them to customs in order to avoid paying duty on them. Keeping this precept reminds us to be mindful, to reflect on the way we live, and to learn to guard against our subtle greed, unfairness or exploitation of others.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE SECOND PRECEPT

Can one steal out of poverty?

There is a segment of the society which feels victimised by the modern economic system. They feel that multi-national companies such as Internet providers, phone companies, banks, chain stores, etc, have been ripping consumers off by charging high processing fees and interest rates, among other unjustified actions, and compelling consumers to contribute to their coffers. Some have argued that we have the right to steal for survival and have even outlined “ethics” for stealing – to take only what one needs, from multi-national companies who can afford the losses.

To reply to this, let us first take a look at the impact of modern advertising.

Most of us are exposed to a myriad of commercial advertisement – in trains/buses, along the highways, and on various media platforms such as the Internet, TV and radio. However, we often do not reflect on the impact that these have on us. Quite un-mindfully, we tend to believe what the advertisers say and we literally buy into this consumerist system. In reality, these commercial messages compel us to believe that we must possess certain things and if we do not, we are deemed inadequate or marginalised. Our unlimited wants are misinterpreted as basic needs, and often with undesirable outcomes. We start to believe that we need certain things when in fact we only want more.

The precept of not stealing sets the boundaries; it stops one

from taking possessions which belong to others. Once we hit the boundaries, we bounce back to check our mind and action. The practice of mindfulness enables us to examine our mind. In fact it is our mind - the state of wanting something we do not have - that makes us feel poor, unhappy and dissatisfied. If we are not mindful, the discontented mind will compel us to steal. By looking deeply into ourselves, we will be able to find the underlying reasons which make us unhappy. Seeing the state of wanting and grasping, how it makes us and others suffer, we naturally begin to drop the thought of “wanting.” The only way out of poverty is through cultivation, to overcome the undesirable state of mind which traps us in inadequacy. Only when our evil roots – wanting, ill-will, and ignorance – are up-rooted, will we feel rich within and be truly happy. Only then will we become free and not be a slave to consumerism. The precept of not stealing also addresses what I will call the “sickness” of contemporary culture. It emphasises social responsibility.

Not only should we respect the property of others, but we should also not exploit them by enriching ourselves at the expense of others. In a capitalist culture, trying to maximise our profits fans our greed. This precept reminds us to be mindful and not become a slave to greed.

Stealing is never an answer to poverty or want. If we believe that it is alright to steal, we are creating insecurity and chaos. How would you feel living in a society full of thieves? Applying the “take from the rich” concept, the losers in the end are the consumers. Consider this – by stealing from a giant chain store – although they could probably write off the losses – the cost would subsequently be passed on to other consumers.

This is unfair to innocent consumers and also creates social disharmony and insecurity. According to Buddhism, if one is poor, he or she cannot become rich by taking others' possessions. The Law of Karma and its results show that we are responsible for our actions and the results we experience due to them. In fact, if we steal, we are planting the seeds of poverty. If we constantly feel poor, such a mental state will certainly lead us to poverty! Conversely, generosity and sharing our belongings are the causes of wealth.

In the *Parinirvana Sutta* (佛遗教经), the Buddha said, "Contentment is the greatest happiness." If we are contented, even if we sleep on the floor, we are happy; if we are not contented, even if we are in heavenly realms enjoying luxury, we feel dissatisfied. Ajahn Brahm, an Australian monk, goes to prisons to teach meditation. One day after a meditation session, the inmates asked him to share his story as a monastic. He told the inmates that there are walls surrounding the monastery just like walls surround a jail. Monastics wake up early, have only one meal a day and stop eating after mid-day. They do not have coffee breaks, and eat only what is donated to them. They sleep on simple beds, without TV, radio or newspapers. After hearing his story, the inmates told Ajahn that it is better for him to live with them in jail! Monastics live simple and frugal lives, yet they feel happy within. Regardless of being rich or poor, the mind is crucial.

The Third Precept:

ABSTAIN FROM SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

THE PRECEPT

*Kāmesu micchācāra veramaṇī
sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the training rule to abstain
from sexual misconduct.

Conditions Under Which A Violation Is Considered to Have Occurred

- *Object*: An illicit partner
- *Intention*: Lustful intention
- *The Act*: The act of engaging in union, defined here as sexual intercourse between a male and a female
- *Consequence*: The acceptance of union

Sexual misconduct occurs when one has sexual relations with an illicit partner with lustful intentions. The key question is, who qualifies as an illicit partner? According to the Pali text, an illicit partner is:

- A woman¹ who is under the protection of her parents or guardian, for example, a young girl²
- A woman who is married or engaged to another man. For married women, any man other than her husband is an illicit partner
- A woman prohibited by custom and tradition. For example, nuns who observe celibacy are prohibited partners under the religious rule

1. In the Buddha's time, women had little or no social status, hence by speaking to men, the Buddha was protecting women from abuse. Today, men and women generally share equal social status so the Buddha's teaching here becomes applicable to both genders.

2. Also during those times, women married at a young age. In modern society, it would apply to children just as they are placed under the special protection of the law.

