



## BUDDHIST FIVE PRECEPTS: NECESSITY AND BENEFITS

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**Paper Received On:** 21 JULY 2021

**Peer Reviewed On:** 31 JULY 2021

**Published On:** 1 SEPT 2021



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### Introduction

*Five Precepts* are the minimal ethical code binding on the Buddhist laity, they are administered regularly by the monks to the lay disciples at almost every service and ceremony, following immediately upon the giving of the three refuges. They are also undertaken afresh each day by earnest lay Buddhists as part of their daily recitation.

The precepts function as the core of the training in moral discipline. They are intended to produce, through methodical practice, that inner purity of will and motivation, which comes to expression as virtuous bodily and verbal conduct. Hence the equivalent term for precept, *sikkhāpada*, which means literally “factor of training” that is, a factor of the training in moral discipline.

The precepts engender virtuous dispositions by a process involving the substitution of opposites. The actions prohibited by the precepts – killing, stealing, adultery, etc., are all motivated by unwholesome mental factors called in Buddhist terminology the “defilements” (*kilesa*). By engaging in these actions knowingly and willingly we reinforce the grip of the defilements upon the mind to the point where they become our dominant traits. But when we take up the training by observing the precepts, we then put a brake upon the current of unwholesome mental “factors. There then takes place a process of “factor substitution” whereby the defilements are replaced by wholesome states which become increasingly more deeply ingrained as we go on with the training.

### **Role of Five Precepts**

All societies have some basic rules that define what a good conduct is and what kind of conduct should be avoided. In a Buddhist society, there are five moral precepts for lay people. These are mainly intended to avoid harming others with a good will. It also suggests indirectly doing well towards others. The *Five Precepts* are also called ‘*Garu-dhamma sīla* - the Weighty Precepts’ or ‘*Nicca-sīla* - the Ever-to-be-observed Precepts". They are as follows:

- 1) Abstaining from killing living beings. (*Pānātipātā veramani sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi.*)
- 2) Abstaining from stealing. (*Adinnādānā veramani sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi*)
- 3) Abstaining from unlawful sexual misconduct. (*Kāmesu micchācārā veramani sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi*)
- 4) Abstaining from speaking lies or untruths. (*Musāvādā veramani sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi*)
- 5) Abstaining from use of intoxicants. (*Surāmerayamajja pamādatthānāveramanisikkhāpadam samādiyāmi*)

If a man wants to build up & successful healthy and happy life, it must be based on sound moral principles such as the *Five Precepts*. In our daily life, according to the Buddhist Ethics, a man is morally good if he observes the *Five Precepts*. It is obvious that observance of the *Five Precepts* is beneficial to himself as well as to the society.

If everyone observes the precept of abstention from killing, the world will be a safer place to live. This precept safeguards the basic human rights to live safely.

The second precept assures the safety of personal property of other members of the society.

The third precept protects the family from unhappy family life. The unity and strength of the society depends on unity and strength of each family.

The fourth precept covers all forms of abuse of speech such as lying, harsh speech and vulgar talks. A person who is accustomed to telling lies is capable of any other crimes. Proper use of speech brings about friendship, harmony, mutual understanding and cooperation.

In addition, intoxicants cause both moral and physical damage to the person who takes them. It blunts the intellect and prevents the realization of truths as he cannot see as they really are.

The observance of the *Five Precepts* brings benefit to oneself and to the society. These precepts are the moral basis on which a decent and civilized society can be built. These precepts are the basis for the universal ethical system. We should observe five moral precepts steadfastly just as one keeps his lower garment tightly. A good Buddhist should remind himself to follow the *Five Precepts* daily. The *Five Precepts* are the basic practice in Buddhism. The precepts are also an indispensable basis for people who wish to cultivate their minds.

Besides understanding the *Five Precepts* merely as a set of rules of abstention, a Buddhist should remind himself that which actions are what we ought to do. It means that we should cultivate loving kindness, renunciation of egoistic thoughts and actions, contentment, truthfulness, and mindfulness, etc. When a person observes the first precept of not killing, he controls his hatred and cultivates loving kindness. With the practice of the second precept, he controls his greed and cultivates renunciation or non-attachment. He controls sensual lust and cultivate contentment with the observation of the third precept.

