

- **{Graphic}** Gatha on Opening the Sutra
 - The Dharma, incomparably profound and minutely subtle, is rarely encountered, even in hundreds of thousands of millions of ages. Now we see this, hear this, receive and maintain this. May we completely realize the Tathagata's true meaning. [bell]

{Graphic} Definitions

Precept [Webster]- Noun

{Graphic} 1. a commandment or direction meant as a rule of action or conduct

{Graphic} 2. a rule of moral conduct; maxim

{Graphic} Ethics versus morality

Both terms are used to distinguish the difference between 'right' and 'wrong' or 'good' and 'bad'. Oftentimes, the terms are used almost interchangeably.

{Graphic} Morality - A person's or society's idea of what is right or wrong, especially in regard to a person's behavior.

In areas where Christianity is dominant, morality is often used in the sense of 'moral theology', i.e. the principals that 'determine the quality of human behavior in the light of Christian revelation'

Categories that some authorities have identified are:

Bravery, Fairness, Deference to authority, Helping the group, Loving your family, Returning favors, Respecting others' property.

{Graphic} Ethics - Refers to community values more than personal values. They are what's "moral" as determined by a community.

The term is often used in the fields of business, law, or medicine where they form the personal code of conduct working in these fields.

{Graphic} Perhaps the best description is that ethical actions result from the application of moral principles.

{Graphic} What are the precepts?

- To answer this requires first defining sīla
 - **{Graphic}** Sīla is the Pali term for morality or ethical behavior (right conduct)
 - **{Graphic}** It's the wholehearted commitment to what is wholesome.
 - **{Graphic}** Right "performance" (caritta), and right "avoidance" (varitta) are two essential aspects of sīla
 - Sīla as performance (caritta) is the right conduct one should follow.
 - Sīla as avoidance (varitta) is abstaining from evil.
- **{Graphic}** Depending on which precepts you're talking about, they're either a proper subset of sīla, or equal to sīla

{Graphic} Where do the precepts fit in the Buddhist teachings?

- The Six Paramitas (Perfections)

- The Paramitas are described as ‘perfections (paramī) of character necessary to achieve enlightenment’ or ‘“bases of training” for those looking to achieve enlightenment’
- **{Graphic}** Mahayana texts list them as follows, with the second being sīla:
 - Dāna pāramitā: generosity, giving of oneself
 - Śīla pāramitā: virtue, morality, discipline, proper conduct
 - Kṣānti pāramitā: patience, tolerance, forbearance, acceptance, endurance
 - Vīrya pāramitā: energy, diligence, vigour, effort
 - Dhyāna pāramitā: one-pointed concentration, contemplation
 - Prajñā pāramitā: wisdom, insight
- **{Graphic}** As part of the Four Noble Truths/Eightfold Path
 - The Four Noble Truths (FNT)
 - The first teaching of the Buddha
 - In the Mahayana tradition they show how we can live in the everyday world
 - They are 4 nouns - The truth, the cause, the end, the path.
 - **The truth of suffering:** birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.
 - **The origin of suffering:** it is this craving [taṇhā, "thirst"] which leads to re-becoming, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for becoming, craving for disbecoming.
 - **The cessation of suffering:** it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it.
 - **The way leading to the cessation of suffering:** it is this noble eightfold path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.
 - **{Graphic}** The Fourth Noble Truth is the Noble Eightfold Path
 - The Noble Eightfold Path (EFP)
 - General
 - The EFP is defined as 8 verbs, all working to bring about the end of suffering
 - Sammā (Pali) - commonly thought of as properly, rightly, thoroughly,
 - But also means ‘to go along with’, or ‘go together with’, or ‘unite’.
 - The term path implies movement – these are things we continually do and they all work together to form a way of living.
 - **{Graphic}** The groups
 - The moral virtue group (śīla) - Living harmoniously with others
 - The meditation group (samādhi) - Training the mind to develop clarity and insight into the nature of reality
 - The wisdom group (prajñā or paññā) – Understanding why this path should be followed and realizing wisdom as the culmination of the path.
 - **{Graphic}** Chart
 - **{Graphic}** The elements’ order
 - When viewed as three divisions, śīla (virtuous living) is first, and through samadhi we achieve culminating insight
 - When viewed as eight factors, view is primary because it is needed to understand why the path should be followed

{Graphic} The Five Precepts (or the Five Rules of Training)

- Pañcasīla, derived from Pali or Sanskrit pañca (five) and sīla (discipline)
 - In this case sīla is used as discipline, not morality
- The most important system of morality for Buddhist lay people
- **{Graphic}** They constitute the minimal standard of Buddhist morality.

