

*Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammâ Sambuddhassa!*

## Five Precepts

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The *panca-sila* or five precepts are one of the three pillars that form the foundation of a young Buddhist's life, the other two being *dâna* (giving) and *bhâvana* (meditation). The 5 precepts are 1. Not to take life, 2. Not to take what is not given, 3. Not to misbehave sexually, 4. Not to tell lies, 5. Not to take intoxicants. 1, 2, 3 and 5 are to do with restraining our negative bodily actions and 4 to do with restraining our negative verbal actions, or words. They are designed to protect both ourselves and others from harm.

### 1. *Pânâti-pâtâ vêramanî sikkhâ padam samâdiyâmi.*

*I take it upon myself* to not kill any beings. This precept also includes avoiding other forms of cruelty towards other beings including hitting, wounding, etc. Notice the term *beings*, as it not only encompasses humans but also animals and other beings. This precept deals with restraining the *dôsa* or anger root within us and all the associated qualities that spring from it such as malice, cruelty and viciousness. Instead we are taught to develop the opposite qualities within us such as *mettâ* (loving-kindness); *karunâ* (compassion), *muditâ* (appreciation of others' success, the opposite of jealousy) and *upekkhâ* (equipoise in any condition, whether it is positive or negative) which are also called the *brahma-vihâra*, or the *four divine abidings* as anyone who practices these is said to be living the *highest* or *greatest living* here. The disadvantages of habitually breaking this precept are re-birth in a lower or hellish realm or in the event of human birth being sickly, weak bodied and having a short life span.<sup>1</sup>

### 2. *Adinnâ dâna vêramanî sikkhâ padam samâdiyâmi.*

*I take it upon myself* to not take what is not given to me. This also includes avoiding all other forms of *stealing* such as fraud, robbery, etc. This precept deals with restraining the *lôbha* or greed root within us. Instead of depriving others of their possessions and causing them harm, this precept also tells us to develop the opposite quality of *dâna* or giving and encouraging and praising other to give as well. The disadvantages of habitually breaking this precept are re-birth into poverty and loss of own property and wealth.

### 3. *Kamêsu micchâ-cârâ vêramanî sikkhâ padam samâdiyâmi.*

*I take it upon myself* to not misbehave sexually. This includes avoiding extra marital affairs, and primarily for youth, avoiding pre-marital sex (sex before marriage), even if the intention is eventual marriage. We need to be very careful of those who would encourage us to do otherwise, and question their motives. This precept deals with restraining our *lôbha* or greed root. Disadvantages of habitually breaking this precept are disturbed sleep, blame, rebirth in a hellish realm and gain of *akusal* or bad kamma.

### 4. *Musâ vâdâ vêramanî sikkhâ padam samâdiyâmi.*

*I take it upon myself* to not be untruthful. Lying is done with our words, and can cause tremendous harm to others. An example of where great harm can be done is where a false testimony causes the innocent party to be severely punished in a court case. This is a good example of how words can destroy a life. Lying is usually done to cover up a wrong that we have done, usually directly or indirectly related to breaking one of the other four precepts. So it is always best to protect our precepts, which leaves no room for lying. The Lord Buddha has said there is no wrong that a liar cannot do, as he is capable of doing any wrong and saying "I did not do it." Even lying for a joke should be avoided. Disadvantage of habitually breaking this precept is loss of credibility.

### 5. *Surâmêrayamajja pamadatthana vêramanî sikkhâ padam samâdiyâmi.*

*I take it upon myself* to refrain from taking intoxicating drinks & substances. The consumption of alcohol has six disadvantages as outlined by the Lord Buddha, and clearly visible for anyone observant

enough to see for themselves. The Lord Buddha has shown these as; weakening of intellect, increased susceptibility to disease, gaining of a bad reputation, increase of quarrels, shameless exposure of the body and the loss of wealth. The last one can be attributed to spending one's wealth on alcohol and the loss of productivity following time spent drinking. If we have friends that drink and encourage us to do the same, we can make it clear to them without insult that we do not wish to drink. Not only will they respect us for this, but we may set a good example for them to follow later on.

You may have noticed that the precepts not only stop us from doing negative actions, but encourages the development of the positive counter qualities. The other thing of note is that when we determine to follow the five precepts daily, we do so as a promise to ourselves and not anyone else i.e. parents, teachers and even not the Lord Buddha.<sup>2</sup> Someone who constantly protects the five precepts can lead a very happy, confident and successful life. Living a harmless life in accordance to the five precepts, he or she poses no threat or fear to others. Causing no fear to others in this way, they themselves become fearless and confident in this life, and also *of* the next. Having a good conscience they *know* that the next destination can also only be a good one.

## Notes

1. Please note that re-birth in hell and other such negative consequences of breaking the precepts does not need to be an inevitability that one cannot escape. One is able to rise above these negative consequences by giving up one's 'bad ways' and strongly establishing oneself in the five precepts and by dedicating one's self to a life of good.
2. However the precepts can be observed in reverence and honour of the Lord Buddha's memory.

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1. *Daily Dāna* by Rasika Wijayaratne (on generosity) [ <http://vihara.org.au/go?to=dailydana> ]
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## Related Suttas

1. DN 31, Sigalovada Sutta, *The Discourse to Sigala - The Layperson's Code of Discipline* [ <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.nara.html> ]