By the fourth precept, the abstinence of false speech is practiced and truthfulness is cultivated. He abstains from unwholesome mental excitement and develops mindfulness through the observance of the fifth precept.

By observing the *Five Precepts*, not only one cultivates moral strength but also performs the highest service to fellow beings. The *Five Precepts* may be considered as two levels. First, it enables men to live together in civilized communities with mutual trust and respect. Second, it is the starting point for the spiritual journey towards liberation.

These precepts are unlike commandments imposed by divine God. Precepts are accepted voluntarily by person himself. Understanding and sympathizing others' feeling with that of oneself, rather than fear of punishment, is the reason for following the precepts. Breaking the precepts is unwholesome because it is unjust and blameworthy and also it produces painful results.

Observing *pañcasīla* (*Five Precepts*) will bring about good advantages as follows:

- 1) Because of UN forgetfulness much wealth will be obtained.
- 2) Good fame will be obtained.
- 3) He can approach the audience bravely.
- 4) He dies without wavering.
- 5) After timely death he attains to celestial abode and enjoys happiness.

By breaking the *Five Precepts* will bring about bad results as follows:

- 1) His name is always received with scorn and contempt.
- 2) He is always forgetful and consequently his progress in life is either retarded or ceases altogether.
- 3) When he has to face a crowd, he is either down-cast or afraid of the crowd.
- 4) When close to death he is either confused or cries out for help.
- 5) After death can never be reborn a happy abode.

The aim of the precepts is to eliminate crude passions that are express through thought, words, and deeds. There are socially advantages and also may be disadvantages in observing the *Five Precepts*.

### **Preparation for Taking Precepts and its Necessity and Benefits**

In Buddhist tradition, the taking precept is preceded by going for refuge. It is done in a beautiful traditional way prescribed by the elders. First, a Buddhist may approach a monk respectfully and follow the monk's instruction for the going for refuge and taking precepts. He bows to a monk and makes an apology in front of the monk. Then he requests the monk to guide him in going for refuge and taking precepts. The daily undertaking of the refuges is best done in a shrine room or before Buddha-image.

“The going for refuge (*saranagamana*) and the undertaking of the *FivePrecepts* (*pañcasīlasamādāna*) are also the first two steps in the process of becoming a lay disciple of the Buddha.”

The door of entrance to the teaching of the Buddha is the going for refuge to the Triple Gem - that is, to the Buddha, to the *Dhamma* and to the *Samgha*. From ancient times to the present the going for refuge has functioned as:

I go to the Buddha for refuge. (*Buddhaṃsaraṇaṃgacchāmi*)

I go to the Dhamma for refuge. (*Dhammaṃsaraṇaṃgacchāmi*)

I go to the Sangha for refuge. (*Samghaṃsaraṇaṃgacchāmi*)

This process of going for refuge is intended to protect us from harm and danger. In this process of going for refuge, the mental act of going for refuge is very essential. *Saddhā* (confidence, deep faith) is necessary.

After taking refuge Triple Gems, we have to undertake *Five Precepts* with a firm determination to follow those rules as a guide to right action. The undertaking of the precepts is not a one-short affair to be done. But the *Five Precepts* should be undertaken repeatedly, preferably on a daily basis. The methods of going for refuge divided into two general kinds:

the superior or supra-mundane going for refuge and the common or mundane going for refuge.

Going for refuge Triple Gems and taking *Five Precepts* can build up a foundation for lay person to be a Buddhist. After having built the strong foundation in his heart, a Buddhist proceed to undertake the *Five Precepts* through which he controls his verbal, bodily and mental attitudes so that he could mold himself to be free from all defilements and attain final liberation. Since the *Five Precepts* are moral principles for all Buddhist and non-Buddhist, it is necessary to observe and undertake them every moment. By undertaking the precepts, we can get the benefits or oneself and also to others.

However, the *Five Precepts* should be understood in terms of both action and the result. Breaking the precepts is unwholesome because it is unjust and blameworthy and also it produces painful result.

Here the result is not the immediate outcome of what has been done but it is effect produced as the result of the intentional action.

Buddha's teachings are not only for knowledge but also for self-Practice & (Implementation).

The aim of this paper is to show how the undertaking *Five Precepts* are important for lay people irrespective of Buddhist or non-Buddhists. Hopefully, the aim is fulfilled by the attempt.

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