Having a sexual relationship with underage children constitutes sexual misconduct. Such sexual abuse of children is extremely damaging to the child's physical and psychological well-being. Human trafficking, particularly that of women and children for the sex trade, is reprehensible and shows a lack of human respect and compassion. Many women and young children are forced or sold into prostitution due to poverty. Other times they are tricked with the promise of a job and then sold to a pimp who controls them and forces them to have sex with numerous customers. As a society we should do our best to prevent and correct such situations.

Adultery is a form of sexual misconduct because when one marries, one promises one's spouse to be loyal to them. By committing adultery, we break that promise and betray our partner's trust.

Sexual activity should not take place under any force, violence, or coercion, under physical or psychological pressure. Such sexual acts are irresponsible; they are expressions of craving, violence and disrespect. When there is the element of disrespect, sex become destructive; it causes negative consequences and suffering to both parties. Rape is not only a sexual misconduct, it is also an act of violence. The victim of rape is not to be blamed or humiliated, but treated with compassion.

Sexual activity should only take place between two mutually consenting adult partners in a committed relationship, and on the basis of love, respect, and gentleness.

It is also sexual misconduct when one engages a partner at an inappropriate time, such as when a woman is pregnant, or when she is nursing. It is unethical to take the mother away from the baby for sex. It is also misconduct to have sex at inappropriate places, such as at places of worship.

Exceptions

When the person in question is:

- Unconscious
- In a deep sleep
- Does not accept the act (non-acceptance)

If one is unconscious, in deep sleep or does not want to have intercourse, he or she does not violate the precept if someone has sex with them. However the person who forced the other person to have intercourse violates the precept.

There was a recorded incident about a Bhikkhuni who was raped. She told the Buddha about it. The Buddha asked how she felt at the time of intercourse and she replied, “Pain - like fire burning.” The Buddha then explained to her that she had not violated the precept. In fact, the man who had raped her violated the precept.

In a situation where a woman or a man is raped, if the victim enjoys the intercourse, the sexual act becomes consensual and the precept is violated. However, in general, a rape victim does not enjoy this violent act. Therefore, we should avoid blaming the victim and instead teach proper sexual ethics to children as they are growing up so that they do not become perpetrators of rape.

The Intensity / Severity of Violation

- The degree of lust
- The spiritual qualities of the victims

The underlying root of violating this precept is always greed accompanied by delusion. The severity of violation is dependent on the degree of lust and the qualities of the person against whom the transgression is committed. If the lust is strong, and force is used, it is certainly more serious than when lust is weak and no force is used. The violation is certainly more severe when the transgression involves someone of high spiritual qualities rather than a partner with less developed qualities. The most serious violation is when one rapes an arahant/arahantini.

The Purpose of the Precept

- Respect for self and others' sexual rights
- Prevention of abduction, rape and adultery
- Giving others a sense of security
- Guarding against lust and sexual desire

There are various reasons for keeping this precept. At a personal spiritual level, it is to guard against our attachment, prevent ourselves from falling into the temptations of harmful and overwhelming lust and sexual desire. At the level of personal ethics, it establishes our respect for our sexual right and those of our sexual partner. We should be responsible for our actions, and guard against irresponsible sexual relationships that will only cause pain to ourselves and others. For that reason, it is best if sexual activity is within the confines of love and long-term commitment.

Quotes from Scriptures

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, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression. This is the third gift... (AN8.39)

Third Mindfulness Training by Thich Nhat Hanh

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. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. 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.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE THIRD PRECEPT

Is this precept (sexual misconduct) still relevant in contemporary society? How should we understand the precept of sexual misconduct? What if one chooses sex outside of marriage?

With the passing of time, society changes – there are changes in family structure, in value systems and so forth. Traditionally, marriage and building a family were almost compulsory. Life was considered incomplete without marriage and family. With modernisation, such a value system has changed. Women in modern society are independent; many do not need to depend on a husband for financial and social security. It has now become a trend that marriage is no longer compulsory, but rather an option.

Regardless of societal changes, we still need to be responsible for our actions. Sex should be an expression of love and long-term commitment between two parties contributing to mental and emotional well-being. In traditional Asian societies, a “long-term commitment” was built on customary/traditional marriages. As societies modernised, legal marriages replaced traditional ones.

Today, when people choose not to marry and still want to have sex; there needs to be a sense of responsibility and commitment towards each other, and also a sense of commitment in raising offspring (in case of pregnancy), and ensuring their happiness.

We also need to value the other person and show respect towards him/her, because a sexual relationship is one that

involves two people trying to bond their lives. They will share ups and downs in life; they will share a sense of intimacy beyond superficial sexual attraction.

We should use our sexuality wisely and kindly. This means abandoning any activities that could hurt others physically or emotionally. We need to check and be mindful of one's motivation and attitude towards sex. How do we relate to our own and others' sexual needs? Is sexual activity an expression of love, or an expression of craving for sensual pleasure? Irresponsible sexual relationships will only cause pain and suffering to both self and others.

Most of my friends are sexually active. If I don't act like them, they will think I am odd.

Traditionally, talking about sex has been taboo in many societies, and religion set ethical guidelines for sexual matters. As societies evolved, religion has lost much of its influence over society. Attitudes towards sex have also changed considerably over the years, with more liberal views becoming the norm, such as sex outside of marriage. In the name of "sexual liberation," casual sex and one-night stands are openly discussed and almost encouraged. It will be helpful to reflect deeply on our own attitude towards sex and moral values – what are our influences, who is doing the talking, are these attitudes our own, or simply what society or our peers consider "cool." Do we simply follow?

