

2016-10-07 Sila Five Precepts

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SPEAKERS

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In Theravada Buddhism kind of Buddhism were part of, I think it'd be a rare if there was discussion about sila, especially for people who are late people without some reference to the five precepts. And it's possible that the it's very common English to call them the precepts. And the word English word precepts is if you look at the dictionary, it means different kinds of things. And they all can kind of work because their words the way the Pali word for precepts is us, kind of has a rich range of meanings. But one of the, when people formally take the precepts formally, they by the so called what we call precepts, they're not called precepts, then, you know, they chant, you know, they're called trainings. And so the five precepts are called the five trainings. And there's a very different feeling around them. We call them trainings and we call them precepts. And so it's the sikkhā is the Pali word, pañca-sikkhā. There is pañca-sīla, which does the what's most commonly translated as a five precepts that if the people basically with pañca-sīla, but sila doesn't mean precepts is means virtue. So five virtues and, and then sometimes the, the so called Five Precepts are called the five dhammas, pañca-dharma. And, dharma can mean a variety of things. That can mean truth and twisting is pretty good five truths, but it also is a very common word that just means things, five, five things. And I love it that is called the five things because it takes kind of a little bit the sting out of out of it that sometimes there with precepts, like precepts, for some people sounds like commandments, or you have to do something, but call them five precepts five trainings because they're so rather than something we undertake, because because it's either or, like we have, this is what we have to do. It's more like these are opportunities for us to train ourselves to become more ethical to become more wise to become more free to become more compassionate. And so one of the motivations that people have for taking on the precepts living by the precepts is to train themselves to better themselves become a better person in the process. with the understanding that yes, you'll probably fail sometimes probably you'll mess up probably you'll you won't do it. But you know, that just means you have to get up and try again and get back on the horse and try again try again and so the emphasis is more on how we're developing ourselves then looking at this is kind of it I do it right or wrong Am I bad or good person it's my interest to be understand that these are actually powerful ways to become freer more compassionate better ourselves and so to live by the precepts has to live with them as mirrors as teachers mirror so we can look at our behavior. So that precept says don't kill so that means in the past I killed with impunity, I just you know, whatever insects that were I just like you know, did them but now, because I had this precept not to kill I think I'm gonna stop and think about it. And so why am I doing this? Why am I motivated I'm motivated to do this remember when I mean it's still troubles me when I remember it? When I was about 11 I had a friend who liked to take a lighter and burn ence and you know it's awful thing to do. I thought that was awful then but I was just confused by it. I didn't stop them I just like what and then you know, I don't want to kill even an insect. Yeah, I've been known to chase mosquitoes in my house and then catch them and then tell people open the door open the door because like Gecko can dry and then release them outside and as opposed to swatting them so did it use mirrors you know, why did why are we doing

what we're doing? You know, we want to kill and why do the insect why why do we want to do that? what's motivating us? What's happening for us? Are there alternatives?

