

## Precepts as the Teacher

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Good morning! Welcome to the International Buddha Dharma Society for Cosmic Law. Last week, we talked about precepts as the outline. We chose which realm to go out of the ten realms. Holding the five precepts, one can still be born as a human; holding the ten good precepts, one can be born to the heavenly realms. Bhikkhus have Bhikkhus' precepts and Bodhisattvas have Bodhisattvas' precepts. Of course, Buddhas have Buddhas' precepts. The upper the realm, the purer the precepts. This week, our topic is Precepts as the Teacher which is also the last teaching of Buddha Sakyamuni.

The Buddha appeared in this world for one great reason which is to lead sentient beings into the Buddha's light (knowledge and opinion). The Buddha expounded Dharma for 49 years and under the two sal trees he was going to enter nirvana. The venerable Ananda who heard the most of the Buddha's teachings was heart-broken and cried silently. At this moment, the venerable Aniruddha whose third eye was the sharpest said to Ananda, "Ananda, it's not time to cry yet. All Buddhas sure will enter Nirvana. It's no use to cry. The Buddha always thought high of you and repeatedly advised you to propagate his teachings. Now the Buddha is leaving, should you go and ask him what do we do in the future?"

As if awakening from a dream, Ananda wiped his tears and said to Aniruddha, "I am terribly upset and don't know where to start. Please teach me!" Aniruddha said, "First, when Buddha is alive, we depend on the Buddha. After Buddha enters Nirvana, who should we depend upon? Second, when Buddha is alive, the Buddha is our teacher. After Buddha enters Nirvana, who will be our teacher? Third, When Buddha is alive, for those malignant Bhikkhus, the Buddha subdue them. After Buddha enters Nirvana, what should we do with them? Forth, when Buddha is alive, the Buddha gives quite a lot of teachings. After Buddha enters Nirvana,

when we collect sutras, how should we start? These four questions, you should ask Buddha for instructions!”

The venerable Ananda accepted Aniruddha’s advice and walked to the Buddha. He bowed to the Buddha and joined his palms and asked the above four questions.

As to the second question, “After the Buddha enters Nirvana, who will be our teacher?” According to the *Buddha’s last Bequest*, the Buddha instructed, “After I leave, you all should respect the precepts as if the dark meets the light, as if the poor gains treasure. You should know that the precepts are your great teacher just like I am still living in this world.” What the Buddha meant is just that the precepts are our teacher.

Besides, in Buddhist sutras as vast as the misty ocean, there are many other earnest teachings that the Buddha exhorted his disciples about precepts.

In *the sutra of Forty-Two Chapters*, the Buddha instructed the disciples, “Disciples, even if you are thousands of miles from me, if you abide the precepts that I made, you sure will obtain the fruits. Otherwise, if you are just by my side and see me all the time, without following my precepts, you will never obtain the fruit.”

In *the Nirvana Sutra*, the Buddha said, “If you want to clear the mind and see the nature, you must hold the precepts with a sincere heart. If you don’t hold the precepts, then you are the Demon’s dependent, not my disciples.”

Holding precepts is the root of Bodhi, is the key door to cultivation. If the Bodhisattvas can hold the precepts, they will gain the following ten kinds of benefits:

1. They may open their wisdom. Those who cultivate the Bodhisattvas’ Way, if they can hold precepts, then both their body and mind are pure and clean; their wisdom nature is clear; for all their wisdom practice and all their vows, none will not be satisfied.
2. They will learn as the Buddha did. When the Buddha started to cultivate the Way, the Buddha took the precepts as the foundation and so he obtained the fruits. For

Bodhisattvas to cultivate, if they can insist on pure precepts, then they are following the Buddha's path.

3. The wise ones will not ridicule and destroy them. Those who cultivate the Bodhisattvas' Way, for they hold precepts cleanly and they do not make bodily and verbal karma, so people of wise all praise them joyfully and will not destroy their name.
4. They will never turn back from their vows. Those who cultivate the Bodhisattvas' Way, for they persevere in pure precepts and pursue the supreme Bodhi, they make great and deep vows and cultivate diligently and they will not turn back from their vows.
5. They will abide in proper practice. Those who cultivate the Bodhisattvas' Way, for they persevere in holding pure precepts, so their body, mouth and mind karma are all clean and they can abide in proper practices and never give up.
6. They will give up birth and death. Those who cultivate the Bodhisattvas' Way, for they persevere in holding pure precepts, they will not create karmas of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech and so on, so that they can get out of the cycle of birth and death.
7. They pursue Nirvana. Those who cultivate the Bodhisattvas' Way, for they persevere in holding pure precepts, they don't have all sorts of false thoughts, so that they are sick of the suffering of birth and death and are able to pursue Nirvana.
8. They will obtain a free mind. Those who cultivate the Bodhisattvas' Way, for their merit of holding precepts are perfect and their heart body/spiritual is bright and pure, all their annoyances and karmic conditions are all liberated and they are not in entanglement any more.
9. They will obtain extraordinary Samadhi. Those who cultivate the Bodhisattvas' Way, for they hold pure precepts, their mind is not scattered, so they can achieve Samadhi, and overcome all the leakages.

10.They will not be in short of confidence and wealth. Those who cultivate the Bodhisattvas' Way, for they hold pure precepts, they have proper confidence in Buddha Dharma, which can generate all dharma wealth of merit, so they will not be in short of it.