Many young people may think that a sexual act is just like any other thing they do for fun and enjoyment, and so long as both parties agree, it is okay. However, the reality is, many

young people have told me that they regretted having casual sex. When we are not mentally ready enough for a sexual relationship, casual sex can increase the risk of destroying what could have been a good friendship and even our lives. Imagine what could happen if a baby was not just born, but born premature? Just like a premature baby, the hurt resulting from premature sex could be deep-seated and could remain unhealed for many years. Some young people have expressed that they lost joy in their lives as a result of the mental wounds from having a sexual relationship they were not ready for.

Just as there are restricted zones on the roads, so too do our bodies. We only allow very special persons whom we trust completely, to enter these restricted zones. It takes time to build trust and intimacy.

We need to be mindful and check ourselves, our mental attitudes, and values. Choose wisely the values you want to be influenced by – the social norms set by magazines, or the ones offered by the wise sages. Which ones will lead you to genuine happiness?

Many of my friends, including myself, have two or three sexual partners. How do you suggest I can keep the Third Precept?

(taken from Thich Nhat Hanh, For a Future to Be Possible, 2007, Appendix I, p107)

When you do two or three things at the same time, like eating your dinner, watching television, and having a conversation with friends at the dinner table, you do not do any of the three things deeply. You cannot truly taste and enjoy each morsel of

food that your beloved one prepared for you. You cannot give your full attention to the television programme, and you will be unable to listen carefully to what your friends are saying. It is even more difficult if you have several sexual partners at the same time. Please examine this deeply. None of your relationships will be profound. Ask your heart whether you are really happy. It may seem all right now, but are you certain that you are not causing suffering to yourself or your partners? A superficial, non-committed relationship never leads to real happiness or peace.

The Fourth Precept:

ABSTAIN FROM UNTRUTHFUL SPEECH

THE PRECEPT

*Musāvāda veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ
samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the training rule to abstain
from false speech.

I will respect truthfulness.

Conditions Under Which A Violation Is Considered to Have Occurred

- *Object:* A human being other than oneself
- *Intention:* The intent to misrepresent the truth and to deceive
- *The Act:* The act of communicating the untruth through words or gestures or by being silent
- *Consequence:* The person comprehends the meaning of the lie. Otherwise, our words are considered idle talk

Exception

- Unintentional misrepresentation

The use of speech to deceive is obvious, but the body too can be used as an instrument of communication – such as in writing (email, SMS, etc), hand signals, and gestures – all can be used to deceive others. The key element in this transgression is the intention. Therefore, there is no offense if a person misrepresents the truth unintentionally. For example, speaking too quickly and saying one thing while meaning to say another, such as a slip of the tongue.

The Intensity / Severity of Violation

The intensity of violation depends on the content of the untruth and the consequence of the untruthfulness. For example, it is a serious offense when a person, out of greed, lies that he/she has attained arahanthood, and the other person believes him/her.

The Purpose of the Precept

The aim of observing this precept is to respect truthfulness. Speech is a way of expressing our thoughts. By being mindful with what we say and how we say it, we train ourselves to be more skillful speakers.

By giving up false speech, one becomes a speaker of truth. He does not deceive others, thus becoming a trustworthy and reliable person. Giving up slander, he reconciles those who are divided and brings them closer together. He strengthens friendships by living with love and harmony. Giving up harsh speech, he says what is gentle and pleasant, pleasing to the ear, affectionate and liked by most. Giving up idle chatter, he speaks at the right time in accordance with facts appropriate to the purpose, in accordance with the Dhamma. He speaks words worth treasuring, reasonable, appropriate, discriminating and to the point. (DN 1)

Quotes from Scriptures

Furthermore, abandoning lying, the disciple of the noble ones abstains from lying. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression. This is the fourth gift... (AN8.39)

Fourth Mindfulness Training by Thich Nhat Hanh

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving

speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am determined to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain and will not criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I am determined to make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

Although technically speaking, the precept does not include a reference to listening, Thich Nhat Hanh has wisely brought this element of listening into his interpretation of this precept. It is noteworthy that by listening carefully, one listens with heart and is then able to connect better with the person with whom we are speaking. We are then able to touch the hearts of others, bringing greater joy and harmony.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FOURTH PRECEPT

In order to sell my product or to close a business deal, keeping the precept of not lying is not realistic to me.

Many business people may think that it is impossible to keep the precept of not lying. However, consider this. If a business person is truthful in his/her claims and perhaps makes a little less on a honest transaction, the chances are that by creating trust, he/she would have gained a loyal client. In other words, being truthful does not conflict with doing business and can instead bring about long term success. I once read of a very successful businessman in Malaysia, whose success was due to his truthfulness and sincerity. The story goes like this...

After the businessman entered into a contract, the price of the necessary raw materials went up. If he stuck to the contract price, he would have lost money. Since there was no way to change it, the only choice would have been to “cheat” with cheaper, substandard materials. However, the businessman decided to courageously tell his customer the truth about the situation. His truthfulness and sincerity touched the customer, who then agreed to an adjustment of the contract pricing. The businessman is now one of Malaysia’s most successful.