So they're mirrors they're also teachers, because we see that we want to kill an insect for example, and then we We know we use them to learn about ourselves. You know, this is not coming from compassion now and coming from fear, I'm coming from hostility. And I don't want to, you know, that's not a place I want to come from. I'm not training to train myself in hostility, I'm training myself to come in with compassion. So we would use that as a teacher for ourselves. And then it's also a training and how to be in society in the world. Because one of the ideas in Buddhism is that the five precepts are five gifts that we give others. So we're giving people the gift of safety. And so we do train ourselves in becoming safe in the world, a lot of people don't have safety in our society in our wider world, and to be around someone they feel safe with is quite a for some individuals is like a huge gift. I've known people who've come to Buddhist centers, and said, I've never been in any community, any place in my life ever. Until now that I felt safe. And there's something about, you know, maybe people living an ethical life, basically, or holding each other kindly or compassionately, that gave some people I've known first experience of their life of being safe. So the idea of giving people the gift of safety is a thing guys, peace was a gift, even though you don't want to, you don't want to live by the precepts like you couldn't care less for yourself. But, but you do care what other people are happens to them, and so sort of generosity to them. So in this sense, the precepts are training guidelines. And not rules are their training, who, you know, their training rules, you know, are guides for us how to live our lives. And so this idea of, you know, being punished that Mary was concerned about earlier. You know, it doesn't come so much into play, if you if this is how you're training. And so it's seen as being a voluntary thing you're doing that you've agreed that you want to train this way, you want to develop yourself this way. And I think for some of us, it's more inspiring to train ourselves in goodness, than it is to hold ourselves to a hard by a rule. So we have five, five training guidelines, five trainings that we can develop ourselves with. One is not killing. Turns out that the Pali for not killing, it doesn't say not killing, it says, not striking out at anything. So it's actually a strong, it's actually a stronger kind of training than not killing. It's you don't you don't cause physical harm to anything. So it's a higher standard, I think, then do not killing. And so not causing harm, not not striking, not causing physical harm to anyone. And then the second is, doesn't say not stealing, it's not taking what's not given. And that's also considered to be a higher standard than not stealing, it has not been offered, then don't take it. So make it so it has to be somehow clearly, explicitly or in some clear, implicit way been offered. And then we can we can take it there for monastics there's a rule that if you're in the wild jungles, and there's a fruit on the tree, and clearly no one owns the land, and no one owns a tree. And that, I think, I don't think you can pick the fruit from the tree. But if they fall on the ground, they have to yell out the top of their voice, does this belong to anyone? Just to be 100% sure, then I think that kind of, you know, that kind of extra congra going the extra distance is kind of a nice. So not taking what is not given. And then there's no avoiding sexual misconduct. And I mentioned that in the morning. I like to think of it as avoiding harm based on our sexuality. And that's, you know, a wide, wide range of things that can cause harm with the way we were involved in this world of sex or sexuality in the world of sex. And so be careful not to cause harm. And it's hard to imagine that someone who causes harm through their sexuality is not simultaneously causing harm to themselves. I think generally think that involves some kind of disrespect of others, some kind of objectifying of others, some kind of over overly self,

preoccupation, all of which is harmful, the person who's doing it. So to train and avoiding sexual misconduct is partly to train and freeing ourselves up so that we are Not being motivated by forces which cause ourselves harm as well. And then not lying. And not other than, like, literally it says not using false speech. And for some people, that's the hardest precept to follow. Because, you know, the people, you know, don't quite say the truth, they say kind of the truth, you know, and you know, and

sometimes they say, what they say is not true about themselves. I'm the worst precept breaker ever, you know, I'm this way, you know, I, you know, I can't meditate at all, I'm the last person in IMC to meditate, you know, I'm just a disaster, you know that that kind of self talk is the kind of kind of false speech, that's not helpful. And then, and then the last one about the about the intoxication, no one not involving intoxicating substances. It kind of belongs to a different class, or a different, you know, then the first four, the first four are clearly involved causing harm. And you know, you the first four, are usually something we do in relationship to other people. The fifth precept, you can do alone, you can go, you can drink alcohol, and take drugs in the privacy of your home. And, you know, keep the doors locked, so you're locked in. And so you don't cause any harm you don't, you're not going to cause anybody any harm. And so some people justify their private use of alcohol or drugs, because they're not causing harm. So it's not inherently something that causes harm. It's not inherently motivated by hostility, or the kind of some of those are greed, the kind of things that are motivating, or breaking the first four training rules. They usually one of the ways of justifying or stressing the importance of this precept is that once you're intoxicated, it's too easy to break the other four. And so it's a way of protecting yourself and protecting others from it. And as I said earlier today, I think that when there's so much challenge, so many challenges people have in our society around alcohol and drugs, that when we have a society that condones it, and just has liquor stores, and so many different, you know, so easily accessible to everyone, that if we create a culture where that's kind of expected, some people go to, you know, office parties at work, and work parties, and he's expected you supposed to be drinking, and it feels very, like, he just feels like you're the odd person out if you don't. So, too, you know, and that causes causes harm, people make mistakes, people cause all kinds of things happen. And so to be careful for oneself, someone doesn't do what one does not heatless and doesn't kind of act impulsively and things later, your regret, or whether it's trying to create a better society for the world around us. The training and in one of the trainings is not to to avoid intoxication. Here also, I think, and with a intoxication, it's very important to look at the motivation that we have, or in the consequence we have, because what we're trying to do if we're practitioners of mindfulness or Buddhist practitioners, we're trying to develop a clear mind. And generally, when people take alcohol, they lose their clarity. It's kind of like it's taking us in the opposite direction we want to go. And so if people I know people who put a lot of time into their mindfulness, developing clarity, developing stability of mind, and, and it's just not worth sacrificing what they built up and created to cloud their mind, when they've kind of been all this time to get themselves unclouded to get clear. Some people that, that becomes the most obvious, when they leave a retreat, they spend seven days or two weeks on a retreat. And then, you know, they, their friend picks them up at the retreat center to drive them home and say, let's go to the bar. You know, you know, you know, and, you know, it's like, No, please, you know, I just spent all this time getting clear, and I want to enjoy it now for a while. So these are the training, kind of five trainings. And

