

## Precepts as the Code of Conduct

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Good morning! Welcome to the International Buddha Dharma Society for Cosmic Law to listen to today's Dharma talk. Our topic today is Precepts as the Code of Conduct. Taking precepts as the code of conduct, at the first beginning you may feel cumbersome and constrained, but just like every sport, it has its own action tips. After long time practicing, when you get used to it, when you become ONE with it, at that time, you will feel handy and effortless.

Observing precepts is a progressive process. You may hold precepts one by one, from one precept, two precepts to many, from bodily precepts to holding precepts in the mind, from coarse precepts to fine precepts, from precepts of form to formless precepts, from countable precepts to uncountable precepts, from five precepts to ten precepts, from ten precepts to Bodhisattva precepts. At the end, precepts are actually our pure self-nature.

Let me share one story with you.

One time, the Buddha was giving teachings to the heavenly beings in Jetavana in the country of Sravasti. In the country of Rajagrha, there were two novices who were going to see the Buddha. It's a long way and there were no people on the road. It was very dry and hot and all the springs were dried up. The two persons were very thirsty and they even had difficulty to breath. There was a spring which had a little bit of water left but there were also some worms in it. They signed, "We go a long way to see the Buddha and don't want to die here." One person said, "We should drink this water to save our lives so that we could go and see the Buddha in person." The other person said, "The Buddha's definitive precepts put compassion at the first place. If we kill lives to live, then it would be meaningless to see the Buddha. /

**would rather hold the precepts to die than to break the precepts to live.”** The first person drank the water readily and then continued his journey. The second person did not drink the water. He died and then was reborn on the second layer of heaven, Trayastrimsa. He introspected and remembered what happened to him. Then he went down to the Buddha’s place with some flowers. He bowed to the Buddha and then sit by his side. The first person, after some days, arrived at the Buddha’s place, tired. He saw the Buddha, the supreme one, he bowed and cried, “My friend died and could not see Buddha any more. May Buddha know this.” The Buddha said, “I already knew.” The Buddha pointed to the deva by his side and said, “This deva is your friend. Because he could hold all the precepts well, he came here first.” The Buddha then expounded, “You could see my body but you don’t hold my precepts. Although you see me, I don’t see you. If you are thousands of miles away from me, but you hold my precepts, then you are just in front of me.” After hearing this, the first person repented.

Wish you may learn something from this little story and realize how important to observe precepts.

Today, we will learn ***the Four Clear and Definitive Instructions on Purity*** in the Surangama Sutra to further understand precepts. In the sutra,

The Buddha told Ananda, “You constantly hear me explain in the Vinaya that there are three unalterable aspects to cultivation. That is, collecting one’s thoughts constitutes the precepts; from the precepts comes samadhi; and out of samadhi arises wisdom. Samadhi arises from precepts, and wisdom is revealed out of samadhi. These are called the Three Non-Leakage Studies.”

”Ananda, why do I call collecting one’s thoughts the precepts? If living beings in the six paths

of any mundane world had no thoughts of lust, they would not have to follow a continual succession of births and deaths.

”Your basic purpose in cultivating is to transcend the wearisome defilements. But if you don’t renounce your lustful thoughts, you will not be able to get out of the dust.

”Even though one may have some wisdom and the manifestation of Chan samadhi, one is certain to enter demonic paths if one does not cut off lust. At best, one will be a demon king; on the average, one will be in the retinue of demons; at the lowest level, one will be a female demon.

”These demons have their groups of disciples. Each says of himself that he has accomplished the Unsurpassed Way.

“After my extinction, in the Dharma-ending Age, these hordes of demons will abound, spreading like wildfire as they openly practice greed and lust. Claiming to be good knowing advisors, they will cause living beings to fall into the pit of love and views and lose the way to Bodhi.

”When you teach people in the world to cultivate samadhi, they must first of all sever the mind of lust. This is the first clear and definitive instruction on purity given by the Thus Come Ones and the Buddhas of the past, World Honored Ones.

”Therefore, Ananda, if cultivators of Chan samadhi do not cut off lust, they will be like someone who cooks sand in the hope of getting rice. After hundreds of thousands of aeons, it will still be just hot sand. Why? It wasn’t rice to begin with; it was only sand.

”If you seek the Buddha’s wonderful fruition and still have physical lust, then even if you attain a wonderful awakening, it will be based in lust. With lust at the source, you will revolve in the three paths and not be able to get out. Which road will you take to cultivate and be certified to the Thus Come One’s Nirvana?

”You must cut off the lust which is intrinsic in both body and mind. Then get rid of even the

aspect of cutting it off. At that point you have some hope of attaining the Buddha's Bodhi.

