

Berkeley Buddhist Priory Newsletter

May – June 2002

Right Speech; Right Action; Right Livelihood

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(Excerpted from Order of Buddhist Contemplatives' publications on the Eightfold Path)

The three aspects of the Eightfold Path which are concerned with speech, action, and livelihood form a group, known as *Sila*. They form a guide to how to live one's life so as to make every action accord with enlightenment. When we practice *silā*, we train from our outward actions towards inward peace, just as when we practice meditation and mindfulness we train from our inward acts of mind toward outward harmony with the universe. These two approaches complement each other and lead towards a unified Buddhist life. Over the centuries, Zen has taken the various elements originally assigned to the ancient path factors of speech, action, and livelihood, and has developed and reorganized them into sets of precepts. There are a number of ways of expressing these precepts; what follows is but one. While at first glance precepts can appear to be rigid rules of conventional morality, in fact they are guides to liberation. Taken as *descriptions* of enlightened behavior rather than simply as *proscriptions* against evil acts, they lead to the signs of wisdom — charity, tenderness, benevolence, and empathy — rather than to guilt, shame, or self-blame. Those who make a life of right speech, action, and livelihood find that they become more aware of their own spiritual heart; those who ignore them find that a coarsening and closing off occurs, both in their spiritual life and in relationships to other people.

The Three Treasures Precept

The Three Refuges, shared by all Buddhists, are the first and most general precept of all.

- *I take refuge in the Buddha.* I entrust my life to the guidance of both the Buddhas who have appeared in this world and the Buddha Nature within.
- *I take refuge in the Dharma.* I go for direction to the teachings of all those who have walked this Way before me.
- *I take refuge in the Sangha.* I seek the advice and wise counsel of those who share the love of truth and commitment to the Eightfold Path.

When taken together as one ongoing precept, as one unified way of life, the Three Refuges will guide and harmonize our understanding of all of the other precepts. If any one of them is left out, our training is like a stool with only two legs: unstable and sure to fall flat.

The Three Pure Precepts

These offer a means of interpretation for the specific precepts to follow and guidance in situations where no specific precept seems to apply, or where precepts seem to conflict.

- *I will cease from evil.* First and foremost, it is my wish to harm no living thing. I will ask in the innermost place of my heart, “Is what I am about to do a harmful thing, a thing which places any separation between a being and the Unborn? Is it a thing which is to be abstained from, a wrongful thing, an unwise thing?” In one sense, “evil” does not exist: there are only unwise actions, done in ignorance and confusion. I pray that I may not do any such thing, whether to myself, others, or the world.
- *I will do only good.* It is my sincere wish to do only that which accords with the truth. I will ask in the innermost place of my heart, “Is what I am about to do fitting, suitable, a thing to be done? Does it tend towards liberation?” This is the good that goes beyond the opposites of “good” and “evil”.
- *I will do good for others.* I pray that my every act will be of true benefit and that I may never inadvertently create conditions which may lead others to do harm. I will ask in the innermost place of my heart, “Is what I am about to do truly of use? Is it a fit offering? Does it accord with the purification of my heart?”

If we can honestly say that in any matter of importance we have considered carefully these Three Pure Precepts, then we can rest in the knowledge that we have done our best. And that is all which Buddhism ever asks of us. Mistakes will still be made, of course, for we are human. But they will have been made with a pure heart, and in the big perspective, that matters. There are many ways to consult the quiet, still, innermost place of the heart. Each of us must do this honestly, as best we can. There are no formulas, no easy answers. Never trivialize the Three Pure Precepts.

The Ten Great Precepts

These ten are specific guidelines for the Buddhist life, as undertaken by the Zen trainee. When they become our blood and bones, we are a true child of Buddha. When we deliberately ignore any of them, we create a separation between ourselves and the family of Buddha.

- *I will refrain from killing.* Since all beings are one within the Buddha Mind, how could I willingly cut off the life of any creature?
- *I will refrain from stealing.* Since it is my true wish to give up all attachments, how could I willingly grasp after anything which is not freely given?
- *I will refrain from abusing sexuality.* Since physical affection is a deep expression of love, and love is an aspect of the Unborn, how could I willingly debase this sacred love by merely gratifying my desires in a way which uses, harms, betrays, or abuses anyone?

- *I will refrain from speaking untruthfully.* Since my heart's desire is to be one with truth, how could I willingly deceive anyone by any means whatsoever?
- *I will refrain from selling the wine of delusion.* Since clear awareness is the door to enlightenment, how could I willingly hinder the Way for anyone by enticing them into partaking of substances, ideologies, false beliefs, or anything whatsoever which befuddles or intoxicates?
- *I will refrain from speaking against others.* Since it is my wish to live by the compassion within my heart, how could I willingly speak hurtfully or disparagingly about anyone?
- *I will refrain from being proud of myself and belittling others.* Since the false notion of self is the very thing I seek to abandon, how could I willingly inflate it with pride, much less do so through seeking to denigrate others?
- *I will refrain from holding back in giving either Dharma or wealth.* Since charity is the first sign of enlightened action, how could I practice stinginess in any form whatsoever?
- *I will refrain from indulging anger.* Since it is my heart's wish to let the love within it flow forth unboundedly, how could I hold onto and nourish angers and resentments which may arise, much less act openly upon them to cause harm?
- *I will refrain from defaming the Three Treasures.* Since these are my true refuge and the very Way, how could I turn from them myself, much less cause doubt about them to arise in others?