they have there's three different aspects to these how to how they're understood or practiced. One is that there are practiced as rules of restraint and that is you avoid doing certain things Some people complain that they're stated negatively, because some people want to have a positive, inspired kind of spirituality. And you know, it's kind of a downer, what can you do all this list you're not supposed to do they're not supposed to do this, you know, you know, they come to Buddhist again. And with all the things not to do. But one of the reasons are, there's a couple of reasons for the wide setting negatively that I can think of. One is that it's really clear, like not to kill, some people have tried to turn the turn around and say positively and say, live with respect and compassion for life. But that's, that's getting ambiguous, what's compassionate, we know what is respect? How do we, you know, then you can kind of, you know, but not to kill is that, you know, much more clear. So there is a training guideline, it's a much clearer one to bump up against, and then to be quest to question and to look at yourself understand what's going on. And there's nothing there, that's harder to fudge around it, like with intoxication, don't intoxicated versus, you know, have a clear mind? Well, you know, I'm pretty clear,

when I have just a little bit, I get clear, actually, it's kind of, you know, so I, this seems to be work well for me. And so anyway, so that's the clarity of that. And it also goes along with a general kind of tendency in early Buddhism, to, as to state the goal of practice in negative terms in terms of what it's not. And some people don't find that inspiring. But I find it very inspiring, because, rather than telling us what we're supposed to be, it's telling us what to avoid. So we can see what's supposed to be can just be, as opposed to I thought, if I'm told that to be compassionate, then I have to kind of get myself into compassion here. If I'm told to avoid hostility, and I figure out how to let go of my hostility, then I'm available, my heart's open, I am available to respond in a way that's appropriate in this circumstance. Maybe the situation doesn't call for compassion, maybe calls for some other kind of response. So rather than pre deciding what the, you know, pre ordaining what the right way of being is, the idea with the, with these negative statements is to help get out of our way. And then once we're out of the way, the open heart can find its way with what needs to happen. So one aspect of the precepts is the precepts of restraint. The other is that they are in fact, expressions of compassion. So we're not just trying to avoid something, but we're trying to come from compassionate place, and to live by the precepts as a compassionate thing to do in our world. Some people might say, it's not enough, because again, they're mostly negative what you don't do. But if we see what goes on in our world around us, you know, if you know, if that's all human beings did was to avoid breaking the five precepts. It would be like a whole different universe that we're living in. And the last aspect to there's three levels or three different aspects of there's a aspect of restraint, the acts, the aspect of compassion. And the third aspect is an inherent virtue. That which is it's not really a matter even of wanting to be compassionate. It just that the precepts are naturally how we live our lives, we're naturally not going to cause harm, we're naturally not going to steal or lie just, we're not capable of it. It's not like we're interested or so that doesn't come out of us. It's like, there's nothing in there's no, there's nothing, that the more those motivations don't exist in us. And so it becomes our character in a sense, rather than actions that we do. So those are kind of the three different levels that some people find helpful. Some people find that the negative one, the avoidance, just easier to understand and the easier to get behind.

And, and then as people train in these, a touch into goodness that's buried that's maybe been buried in our hearts, and that goodness begins to shine and then we start finding ourselves acting from that goodness from compassion. And then as that goodness becomes stronger and stronger, and we act on it and develop it and follow through on it, it becomes our character, it becomes who we are. So five precepts, five training guidelines for five trainings that we do five things that we can take on hand.

So any comments about that? Any questions or reactions? Yes, please continue by here.

I've heard the first one not causing harm not to be restricted to physical killing, like, looks can kill or killing people with your thoughts or your words, which is also very interesting.

I think. So I think it points to another aspect of kind of layers of depth that these precepts can have. That you know, for some people, at some point in their training, you take it at the most literal level don't kill. And then as they become more trained, or their heart becomes more understanding, there's more mindfulness, and more caring, then we realize we don't want to cause any harm to anyone. And so it's understood to be cannot causing harm. I think that you Yeah, so maybe that's all I'll say. Yes.