"What I have said here is the Buddha's teaching. Any explanation counter to it is the teaching of the demons' king, Papiyan.

"Further, Ananda, if living beings in the six paths of any mundane world had no thoughts of killing, they would not have to follow a continual succession of births and deaths.

"Your basic purpose in cultivating samadhi is to transcend the wearisome defilements. But if you do not renounce your thoughts of killing, you will not be able to get out of the dust.

"Even though one may have some wisdom and the manifestation of Chan samadhi, one is certain to enter the path of spirits if one does not cease killing. At best, a person will become a mighty ghost; on the average, one will become a flying yaksha, a ghost leader, or the like; at the lowest level, one will become an earth-bound rakshasa.

"These ghosts and spirits have their groups of disciples. Each says of himself that he has accomplished the Unsurpassed Way.

"After my extinction, in the Dharma-ending Age, these hordes of ghosts and spirits will abound, spreading like wildfire as they argue that eating meat will bring one to the Bodhi Way.

"Ananda, I permit the Bhikshus to eat five kinds of pure meat. This meat is actually a transformation brought into being by my spiritual powers. It basically has no life-force. You Brahmans live in a climate so hot and humid, and on such sandy and rocky land, that vegetables will not grow; therefore, I have had to assist you with spiritual powers and compassion. Because of the magnitude of this kindness and compassion, what you eat that tastes like meat is merely said to be meat; in fact, however, it is not. After my extinction, how can those who eat the flesh of living beings be called the disciples of Shakya?

"You should know that these people who eat meat may gain some awareness and may seem to be in samadhi, but they are all great rakshasas. When their retribution ends, they are bound to sink into the bitter sea of birth and death. They are not disciples of the Buddha. Such

people as these kill and eat one another in a never-ending cycle. How can such people transcend the Triple Realm?

"When you teach people in the world to cultivate samadhi, they must also cut off killing. This is the second clear and definitive instruction on purity given by the Thus Come Ones and the Buddhas of the past, World Honored Ones.

"Therefore, Ananda, if cultivators of Chan samadhi do not cut off killing, they are like one who stops up his ears and calls out in a loud voice, expecting no one to hear him. It is to wish to hide what is completely evident.

"Bodhisattvas and bhikshus who practice purity will not even step on grass in the pathway; even less will they pull it up with their hand. How can one with great compassion pick up the flesh and blood of living beings and proceed to eat his fill?

"Bhikshus who do not wear silk, leather boots, furs, or down from this country or consume milk, cream, or butter can truly transcend this world. When they have paid back their past debts, they will not have to re-enter the Triple Realm.

"Why? It is because when one wears something taken from a living creature, one creates affinity with it, just as when people eat the hundred grains, their feet cannot leave the earth. Both physically and mentally one must avoid the bodies and the by-products of living beings, by neither wearing them nor eating them. I say that such people have true liberation.

"What I have said here is the Buddha's teaching. Any explanation counter to it is the teaching of the demons' king, Papiyan.

"Further, Ananda, if living beings in the six paths of any mundane world had no thoughts of stealing, they would not have to follow a continuous succession of births and deaths.

"Your basic purpose in cultivating samadhi is to transcend the wearisome defilements. But if you do not renounce your thoughts of stealing, you will not be able to get out of the dust.

Even though one may have some wisdom and the manifestation of Chan samadhi, one is

certain to enter a devious path if one does not cease stealing. At best, one will be an apparition; on the average, one will become a phantom; at the lowest level, one will be a devious person who is possessed by a mei ghost.

"These devious hordes have their groups of disciples. Each says of himself that he has accomplished the Unsurpassed Way.

"After my extinction, in the Dharma-ending Age, these phantoms and apparitions will abound, spreading like wildfire as they surreptitiously cheat others. Calling themselves good knowing advisors, they will each say that they have attained the superhuman dharmas. Enticing and deceiving the ignorant, or frightening them out of their wits, they disrupt and lay waste to households wherever they go.

"I teach the bhikshus to beg for their food in an assigned place, in order to help them renounce greed and accomplish the Bodhi Way. The bhikshus do not prepare their own food, so that, at the end of this life of transitory existence in the triple realm, they can show themselves to be once-returners who go and do not come back.

"How can thieves put on my robes and sell the Thus Come One, saying that all manner of karma one creates is just the Buddhadharma? They slander those who have left the home-life and regard bhikshus who have taken complete precepts as belonging to the path of the Small Vehicle. Because of such doubts and misjudgments, limitless living beings fall into the Unintermittent Hell.

"I say that bhikshus who after my extinction have decisive resolve to cultivate samadhi, and who before the images of Thus Come Ones can burn a candle on their bodies, or burn off a finger, or burn even one incense stick on their bodies, will, in that moment, repay their debts from beginningless time past. They can depart from the world and forever be free of leakages. Though they may not have instantly understood the Unsurpassed Enlightenment, they will already have firmly set their mind on it.