Let us now take a look at the state of affairs in the consumer market today. There are many shoddy and fake goods that have harmed consumers. The Chinese use the term “black heart” (黑心产品) to describe such products. Just to quote an example, the 2008 Sanlu Milk incident in China killed four babies and left thousands ill. Business people who want

to maximise profits produce such so-called “black hearted” products. These are harmful and are detrimental to public safety.

There are always ways and means to make money ethically. Therefore, we should always strive to be truthful and honest about our products or services, and the fourth precept sets out the guideline for us.

I want to attend Dharma events but my parents don't want me to go. I don't want to lie to them but I want to attend them because the Dharma is the real source of happiness. What should I do?

Communication is important. When one does not understand a culture or religion, there is a tendency of mistrust and misunderstanding. It will be good to share with your parents what you plan to learn or have learnt from the Dharma. Be careful though, not to impose your ideas on others when you are sharing information with them. You may also want to invite your parents to attend Dharma events with you, so that they are aware of what you are involved in. Let them know where you are going, what you do in the Dharma centre, what you learn, and who your Dharma teachers and friends are. They will feel more at ease if they are informed and know what you are doing. The best and most effective way to convince your parents is through your actions and behaviour. If your parents see a change for the better in you, they will certainly allow you to go the Dharma centre.

I once had a student in Australia, a divorcee who used to have problems with her children. After coming to the Dharma

centre, learning the Dharma and applying it in her life, her children noticed a positive change in their mother. Then came a period when she got too busy to go to the Dharma centre and started becoming cranky and reverting to her old behaviour. Her children were the ones who reminded her to go back to the Dharma centre.

What is the Buddhist view on new instant messaging?

With modern technologies, communication has become very vast and sophisticated. Besides the telephone, we send instant messages online. In fact, we spend a lot of time talking. Yet if we look deeply, we do not need to talk as much as we think. We need to reflect on the content of our chats and our motivation behind the chatting.

Loneliness is one of the afflictions of modern life. People in modern societies often feel lonely, and many engage in chit-chatting via SMS and instant messaging, in the hope that the feeling of loneliness will then go away. However, idle-chatting/surfing the Net is never an answer to loneliness. Instead, it may bring more “toxins” into the mind. Each time you feel lonely and turn to your handphone or the Internet, you are cultivating the habit of idle talk, which may make things worse. If we are not mindful, we can easily get addicted to these modern technologies, and in fact, many young people do. They feel uneasy if they are unable to access the Internet. We need to be discerning in our use of information technology and help our young ones use it wisely.

During the Buddha’s time, there was no IT and hence, no precept set to guide its use. Today, we can use all the precepts

based on the principle of non-harming, as a guide for IT use. If we look closely at the content on the Internet today, we detect a lot of violence, hatred, greed and fear. If we spend hours surfing aimlessly, we unconsciously sow seeds of violence and ignorance in us. When we do that, our children follow our example. We need to be careful of unhealthy content which is destroying the social fabric of our families and ourselves. Discussion within our communities about this can bring about greater awareness. It can also bring about ideas on how to protect children, families, as well as society from destructive websites. We should boycott those websites that spill harm into our societies and make an effort to warn others of their danger.

Is it okay to tell little white lies?

If we have good reason to suspect that someone's life is at stake, we should use our wisdom in how we reply to a question. We can give a nonsensical response, change the subject, or respond to another question instead because our intention is to save lives.

We need to be very mindful in bending the precepts and only do so in extreme cases. We should not allow "exceptions" to become the norm. We need to be very careful and look deeply, to see if we are bending the precepts for our convenience and then calling them "white lies" to justify them.

Our motivation for lying often is to conceal another action we did that we do not want someone to know about, and frequently that other action was a negative one. In this case, there are two non-virtues: the original action, such as sexual

misconduct, and then the lie that is told to cover it up. Here we have to examine why we did the original action as well as why we want to conceal it.

If we reflect deeply, we will find that very often, we conveniently turn to white lies when confronted with difficult situations. In fact, if we are determined to keep the precepts, wisdom will grow. In other words, we use our resolve to deal with difficult situations without violating the precepts.

In my personal experience, when devotees brought food (dana) to the temple, they are usually fond of asking the monastics “Does it taste good?” or “Do you like the dish?” I knew they were not ready for a negative answer and they would feel discouraged or disheartened if I said I did not care much for the dish. Initially I told white lies, so as not to upset them. However, to me a lie was still a lie. I aspired to keep my precepts pure, yet I did not wish to hurt anyone. This required skilful means. As time went by, I began to think of better ways to respond. Instead of answering their questions directly, I chose not to answer. I would acknowledge their virtuous act of offering dana and supporting the monastics, and encourage them to continue with their kindness.

In doing so, I did not lie, and I did not upset anyone. When I got to know the devotees better and when I felt their minds were ready, I would give them positive suggestions on how to improve their dish!

Hence, when confronted with difficult situations, it is our cowardly mind that leads us to tell lies and conveniently use “white lies” as a license to lie. It is only when we are

mindful, that we can see our intentions clearly. Our courage, determination and wisdom will grow if we keep the precepts faithfully.

The Fifth Precept:

ABSTAIN FROM CONSUMING INTOXICATING DRINKS AND DRUGS

THE PRECEPT

*Surā-meraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā
veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the training rule to abstain from intoxicating drinks that cause heedlessness.