The precept of the second one to refrain from taking what's not given, is it okay then to ask for things.

I think that for a layperson, it is monastics have rules against asking or making leading statements. You know, you know, a green water bottles are really nice. You know, so monastics are not supposed to even you know, that's even doing it as light people, you know, you know, green water bottles, I'm dream

of green water bottles, you know, even that, you know, it seems to kind of, you know, yucky, right? I think, you know, kind of, you know, to kind of manipulate situation, so I can get a bottle that I don't need or need something. I think it's fine. It's okay. Yeah, yeah, I think it's always fine to ask, but I think a little bit on your motivation, you know, I think I told a story recently of many years ago, a gentleman or this monk had was given a smartphone, one of the first smartphones ever, I think it was smartphone, it was, it was like \$1,000 it was flat, and phones weren't flat and did all this stuff. And I looked at him and said, you know, What, are you you're renunciant you're not supposed to have any, you know, you have no money and, and now you're you're supposed to live basically life of poverty, kind of and I said, What are you doing with a smartphone? And he said, Well, someone gave it to me, it was a gift. And I figured it was okay to keep it as long as if I if anybody asked me for it out, give it to them. So I was tempted, but not so much that I wanted it. I wanted to test I wanted to test him. So I could put, you know, I could have I could have asked him for it. But I think you know, it would have been kind of weird and so, you know, there's, there's you know, there's different kinds of asking, but yeah, if you need you know, if you have a need a real need and I think it's okay to ask. give people the opportunity.

I think it's very funny that this came up because I've been eyeing this box of Jinjin candies, like all day, and I know they're not mine. And I kind of I had this thought like, well, if this were my friend's box, and like I knew this was my friend's box. I would feel no hesitation about saying I'm really having a hankering for a gin gin Can I please have one? Because I would have such confidence that this friend would understand this is clearly or request that there's no part of our relationship that hinges on their acquiescing that like a no is perfectly fine. If they're like, that's my last box. Can I buy you one like, you know, or something. But if it's not someone that I have a relationship with, there might be kind of a feeling of because we don't know each other. There's a necessity to be polite. And then it's like oh, we might I might be like starting a relationship like maybe these are gills and like you know I don't know. Yeah, this

is a rich opportunity right now.

The news to me that we hear candy over there. Here's my take baby steps because people are ready to help me. And I have one of my No thanks. Yeah.

Learning the precepts was really helpful to me as a relatively new stepmother. When my stepson was 910, maybe. And I picked him up from school and was bringing him home. He sit in the backseat, because he's told the backseat. And he said, I've found a watch on the playground. And some people say Finders keepers, losers weepers. What do you think? So obviously, he wasn't quite sure that this was the whole story. And what mmediately popped into my mind was I said, well, the Buddhists have this guideline about not taking what isn't freely offered to us think that other kids are meant to leave his or her watch on the playground for you. And he said, No. And then he said, You take it back to whether we didn't want to be seen as having perhaps stolen it, or whether he just wasn't sure he could follow through, I'll never know. But he gave it to me, and I took it back to the office nice. And I'm still grateful for that teaching, because it helped me

help him think about it a little bit more broadly.

Nice.

thing, it depends on the culture, too, I find that in us in general, people don't steal things, you know, if you put on table and while you're eating lunch, but like in Italy, or Indonesia, you know, you have to

watch for your things, because they will steal from you. You know, it's just, it depends on the culture. Also, and my question is not about that, but about the killing mosquitoes.

When I was in India,

there was well people say there's a an outbreak of dengue fever. So at the airport, Delhi airport, believe it or not, I was just killing mosquitoes around me and killing mosquitoes around my daughter, like, you know, machine guns. And after a while, I was like, oh, shoot, I just kill living beings, you know, I, after all that, and I realized I just broke a preset, and I felt really bad. And, but then, I was thinking, you know, it's either harming the mosquitoes or harming me and my daughter, so I, I justified that I was trying to protect myself and my daughter from getting the dang gay. Oh, whatever. out right.

