

Practice Group – Month One

The Five Precepts

‘Not possible is it, Bhikkhus, without having mastered the domain of virtue, to master the domain of concentration. Not possible is it, without having mastered the domain of concentration, to master the domain of wisdom.’ *AN 5:22*

‘The most important thing in the daily life of a person who practises the Dhamma is to keep to the precepts and to care for them more than you care for your life – to maintain them in a way that the Noble Ones would praise. If you don’t have this sort of regard for the precepts, then the vices that run counter to them will become your everyday habits ---

Meditators who see that the breaking of a precept is something trifling and insignificant spoil their entire practice. If you can’t practice even these basic, beginning levels of Dhamma, it will ruin all the qualities you’ll be trying to develop in the later stages of the practice. This is why you have to stick to the precepts as your basic foundation and to keep a lookout for anything in your behaviour that falls short of them. Only then will you be able to benefit from your practice for the sake of eliminating your sufferings with greater and greater precision.’ *From ‘A Basic Order in Life’ in ‘An Unentangled Knowing by Upasika Kee Nanayon*

Though training in moral discipline is listed first among the three groups of practices, it should not be regarded lightly. It is the foundation of the entire path, essential for the success of the other trainings. The Buddha himself frequently urged his disciples to adhere to the rules of discipline, “seeing danger in the slightest fault”. One time, when a monk approached the Buddha and asked for the training in brief, the Buddha told him: “First establish yourself in the starting point of wholesome states, that is, in purified moral discipline and right view. Then, when your moral discipline is purified and your views straight, you should practise the four foundations of mindfulness. ‘*The Noble Eightfold Path*’ p42 by Bhikkhu Bodh

The Buddha’s path consists not only of mindfulness, concentration, and insight practices, but also of virtue, beginning with the five precepts. In fact, the precepts constitute the first step in the path. There is a modern tendency to dismiss the five precepts as Sunday-school rules bound to old cultural norms that no longer apply to modern society, but this misses the role that the Buddha intended for them: as part of a course of therapy for wounded minds. In particular, they are aimed at curing two ailments that underlie low self-esteem: regret and denial. *From ‘The Healing Power of the Precepts’ by Thanissaro Bhikkhu in the collection of essays entitled ‘Noble Strategy’*.

Suggested ways of approaching this month’s focus on the precepts.

1. Take the precepts each morning and review them each evening.
2. Focus on one precept each week.
3. Compare the precepts to other advice from the Buddha e.g. if you have told the truth to keep the fourth precept but that truth caused harm, did you consider ‘Is this true, beneficial, right time and place, do I speak from a mind of goodwill and do I speak gently?’ before speaking.
4. If you find it quite easy to keep the fourth precept, consider including the other aspects of Right Speech i.e. abstaining from harsh speech, divisive speech and idle chatter.
5. When considering the positive precepts, how far should you go with positive actions such as generosity e.g. should you give anything that you have to anyone that asks for it?