Conditions Under Which A Violation Is Considered to Have Occurred

- *Object:* The intoxicant
- *Intention:* The intention of taking the intoxicant
- *The Act:* The activity of ingesting it
- *Consequence:* The actual ingestion of the intoxicant

Exceptions

- If the intoxicants are taken as medicine or for medical reasons
- The substance is non-alcoholic but tastes, looks like or smells like alcohol
- If the alcohol is used in cooking and has evaporated through the cooking process

Alcohol refers to any alcoholic drink made from grain and yeast, such as whiskey, beer, vodka and gin. Fermented liquors such as wine, mead and rum are alcoholic beverages which can be made from flowers, fruits, honey and sugar.

While the precept specifically refers to alcoholic beverages, its meaning extends to illegal drugs and to the misuse of prescription drugs. However, correct use of pain killers after surgery, for example, is not included in this precept.

The key factor for violation is the intention, the intellectual catalyst leading to the physical act of consuming the alcohol.

The *Vibhanga* states that even as little as a drop the size of a dewdrop on the tip of a blade of grass is enough to constitute a violation. So, having even a small glass of wine, even if it does not make one drunk, is a transgression. In addition, the number of offenses involved is determined by the number of separate sips, so each separate sip would count as an offense. There is no offense if alcohol or intoxicants are used for medical reasons, such as homeopathic tinctures, or for cooking to add flavor, as the alcohol would evaporate during the cooking.

The Intensity / Severity of Violation

There is no gradation of moral weight given to this precept.

The Purpose of the Precept

Unlike the previous four precepts which deal with our relationship to the rest of society, this precept deals with a person's relationship with himself, that is, with his own mind and body. Taking intoxicants can influence the way in which we interact with others. We might normally be restrained, but under the influence of intoxicants, we might lose self-control, become heedless and engage in unethical acts such as killing, stealing, adultery and lying. Under the influence of intoxicants we say and do things that we would not normally say or do, and these actions often cause many difficulties in our relationships. In addition, most criminal actions are done while under the influence of intoxicants. Traffic accidents due to drunk driving can harm ourselves and others. If someone is killed due to our carelessness caused by drunk driving, we feel great remorse for the rest of our lives. Alcoholism in families

often leads to domestic abuse and gambling, ultimately destroying family harmony. By abstaining from intoxicants, we protect ourselves from heedlessness, and the misfortunes resulting from it, such as loss of wealth, quarrels, shameless conduct, negligence, and we protect the well-being of family and society.

Quotes from Scriptures

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, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and 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, will never be open to suspicion, and is unfaulted by knowledgeable contemplatives and priests. And this is the eighth reward of merit, reward of skillfulness, nourishment of happiness, celestial, resulting in happiness, leading to heaven, leading to what is desirable, pleasurable and appealing (AN8.39)

Fifth Mindfulness Training by Thich Nhat Hanh

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 ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and

in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.

The Buddha only mentioned alcohol, but it is wise to understand this precept in broader terms and relate it to our contemporary world where many people are intoxicated physically and mentally. Although the Buddha did not speak about television, the Internet and print media, we need to be more mindful of what we take into our body and mind.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FIFTH PRECEPT

Can I take the Fifth Mindfulness Training (the Fifth Precept), and still drink an occasional glass of wine or beer with dinner?

(taken from Thich Nhat Hanh, For a Future to be Possible, 2007, Appendix 1, p109-110)

Thay [Thich] Nhat Hanh advises us not to drink any alcohol, if possible. If you still have a strong inclination to drink, please do so mindfully. Look deeply into the conditions of your liver, your heart, and the fact that humankind is wasting a lot of grain and fruit making alcohol instead of feeding other humans. Meditating in this way will lead us to feeling uncomfortable when drinking any amount of alcohol.

If you are not ready to stop drinking entirely, please take the first four mindfulness trainings and try to drink mindfully until you are ready to stop. Thay [Thich] Nhat Hanh advises those who take the Fifth Mindfulness Training [Fifth Precepts] not to drink at all, even one glass of wine or beer a week. French authorities advise their citizens that one glass of alcohol is okay, but that three is saying hello to the damage that an accident can cause. But how can you have a second or third glass if you have not had the first?

Under normal conditions, we may drink one or two glasses of wine from time to time. But in moments of despair, we might have five, six, or seven glasses in order to forget our sorrows. This can lead to alcohol abuse. A lovely grandmother on a retreat in England asked this question, and I told her, “You are a moderate drinker, but are you sure all your sons,

daughters, and grandchildren are like you? If during one or two moments of despair they gradually drink more and more and become alcoholic and destroy themselves physically and mentally, who would be responsible? Haven't you participated partly in that process? If you keep the Fifth Mindfulness Training now, you may be the torch for the future generations of your grandchildren. You keep the mindfulness trainings as a bodhisattva and not as an order that you are forced to obey."

In my work, I take clients out to eat often and at these times, everyone drinks. Taking the precept not to drink is not practical for me. Also, my family has a drink with dinner and my friends drink at parties. If I do not join them in drinking, they will think I am strange, that I am being unnecessarily prudish, or that I am pretending to be morally superior. They may even think poorly of Buddhism if I do not join in what "normal" people do.

An Australian devotee once told me she used to drink with her mum. According to her, it is part of Australian culture to drink; to drink alone means you are alcoholic, but drinking with someone is just being sociable.