Yeah. This is this is the kind of evaluation that people do in their lives and the different people will decide different points in the scale. So for example, most people that I know but not everyone, most people I know are content if they have bacterial infection to take antibiotics, which kills you know, millions and millions of living beings, like the bacteria and or kill parasites in our stomach. So those kinds of living beings, okay to kill those. And then and, you know, and some people are happy to, you know, they're, you know, someone's, you know, the butcher is willing to kill a cow or a pig. But, you know, to kill their own pet, you know, like, you know, no way I mean, that's crosses the line, I can't, you know, I can't get, you know, kill my pet. And, you know, So we're so you know, different people have lines you know, so different people have different points net gradation from back area to human beings where they feel like in order to be safe, or take care of myself, I need to kill this, this living being. And so back to so mosquitoes is one, I mean, we have a society around here, sometimes there's a spray in order to protect people from the West Nile virus. And in some places now the Zika virus, and, and I think government is expected to take care of it that way. And we're kind of condoning it. So you know, I probably, you know, if there was a serious mosquito in my home that was going to, you know, really cause serious harm the illness to my kids, I would try to do so I might end up figuring out some way to kill them. Myself, I don't know if I would stop it. But the important thing for me is that I don't know how different people are going to evaluate this is where the line is, and when they decide to involve involved in taking a life. But what I think is very, what I'd like to have people do who are Buddhists, Buddhist practitioners are inspired, just wise people, is they don't do it automatically or instinctively. But they actually every time they do it, they really reflect deeply. And they question it and wonder, Is this really appropriate? Should I do this? And also to always ask, Is there an alternative? Is there an alternative, so you know, maybe this is silly, but next time you go to India with your daughter, you traveled it with the windows, little hats that have mosquito net, you know, and, and so you don't have to worry or you get the you know, or that your hands are they now they have clothes, you can buy an Rei that are filled with mosquito repellent. And so you know, you really plan ahead, so that think about what the alternatives are. And so you know, so you know, we have periodically over the years, we have ant infestations in our house and our kitchen. I mean, that's just periodically, this happens regularly enough. But partly, we just live with it now, just like, you know, we share the house with them. And, you know, we usually come for food that's been left out, So now we try to keep it impeccably clean in the kitchen. As opposed to getting an ant poison, you know, which I don't want to do, I'd rather kind of either be impeccably clean, or somehow just live with them a little bit than, you know, and, and be patient with them, and we clean up the food that they found on the kitchen counter, they'll go away after a couple hours, you know, week I can I can live with him for a couple hours. And so so, you know, so to question and look at the alternatives and look what we're willing to live with, instead of doing the instinctual This is yucky, this is bad or something. I think that questioning and that reflecting and that, you know, considering alternatives. Is is I think is very important. And that's what I hope people will do rather than just making a decision. There is a site society to win the questions like, like, capital punishment, you

know, have you really considered all the different issues that we looked at the alternatives and for us as a society? And and, you know, I would I suspect that as a society as a whole, we haven't really had the full discussion about this.

So I hope that today has shown you that virtue ethics is a worthwhile thing to reflect on, I think about some of the most exciting aspects of human life that we read novels and make movies about and have to do with ethics. You know, probably most movies most most novels would be uninteresting if someone was an unethical in some way or other. And the, you know, it's it touches into any core aspects of human existence and what motivates people what drives people, what's possible for human beings in terms of developing capacities for freedom and compassion. I think it's a very rich area in our life. And it's well worth exploring, getting to know being concerned about being thoughtful about reading about learning about and it's not like, I don't think of it as being elementary school Buddhism, you know, just you have to get through it so you can get to the important things, you know, meditation or experiences of transforming liberation or something. I think that it's as valuable and rich part of human life as anything else. And it's very practical because to do with how we live our lives, and if Buddhism is not about how we live our lives, then it's probably not so useful for the rest of us. So those are my thoughts. And yes, please. That's great. Thank you for reminding me. Let's go around and say names. So bear with me before we get now if everyone can just go around, say net your name. We'll start with your learner.

I'm Yolanda.

I'm an

Susan.

Kate.

We call

me i think you know me.

Courtney,

Mary,

Kate.

Bill,

Jenny

musar. And

Angie,

Kate.

Diane. Great. Thank you all. So it would be helpful if a few of you could stay behind to clean the bathrooms. I think this floor was swept out there. And maybe the kitchen was cleaned after lunch but further maybe three people who could say and clean the bathrooms and maybe vacuum this floor here before people 123 Okay, well, maybe it didn't focus the three of you maybe can do the bathroom so it'd be great. And hopefully they have a day along tomorrow though vacuum here. So thank you all and sorry, and put the chairs back and next time. I think the next prime is renunciation, letting go becoming free. So see you in November. Thank you.