- They are a proper subset of the Sila group of the noble Eightfold Path (speech, action, livelihood)
 - i.e. They are not all of that group
- Following them generate merit and create good karma
- They contribute to a harmonious society – they are the interface between the individual and society
- **{Graphic}** These rules are not philosophical – they are pragmatic.
 - Merriam-Webster formally describes pragmatic as:
 - ‘Dealing with the problems that exist in a specific situation in a reasonable and logical way instead of depending on ideas and theories’

{Graphic} They are often put in the following form, in part to emphasize that they are not externally imposed, but are rules that one adopts and skillfully employs:

- **{Graphic}** I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking life;
- I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking what is not given;
- I undertake the training rule to abstain from sensual misconduct;
- I undertake the training rule to abstain from false speech;
- I undertake the training rule to abstain from liquors, wines, and other intoxicants, which are the basis for heedlessness.

In the Mahayana tradition they are sometimes called the Śrāvakayāna precepts

A yāna is a method of practice in Buddhism.

- Śrāvakayāna - the yāna (method of practice) of the disciples, or listeners.
- Pratyekabuddhayāna – the yāna whereby enlightenment is achieved without the aid of teachers and without teaching others.
- Bodhisattvayāna – the yāna whereby individual enlightenment is forsworn until all beings achieve enlightenment.

{Graphic} History

- They are similar to the Ten commandments in the Abrahamic tradition (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as the Bahá'í Faith, Samaritanism, the Druze Faith, and others) and the ethical codes or rules of propriety in Confucianism known as Li.
- **{Graphic}** Origins in Brahmanism
 - The precepts were part of Brahmanism (which was later a significant influence in the development of Hinduism) before the rise of Buddhism.
 - **{Graphic}** The 1st 4 precepts of the pañcaśīla of the pre-Buddhist Brahmanic priests were almost identical to the Buddhist precepts
 - **{Graphic}** The prohibition on intoxication was new in Buddhism and was based on Appamāda
 - This word is a negation of pamāda, which means "negligent" or "lax."
 - "Heedfulness", "diligence", and "conscientiousness", all captures certain aspects of the word.
 - Appamāda is one of the virtuous mental factors within the Mahayana Abhidharma teachings (Abhidharma-samuccaya ("Compendium of Abhidharma"), a Buddhist text composed by Asaṅga)
 - Śraddhā – faith,
 - Vīrya - energy
 - Hrī - shame at doing evil
 - Apatrāpya - decorum, regard for consequence
 - Alobha - non-attachment

- Adveṣa - non-aggression
- Praśrabdhi - calmness
- Upekṣā - equanimity
- Appamāda - conscientiousness
- Ahimsā - non-injuriousness
- **{Graphic}** Appamāda was also one of the last words of the Tathagata. The full sentence was:
 - “Come now, monks, for I tell you all conditioned things are subject to decay, strive on with heedfulness!”

{Graphic} The Eight Precepts

- Lay precepts that are more similar to monastic precepts
- They are followed on special observance days to give the lay practitioner an impression of what monastic life may be like and to emphasize meditative concentration
- **{Graphic}** The basis of them are the Five Precepts
- **{Graphic}** The additions are:
 - **{Graphic}** I undertake [to observe] the rule of abstinence from taking food at the wrong time
 - **{Graphic}** I undertake [to observe] the rule of abstinence from dancing, music, visiting shows, flowers, make-up, the wearing of ornaments and decorations
 - **{Graphic}** I undertake [to observe] the rule of abstinence from a tall, high sleeping place.