"If one does not practice any of these token renunciations of the body on the causal level, then even if one realizes the unconditioned, one will still have to come back as a person to repay one's past debts exactly as I had to undergo the retribution of having to eat the grain meant for horses.

"When you teach people in the world to cultivate samadhi, they must also cease stealing. This is the third clear and definitive instruction on purity given by the Thus Come One and the Buddhas of the past, World Honored Ones.

"Therefore, Ananda, if cultivators of Chan samadhi do not cease stealing, they are like someone who pours water into a leaking cup and hopes to fill it. He may continue for as many aeons as there are fine motes of dust, but it still will not be full in the end.

"If bhikshus do not store away anything but their robes and bowls; if they give what is left over from their food-offerings to hungry living beings; if they put their palms together and make obeisance to the entire great assembly; if when people scold them they can treat it as praise: if they can sacrifice their very bodies and minds, giving their flesh, bones, and blood to living creatures; and if they do not repeat the non-ultimate teachings of the Thus Come One as though they were their own explanations, misrepresenting them to those who have just begun to study, then the Buddha gives them his seal as having attained true samadhi.

"What I have said here is the Buddhas' teaching. Any explanation counter to it is the teaching of the demons' king, Papiyan.

"Ananda, though living beings in the six paths of any mundane world may not kill, steal, or lust either physically or mentally, these three aspects of their conduct thus being perfect. Yet if they tell lies, the samadhi they attain will not be pure. They will become demons of love and views and will lose the seed of the Thus Come One.

"They say that they have attained what they have not attained, and that they have been certified when they have not been certified. Perhaps they seek to be foremost in the world, the

most venerated and superior person. To their audiences they say that they have attained the fruition of a Shrotaapanna, the fruition of a Sakridagamin, the fruition of an Anagamin, the fruition of Arhatship, the Pratyekabuddha vehicle, or the various levels of Bodhisattvahood up to and including the Ten Grounds. In order to be revered by others and because they are greedy for offerings.

”These icchantikas destroy the seeds of Buddhahood just as surely as a tala tree is destroyed if it is chopped down. The Buddha predicts that such people sever their good roots forever and lose their knowledge and vision. Immersed in the sea of the Three Sufferings, they cannot attain samadhi.

”I command the Bodhisattvas and Arhats to appear after my extinction in response-bodies in the Dharma-ending Age, and to take various forms in order to rescue those in the cycle of rebirth.

”They should either become Shramanas, white-robed laypeople, kings, ministers or officials, virgin youths or maidens, and so forth, even prostitutes, widows, profligates, thieves, butchers, or dealers in contraband, doing the same things as these kinds of people while they praise the Buddha vehicle and cause them to enter samadhi in body and mind.

”But they should never say of themselves, ‘I am truly a Bodhisattva’; or ‘I am truly an Arhat,’ or let the Buddha’s secret cause leak out by speaking casually to those who have not yet studied.

”How can people who make such claims, other than at the end of their lives and then only to those who inherit the teaching, be doing anything but deluding and confusing living beings and indulging in a gross false claim?

”When you teach people in the world to cultivate samadhi, they must also cease all lying. This is the fourth clear and definitive instruction on purity given by the Thus Come Ones and the Buddhas of the past, World Honored Ones.



"Therefore, Ananda, one who does not cut off lying is like a person who carves a piece of human excrement to look like chandana, hoping to make it fragrant. He is attempting the impossible.

"I teach the bhikshus that the straight mind is the Bodhimanda and that they should practice the four awesome departments in all their activities. Since they should be devoid of all falseness, how can they claim to have themselves attained the Dharmas of a superior person?

"That would be like a poor person falsely calling himself an emperor; for that, he would be taken and executed. Much less should one attempt to usurp the title of Dharma King. When the cause-ground is not true, the effects will be distorted. One who seeks the Buddha's Bodhi in this way is like a person who tries to bite his own navel. Who could possibly succeed?

"If bhikshus' minds are as straight as lute strings, true and real in everything they do, then they can enter samadhi and never be involved in the deeds of demons. I certify that such people will accomplish the Bodhisattvas' Unsurpassed Knowledge and Enlightenment.

"What I have said here is the Buddha's teaching. Any explanation counter to it is the teaching of the demons' king, Papiyan.

That's all for today! This is the last talk for the subject of Precepts. There is quite a lot to digest. Please read again and again when you have time. I wish for now precepts have been planted in your heart. I wish in the future you will follow precepts and become ONE with the precepts. Wish all of you become Buddha soon. Thank you! Amitabha!