Are we being unnecessarily prudish if we do not join in what "normal" people do? Is what "normal" people do always correct? In the *Kalama Sutta*, the Buddha advised us not to follow blindly what others do, but to use our wisdom to inquire. Only when we are satisfied that an action benefits us and others, then we proceed.

A sister nun of mine was studying in a university in Japan. Once she was invited to attend a function in her faculty, where she was offered a glass of wine by her professor. She would have appeared rude if she did not accept the offer, but she courageously decided to do so politely anyway. She confidently told her professor that since her ordination, she had promised the Buddha that she would not drink from then on. Her professor not only did not feel offended, he was very impressed by her courage and honesty, and got her a cup of fruit juice instead.

As the world globalises, there is greater acceptance and understanding of other cultures and behavioural systems. We need to learn to express our choice in a polite way. If we are clear about why we are upholding the precepts and of what we are doing, we can speak with confidence and sincerity. Our friends will accept our differences and respect the choices we make.

FREQUENTLY
ASKED
QUESTIONS
REGARDING
THE TAKING OF
THE PRECEPTS

Can we observe the Precepts without going through the official ceremony?

Some people say that they are already keeping the precepts and are spiritual, and feel there is no need to go through the official ceremony. In fact, they argue that they are better than those who go through it but do not uphold the precepts.

The ceremony is a time when we can express our faith, confidence and commitment. By participating in the ceremony, we express our determination and commitment to observe these Five Precepts in our daily life. It means we have strong faith in these Five Precepts as a framework for us to transform our life; without faith, it will be difficult to observe/practise the Precepts. In the ceremony, we publicly accept the Five Precepts with a strong intention to use them as a guideline for living an ethical life. In other words, we are committed to live a virtuous life, with dignity and mindfulness, to be in harmony with all beings around us; in short, to bring our actions into harmony with our spiritual ideals.

The Pali word *Sila* (morality) has the connotation of virtue, skillfulness, nobleness and wholesomeness. By taking part in the official precepts ceremony, we formally take on the qualities of *Sila* in the presence of a spiritual mentor, the Buddha, bodhisattvas, and arahants. Therefore there are only benefits and no harm in participating in the precept ceremony when we are intent on living virtuously.

The Buddhist Five Precepts provide a wholesome foundation for personal and social growth, by providing practical and universal principles for a good life and the cultivation of virtues. It is based on the principle of non-harming and has the effect

of harmonising our true interest for the well-being of others, and the universal laws. Action taken without regard for ethical principles leads to relationships scarred by competitiveness, exploitation, and aggression. In contrast, actions guided by ethical principles promote harmony among people, bringing about peace, cooperation and mutual respect.

The Buddhist Five Precepts are not commandments imposed by force; rather, they are a course of training that we take on willingly. They are not taken to please a supreme being, but for our own cultivation. The Five Precepts function as the core training in moral discipline and form an integral part of a Buddhist's life. They are used to help us become better people and are not to be taken as a burden we feel compelled to shoulder. The upholding of the precepts includes recitation of the precepts daily, mindfulness, self-discipline and reflection. It requires a high level of sincerity, honesty and inner discipline.

How can the Buddhist Five Precepts be liberating when one is forbidden to do certain things after taking the precepts?

The Buddhist Five Precepts form a framework which allows us to take care of ourselves, as well as the society. It prevents us from creating problems for ourselves and others, and guides us in doing what is beneficial. It provides a path through which we learn to live in harmony, with honesty, strength and dignity, which will then bring happiness to ourselves and others, and ultimately lead us to liberation.

We need to ask ourselves what we mean by freedom and liberation. Society tends to define freedom as the ability to do

what we want, and say whatever we think and feel. Actually, this sort of freedom is an illusion. The actions we do to get what we want are often motivated by disturbing emotions, which in turn are often driven by external or environmental forces. These forces can be social, political or economic in nature, for example, peer and societal pressures, and media influences. Such forces create great feelings of inadequacy and an exaggerated need for acceptance from others. To compensate, we try to add “value” to our lives through material acquisitions or changing our behaviour in ways that are often against our natural or true feelings. We conform to what we believe to be others’ expectations so that we will be seen as the individual we want to be. We are not really free when our decisions mindlessly comply with these external factors. We are not free if our actions are driven by our wants and desires! Instead, we become a slave to our desires.

From the Buddhist perspective, true freedom is only attained when we transform our desire, hatred and ignorance into compassion, love and wisdom. Morality and the Five Precepts guide our speech and action; meditation helps us develop the awareness of our mental attitudes and how external forces influence our feelings and motivate us to act. When we are able to uproot our three “poisonous roots” – greed, ill-will, and ignorance – we can then be in control of our mind, speech and action, and not be driven by external factors or by internal emotions or attachments. It is only then, can we claim to be truly free and liberated.

What should I do when I violate a precept?

Some people worry too much over the violation of precepts, as if it were something fatal. The fear of violation is so great that they dare not take the precepts. Some think that they will take the precepts only when there is no possibility of violating them. The reality is that we may break the precepts. No one is perfect when he/she just begins to observe the precepts and even after some time of upholding the precepts, faults may occur. In fact, it is because we cannot keep the precepts perfectly that we need to take and keep them. They are a tool for us to develop our mindfulness and to prevent us from doing unwholesome actions. Hence, the precepts should be understood as a tool to train ourselves.

