

## The Five Precepts

This week's mailings focus on the Five Precepts, the traditional trainings in Virtue that all forms of Buddhism offer.

Traditional version:

1. I undertake the precept to refrain from killing.
2. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given.
3. I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct.
4. I undertake the precept to refrain from false speech.
5. I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.

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From *Pay Attention For Goodness' Sake* by Sylvia Boorstein

[When I lead people in reciting the Precepts at the beginning of retreat] I say, "This is an *amazing* form. As we recite these Precepts together now, I hope you will feel, as I do, how reassuring it is to be in a room full of people and announce, along with everyone else, the equivalent of 'I dedicate myself to goodness'. Do it with your eyes open. Look around. Whether or not we have met before, we are all saying to each other, 'Relax. I am trustworthy.'

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"A contemporary gratitude prayer making the rounds of meditation center bulletin boards reads: 'I am thankful that thus far today I have not had any unkind thoughts or said any harsh words or done anything that I regret. However, now I need to get out of bed and so things may become more difficult'. I am glad to use it as my 'text' for inviting people to recite the Five precepts out loud to themselves in the morning as they begin the work of their day. Maybe we should extend this prayer. We could add, 'And since things will surely become more difficult, and since I want to end the day thankful as well, I intend to:

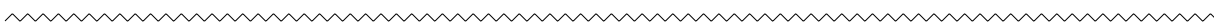
Do no harm to anyone,  
Take nothing that is not freely given,  
Speak truthfully and helpfully,  
Use my sexual energy wisely,  
And keep my mind clear.'

The practice of recitation, even when I am alone, makes a difference to me. I am an out-loud witness to my good intentions, and I count on hearing my voice catch up with me during the day."

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An alternative expression of the Precepts by Caitriona Reed, teacher in the Thich Nhat Hanh tradition:

- Aware of the violence in the world, and of the power of nonviolent resistance, I stand in the presence of the ancestors, the earth and future generations, and vow to cultivate the compassion that seeks to protect each living being.
- Aware of the poverty and greed in the world, and of the intrinsic abundance of the earth, I stand in the presence of the ancestors, the earth and future generations, and vow to cultivate the simplicity, gratitude and generosity that have no limits.
- Aware of the abuse and lovelessness in the world and of the healing that is made possible when we open to love, I stand in the presence of the ancestors, the earth and future generations, and vow to cultivate respect for the beauty and erotic power of our bodies.
- Aware of the falsehood and deception in the world and of the power of living and speaking the truth, I stand in the presence of the ancestors, the earth and future generations, and vow to cultivate the ability to listen; and clarity and integrity in all I communicate by my words and actions.
- Aware of the contamination and desecration of the world, and of my responsibility for life as it manifests through me, I stand in the presence of the ancestors, the earth and future generations, and vow to cultivate discernment and care in what I take into my body and mind.



Reflections:

What is your relationship to the idea of “Precepts” (rules? vows? guidelines? suggestions?)?

What practice of remembering them might be most helpful to you?

You might think of your own wording that truly inspires you.