{Graphic} The Ten Precepts (In the Vinaya of many South Asian sects)

- These may be taken by men or women who want to ordain as monks but are too young
- They're observed if they are currently devoted to formal ordination or during breaks in their secular education
- **{Graphic}** They're very similar to the Eight Precepts with the addition of not accepting money

{Graphic} Bodhisattva Precepts (aka the “Ten Great Precepts”)

- These precepts are associated with the bodhisattva vow to save all beings
- The first five are basically the Five Precepts
- The five additional are:
 - Not to broadcast the misdeeds or faults of the Buddhist assembly, nor encourage others to do so.
 - Not to praise oneself and speak ill of others, or encourage others to do so.
 - Not to be stingy, or encourage others to do so.
 - Not to harbor anger or encourage others to be angry.
 - Not to speak ill of the Buddha, the Dharma or the Sangha (lit. the Triple Jewel) or encourage others to do so

Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts (in Sōtō Zen)

- The Three Treasures (aka the Three Refuges or Three Jewels)
 - Taking refuge in the Buddha
 - Taking refuge in the Dharma
 - Taking refuge in the Sangha
- The Three Pure Precepts (aka the Three Root Precepts,)
 - Do not create Evil
 - Practice Good
 - Actualize Good For Others

- The Ten Grave Precepts
 - Respect life – Do not kill
 - Be giving – Do not steal
 - Honor the body – Do not misuse sexuality
 - Manifest truth – Do not lie
 - Proceed clearly – Do not cloud the mind
 - See the perfection – Do not speak of others' errors and faults
 - Realize self and others as one – Do not elevate the self and blame others
 - Give generously – Do not be withholding
 - Actualize harmony – Do not be angry
 - Experience the intimacy of things – Do not defile the Three Treasures

{Graphic} A deeper look at the Fifth Precept

- The first four (regarding killing, stealing, sensual misconduct, and false speech) are in regard to your actions as they affect someone else.
- (Arguably, the above is true of all the precepts except the 5th)
- **{Graphic}** The fifth precept is in regard to your relationship with yourself.
- **{Graphic}** Thich Nhat Hanh and others have expanded this admonition to include avoiding unmindful consumption by paying attention to the Four Kinds of Nutriments. These are:
 - **{Graphic}** Edible foods – Mindfulness of what, how, and why we are eating
 - **{Graphic}** Sense impressions – Let mindfulness guard us from inadvertently feeding the negative seeds in our consciousness
 - **{Graphic}** Volition – Look deeply to ensure that your true volition is for the good of all beings
 - **{Graphic}** Consciousness – Be aware of what you are letting yourself think. To a great extent, you create your own reality – use your consciousness wisely
 - 1997 ‘As Good as It Gets’ quote
 - Carol (Helen Hunt): Do you have any control over how creepy you allow yourself to get?
 - Melvin (Jack Nicholson): Yes I do, as a matter of fact.

A personal anecdote involving the Fifth Precept

My motivation for sharing this is not to proselytize, nor to signal any sort of virtue or lack thereof. It is simply to publicly express my gratitude to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha for the many changes they have inspired in my life.

In my childhood there were a lot of examples of alcohol abuse. Of my immediate family, my father was high functioning, but undoubtedly alcohol dependent. Of my parents’ three siblings, two were alcohol dependent, and in my immediate neighborhood of 8 families or so, two were headed by alcoholics. I really don’t recall any adults who weren’t at least social drinkers. Cocktail parties, happy hours, libations and dividends were what you did to relax and unwind. Drinking was normalized.

When I was a young teenager I started down the dark path toward figuratively becoming a Hungry Ghost. I couldn’t understand then what was happening to me, but I quickly learned that the pain of loneliness and self-loathing was easily masked by alcohol and drugs.

All was not completely dark during this time. I knew that this would pass, and by the time I was 17 it had greatly abated. I continued to get healthier mentally, but I also continued to fall back on the crutch of alcohol. One of my rationales was that I was a good husband, a good father, and made an adequate living, drinking to relax was perfectly normal and wasn't harming anything.

In the following years I stopped deluding myself with the thought that I wasn't harming anything. I felt terrible, and I was setting the same bad example that had been set for me. I knew that my relationship with alcohol had to change.

What was the last bit of impetus needed was provided by repeated readings of the Plum Village's Fifth Precept, specifically this line - "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." Contemplating this made me realize that the life that has been transmitted to me is not mine. There is no me. Instead I am simply the continuation of the fabric of being.