Although, in *the Sujata Sutra*, we already talked about the benefits of holding the five precepts, but here I still want to explain further.

No killing is not to invade lives. From as big as killing people to as small as killing chicken, duck, cockroaches and ants, these are all killing. Suicide is also killing and even worse, suicide creates great karma because it's killing human being and human being's energy is much greater than animals. Besides, wasting time is also killing because life is just accumulation of time, so wasting time is like killing life.

In corresponding to this precept, Buddhism requests Buddhists not to eat meat. In the *Nirvana Sutra*, it says, "For meat eaters, they cut off the seeds of great compassion. When they walk, live, sit and sleep, all the sentient beings are terrified when they smell their smell of meat." No killing can cultivate our compassionate heart, cultivate our consciousness of respecting lives. We should not only not kill, but also, we should keep love and kindness in our heart. Tolerate people and things and decrease violent emotions.

No stealing means not to invade others' wealth. Stealing includes direct stealing and indirect stealing, visible stealing and invisible stealing. For example, stealers stealing, robbers robbing, these are the direct stealing; corrupt officials corrupting is indirect stealing; extortion and fraud, repudiating debt is visible stealing; abusing the public trust is invisible stealing. Simply speaking, if it's not your stuff, you take it without permission, then it is stealing. We should not only not steal, but also give diligently. The merit of giving is not related to how much you give. One penny, one word, one action, if it is to benefit others, are all giving. Kind actions do not need to surprise the heaven and the earth, but need to accumulate little by

little and at the end, it will become a habit and we can experience the happiness from the happiness of other people.

Sexual misconduct refers to the sexual behavior outside of legal relationship between husband and wife, such as raping, whoring, one-night stay, illegal love affair, and so on. If someone had sexual misconduct, he/she will not only bring sufferings to himself/herself, but also to others. Holding the precepts of no sexual misconduct will help one to overcome one's desires, to be honest to one's partner, to build a happy family and construct a harmonious relationship.

False speech means not to speak unreal words, including sowing dissension, speaking harsh words, deceptive words and flattery words. No false speech means to avoid unreal words, not to exaggerate or cover the actual situation, which can cultivate the virtue of honesty and trustworthiness to obtain others' trust.

Wine-drinking will slow and disorient one's mind. Under the effect of alcohol, one may do many careless, danger and even immoral things. The sutra mentioned that wine-drinking has ten faults and thirty-six misses, such as discoloration, short of dignity, loss of fame, loss of wisdom, illness, loss of wealth, loss of respect, car crash, falling into water, and so on. Everything that can stimulate one's nerve, cause one to lose one's mind, corrupt one's virtue, such as hemp, opium, heroin, ecstasy, and so on, all belongs to no wine-drinking precept. Holding this precept will make sure that one's mind is clear and wise, which is not only good to the family, but also bring peace to the society and helpful for practicing samadhi.

All cultivators should take precepts as the teacher. Precepts are the foundation. Precepts are the priority. The purpose of cultivation is to get out of the cycle of birth and death. If one does not hold the precepts, then cultivation would be meaningless. Cultivating without holding precepts will never have the chance to be free from reincarnation.

“Keeping the mind still” is the greatest wisdom in the universe. You may also say that it is a precept. No matter what happened, no matter under what situation, keep our mind still. When facing various of temptation, humans are very easy to move their mind. When facing fame, wealth, wine, or women/men, humans are easy to move their mind. And after they do so, they may find different excuses for themselves. In fact, after you move your mind in different kinds of situation, or maybe you put into actions, your own energy will change. If you try to excuse yourself you are cheating yourself. Maybe it’s not easy to feel the change if it is small, but for great changes, it’s easy to tell.

For example, during the great famine time, extraordinary phenomenon of cannibalism once happened. Some people even ate their own children. For those people who ate people, their expression in their eyes changed. Because, in fact, after eating human being, their energy, information and codes have changed dramatically. Inside, they are not humans any more.

Great things are like this, so are small things. Every word, every action, even every thought is affecting the energy, information and code of us. Either subliming or sliding, all in our own hands, not anybody else. We are our own master.

Take precepts as the teacher. It’s really a serious thing. You may be listening, but you may not be taking this message into yourself. Maybe you need to experience something and until then you may not truly understand. But for now, you hear and remember this message that you are given today.

When we quiet down, when there is no noise in our mind, when there is no attachment in our mind, when our mind is free, we know everything. We know what is wrong and what is right. Our heart body knows everything and it is far beyond our human body. Under certain situations, we may starve our human body, we may have our human body ridiculed by others, we may even have to let it die, however, we cannot do evil things for it to contaminate our

heart body or spiritual body. The human body is a karmic body, a piece of clothes, and we may change it, however, our original heart body, will get punishment due to the evil things done by this physical body.

True happiness is built on observing precepts and abiding the Cosmic Law. The happiness of breaking the precepts will only bring suffering later. Effects always follows causes. Bodhisattvas are afraid of causes and common beings are afraid of effects. Humans only know to complain their bad luck, but they don't know that everything is due to what they have done themselves. The true meaning of holding precepts is not to restrain one, but for one to achieve true happiness.

Amitabha! Thank you! Wish all of you can learn something from today's teaching! Take precepts as the teacher and correct yourselves! May you become a Buddha soon! See you next week!