The 48 Less Grave Precepts

Together with the Ten Great Precepts, these form a detailed description of the Bodhisattva's way of life. The complete set of fifty-eight precepts is thus known as the "Bodhisattva Precepts". A full description of these can be found in the book *Buddhist Writings*. Among them are included guides to practicing respect and gratitude, to abstaining from becoming drunk or using drugs, to undertaking a vegetarian diet, to encouraging others in their practice, to finding energy within one's own practice, to caring for others who are ill or in need, to abstaining from possessing or dealing in lethal weapons, to refraining from profiting at the expense of the suffering of other beings, to avoiding negligence with respect to the world and its creatures, to refraining from abuses of power and position, to avoiding unsuitable livelihoods, and to not becoming caught up in distractions.

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Priory News

On Wesak, Buddhists throughout the world commemorate the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha. It is the most spiritually significant day of the Buddhist calendar and it is helpful for Buddhists to join together as a Sangha and express their gratitude and joy for the existence and transmission of the Three Treasures.

On Sunday, May 19, we will have the usual 9:30 am meditation, followed by the Wesak ceremony at 10 am. The Wesak ceremony is a particularly joyous service. The altar is covered with silk flowers, and a statue of the Buddha as a baby stands on the front altar. During the ceremony we pour water over the head of the Buddha, representing the water of compassion abundantly flowing over all beings.

After the ceremony, the Priory will have a Dharma class and the children will gather for their own class. At around 12 pm, we will have a potluck lunch. All family and friends of our Sangha are welcome to come to the potluck and to share in our celebration of the birth of the Buddha. The Priory potlucks provide a wonderful offering of foods, and allow us to deepen our contact and friendships with our fellow members of the Sangha.

Taking the Precepts and Becoming a Buddhist

Three members of the Priory Sangha, Margaret Deem, Jennifer Chinlund and Cathy Ruiz, took the Buddhist Precepts and became lay Buddhists at this March's Keeping of the Ten Precepts Retreat at Shasta Abbey. A deep commitment to follow the Buddha is the lifeblood of the Sangha and we rejoice and are grateful for all who have vowed to be part of the Sangha.

Now the universe rejoices, the earth trembles and the flowers fall. The Bodhisattvas of other worlds ask their Buddha what this means and the Buddha replies that a new disciple has been given the Pure Great Precepts of the Bodhisattvas and been converted to the Truth by the Master who was given the Precepts before in the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha who is the Buddha of this world. The disciple will become a Buddha in the future through this merit therefore the universe rejoices.

From the Ceremony of Receiving the Buddhist Precepts

Memorial for Rosa Centenaro

Rosa, a long-term member of the Priory's Sangha, had died the previous year, on February 26, 2001. In Buddhism, memorials are both ways to share our sadness at our loss and to offer the merit of our training to the departed person. On Sunday, February 24, the Priory Sangha held a memorial ceremony for Rosa. It was good to remember her bright spirit and to have the opportunity to have this service as an offering to Rosa.

With Gratitude

Charity is one of the four wisdoms and demonstrates the Bodhisattva's aspiration. Deep appreciation and gratitude is extended to all those who

contribute their spiritual practice, money, time, energy, and various generous gifts to the Priory. The generosity of the entire Priory Sangha is what makes it possible for the Priory to exist and for the Dharma to be offered.

In recent months, we have been given many generous gifts, including paint, plants, paper goods, tools, fabric, office supplies, computer books, many used books, foam for meditation benches and many other useful items.

Providing monks with food is the traditional offering given when coming to a Buddhist temple, and we appreciate all the generous food offerings we have been given. All the very generous and deeply appreciated donations of food provide most of the needs of the Priory. Rev. Kinrei has become aware that he is allergic to dairy products so please try not to donate foods with dairy in them to the Priory. Also, try to give food without garlic as it is considered an inappropriate food for Buddhist monks. Although we are grateful for any gift of food, the most helpful food donations are prepared meals, soy milk, fruit, tofu, vegetarian “meats” and breakfast cereal. You are always welcome to ask Rev. Kinrei what is currently needed at the Priory.

A Southern Californian Sangha member with a bookstore has offered to try to sell any books that the Priory is given. We encourage Sangha members and friends to donate any unwanted books to the Priory on an ongoing basis. A steady stream of books seems to arrive at the Priory and all of these generous donations are earning a considerable amount of money for the Priory, and we very much appreciate these gifts of books.

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