When we violate the precepts, the best thing to do is to sincerely and truthfully confess to the Buddha by imagining the Buddha in front of you. Sincerely acknowledge the transgression and say, “I am aware that I violated the precepts of [.....], “I know it is not beneficial to [.....].”

Next, reflect on how and why the transgression arose. Was it due to lack of mindfulness? Greed? Anger? Ignorance? Carelessness? Then make a determined decision not to do the action again.

In examining our actions and intentions in this way, we are constantly refining them. In the past, we may have used to do many harmful actions, were unaware of them or did not care. Now, we are aware of them, regret them and are motivated not to do them again. This helps us to develop our mindfulness and work against our three “poisonous” attitudes of attachment, ill-will, and ignorance.

Do not feel guilty over transgressions. Rather, regret them, learn from them, and be strongly determined to change. Our negative habitual energy is strong and causes us to violate the precepts. The fact that we are aware of our transgression and making an effort to change, will certainly decrease that negative habitual energy.

We need to keep in mind that upholding the precepts is a constant transformation of ourselves. We need to be patient and keep working to improve by saying to ourselves each time we confess, “From now on, I will try to do better.”

CONCLUSION

In this one precious life of ours, we all want happiness. So we need to act harmoniously and with care towards ourselves and the environment around us. It is therefore useful to have guidelines to work with. The Buddhist Five Precepts provide a good framework for us to live by.

By abstaining from killing, all beings will be safe around us and peace in the world will be enhanced. By abstaining from stealing, all beings can be secure around us, and harmony and generosity in society will grow. By abstaining from sexual misconduct, all beings will be able to relate to us honestly and with trust, and mutual respect amongst people will follow. By abstaining from lying, all beings can trust our words, and friendship among all will bloom. By abstaining from intoxicating drinks and drugs, our mindfulness and introspective awareness will develop, our minds will be clearer, and our actions more considerate. As we progress with these precepts, we will discover that they are universal ethics that apply to all human beings regardless of race or religion.

In the process of upholding the precepts, we might constantly make the same mistakes. Be patient. We can forgive ourselves and make reparations for our negative acts. By and by, ethics and virtue will become an intrinsic part of us, and we will be able to live at peace and at ease. This harmony within

ourselves will extend to that of those around us. This will not only lead us to happiness in this life, but also plant the seeds of happiness in our future lives.

If you have further questions pertaining to the Buddhist Five Precepts, please post them on our website **ethics.buddhist.sg**, where this book is also available for download.

APPENDIX 1

HOW TO GET RID OF INSECTS WITHOUT KILLING THEM

(Taken from Aggacitta Bhikkhu, The Importance of Being Morally Virtuous, p84-85)

Ants don't like sour things

- To keep them away, squeeze fresh lemon juice on where they'll be passing, and also wipe the lemon slices on that surface.

Cockroaches don't like fragrance and cucumber

- Put fragrant things like pandan leaves, cakes of soap, etc. in a cupboard to keep out cockroaches. After several days, they will be all gone and your cupboard will even smell good.
- Put pieces of cucumber in places you want to be cockroach-free.

Mosquitoes don't like lemon grass, spice, orange light, etc.

- Plant lemon grass (citronella grass, serai wangi, geranium grass) near doors and windows in the garden or in pots to keep them away.

- Bury garlic under flowerbeds, clear dead leaves, and keep the area clean.
- Hang up a bunch of spring onions, and use gauze to wrap up the green sections of the onions.
- Put up orange coloured curtains, or orange plastic wrap around a bulb. Mosquitoes are afraid of orange light.
- Putting a pot of lilies, milans, roses, or evening primroses in your room will work too.
- Dissolve Vitamin C and B2 in water, wipe the water on your skin, and the scent will drive the mosquitoes away.

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BUDDHIST CENTRES IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD (MALAYSIA)

We invite you to find out more about Buddhism and Buddhist activities around Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and other states in Malaysia. If you wish to read about Buddhist news around the world, please log on to the Buddhist Channel at www.buddhistchannel.tv

You may also wish to visit one of the Buddhist Centres nearest to you listed here. Many of them have Sunday Schools for children, youth sections, family-oriented activities, regular talks on Buddhism, fellowship gatherings and trips and meditation classes.

KUALA LUMPUR:

Buddhist Maha Vihara

Jalan Berhala, Brickfields

Web: www.buddhistmahavihara.com

Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia

Jalan Berhala, Brickfields

Web: www.bmsm.org.my

Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple

Siri Jayanthi Association, Jalan Tujuh, Sentul Pasar

Web: www.mybuddha.my

SELANGOR:

Bandar Utama Buddhist Society (BUBS)

Uttama Bodhi Vihara

Jalan BU 3/1 Bandar Utama, Petaling Jaya

Web: www.bubsoc.org

Buddhist Gem Fellowship (BGF)

Jalan 19/3 Petaling Jaya

Web: www.bgf.org.my

Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia (Kajang Branch)

Jalan Reko, Kajang

Email: chookkajoo@gmail.com, pailing@gmail.com

Web: <http://bmsmkajang.my>

Chempaka Buddhist Lodge

Taman SEA, Petaling Jaya
Email: cbnpj@streamyx.com
Web: www.chempaka.org.my

Kinrara Metta Buddhist Society

Taman Kinrara, Puchong
Web: www.kinrarametta.org

Kota Kemuning Buddhist Centre (KKBC)

Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia
(Shah Alam Branch)
Kota Kemuning, Shah Alam
Web: <http://kkbc-info.blogspot.com>

Klang & Coast Buddhist Association

KM 2, Persiaran Tengku Ampuan Rahimah, Klang
Tel: 012 695 1817

Maha Karuna Buddhist Society (Subang 2)

Bandar Pinggiran Subang, Shah Alam
Web: www.mahakaruna.org.my

Mudita Buddhist Society

25-B Jalan Stesen, Klang
Tel: 012 213 5602, 016 683 9399

Nalanda Buddhist Society

Taman Sri Serdang, Seri Kembangan
Web: www.nalanda.org.my

Sg Long Buddhist Society

Bandar Sungai Long, Kajang
Web: <http://slbuddhists.org>

Shah Alam Buddhist Society (SABS)

Bukit Rimau, Shah Alam.
Web: www.sabs.org.my

Subang Jaya Buddhist Association

Jalan Kewajipan SS13, Subang Jaya
Web: www.sjba.org

Selangor Buddhist Vipassana Meditation Society

Jalan SS3/37, Petaling Jaya
Email: sbvms@yahoo.com

Putra Heights Buddhist Society

Jalan USJ21/6, UEP Subang Jaya
Web: <http://putraHBS.multiply.com>

Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia

Taman Mayang, Petaling Jaya
Web: www.ybam.org.my

KEDAH:

Buddhist Hermitage Centre - Lunas

Kampung Seberang Sungai, Lunas

Email: [lakhaw52@streamyx.com](mailto: lakhaw52@streamyx.com)

KELANTAN:

Persatuan Buddha Wakaf Bharu

Wat Pracacinaram, Kampung Kulim

Wakaf Bharu

Web: <http://pbwb.tripod.com>

MELAKA:

Seck Kia Eenh Buddhist Temple

Jalan Gajah Berang

Web: www.ske.org.my

PENANG:

Mahindarama Buddhist Temple

Kampar Road

Web: www.mahindarama.com

PERAK:

Persatuan Buddhist Hilir Perak

Jalan Jawa, Teluk Intan

Web: <http://welcome.to/pbhp.htm>

Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

Taiping Insight Meditation Society

Medan Taiping, Taiping

Web: www.sasanarakkha.org

PAHANG:

Kuantan Buddhist Association

c/o Pahang Buddhist Association

Jalan Bukit Ubi, Kuantan

Tel: (09) 573 9644, 9633, 012 9289 753

TERENGGANU:

Terengganu Buddhist Association

80-81 Jalan Syed Zain, Kuala Terengganu

Tel: (09) 622 2826

Suttarama Buddhist Centre

Jalan Air Jernih, Kuala Terengganu

Email: suttarama@yahoo.com

JOHOR:

Metta Lodge Buddhist Centre

Taman Melodies, Johor Bharu

Web: <http://mettabcj.googlepages.com>

Kota Tinggi Buddhist Society

Taman Sri Lallang, Kota Tinggi

Email: ktbs@tm.net.my

SARAWAK:

Kuching Dhamma Vijaya Buddhist Centre

Tingkat 1, No 249 Lot 2581

Central Park Commercial Centre, Kuching

Tel: 016 869 6149, 012 893 7836

Kuching Buddhist Society

Jalan Laksama Cheng Ho, Kuching

Web: <http://kbs.cdc.net.my>

SABAH:

Sabah Buddhist Association

Lot 10, Block I, Sinsuran Complex

Kota Kinabalu

Tel: (088) 255376

The Sandakan (Sabah) Buddhist Mission

Block F Old Slipway, Sandakan

Tel: (089) 214061, (089) 612939

Email: sknbudd@tm.net.my

BUDDHIST BOOKSTORES AND LIBRARIES:

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Block D9, Jalan PJU 1A/46

Dana 1 Commercial Centre, Petaling Jaya Selangor

Web: www.sukhihotu.com

Sukhi Hotu (Penang)

Jalan Gottlieb, Penang

Web: www.sukhihotu.com

Dhamma Reading Room

Jalan 19/3, Petaling Jaya Selangor

Web: <http://drrbuddhistlibrary.blogspot.com>

Ven. Seck Kim Seng Memorial Library

Jalan Hang Jebat, Melaka

Tel: 06-286 4149

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Faxun (aka Bhikkhuni Shin)

The precepts are an incredible blessing in our lives; they prevent us from doing what we have already decided we don't want to do.

In this book, you will find a clear explanation of each precept and the benefits of living in accordance with it. Please think deeply about what you read and apply it to your own life experiences so that you understand yourself better. Use your mind of wisdom and compassion to contemplate your actions so that instead of living with the motivation “I want what I want when I want it, and it doesn't matter what I do to get it,” you live with the intention “My life depends on the kind efforts of others. Therefore I want to reciprocate their kindness by not harming them. Furthermore, because I care about myself, I want to put the seeds of positive karma, not destructive karma, in my mindstream.”

Then experience the joy that comes from living an ethical life...

From the Foreword by Venerable Thubten Chodron,
Sravasti Abbey, 2011

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