

Daily Practising Rituals of Buddhism

Teachings On The Ethics Of Buddhism

Essentially, according to Buddhist teachings, the ethical and moral principles are governed by examining whether a certain action, whether connected to body or speech is likely to be harmful to one's self or to others and thereby avoiding any actions which are likely to be harmful. In Buddhism, a mind that is controlled avoids actions that are likely to cause suffering or remorse.

Moral conduct for Buddhists differs according to whether it applies to the laity or to the *Sangha*, ie monks. A lay Buddhist should cultivate good conduct by training in what are known as the "Five Precepts", *Pancca Sila*. The five precepts are training rules, which, if one were to break any of them, one should be aware of the breach and examine how such a breach may be avoided in the future. The resultant of an action, often referred to as *Kamma*, depends on the intention more than the action itself. It entails less feelings of guilt. Buddhism places a great emphasis on "mind" and it is mental anguish such as remorse, anxiety, guilt etc. which is to be avoided in order to cultivate a calm and peaceful mind.

The five precepts are:

1. ***Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami***
I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying living creatures.

This means to undertake the training to avoid taking the life of beings. This precept applies to all living beings not just humans. All beings have a right to their lives and that right should be respected.

2. ***Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami***
I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given.

This means to undertake the training to avoid taking things not given. This precept goes further than mere stealing. One should avoid taking anything unless one can be sure that it is intended that it is for you.

**3. *Kamesu michacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*
I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct.**

This refers to the promiscuousness outside of the sanctity of marriage.

**4. *Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*
I undertake the precept to refrain from incorrect speech**

This means to undertake the training to refrain from false speech. As well as avoiding lying and deceiving this precept covers slander as well as speech which is not beneficial to the welfare of others.

**5. *Surameraya majjapama datthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*
I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.**

This means to undertake the training to abstain from substances which cause intoxication and heedlessness. This precept is in a special category as it does not infer any intrinsic evil in, say, alcohol itself but indulgence in such a substance could be the cause of breaking the other four precepts.

These are the basic precepts are expected practices as a daily training of any lay Buddhist.

Eight Precepts – *Atthanga Sila*

On special holy days, many Buddhists, especially those following the Theravada tradition, would observe three additional precepts with a strengthening of the third precept to be observing strict celibacy.

The Order of observing of these holy days every month is as follows :

Full Moon – *Pura pasalosswak*. On this day the majority of the Buddhist lay people participate in *atthanga sila*.

Then on the Waning moon, *Ava atawaka*, New Moon, *amawaka*, Waxingmoon, *pura atawaka*. On these occasions of the moon *atthanga sila* can also be observed.

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3. ***Abbramma chariya veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami***
I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct.

This refers to the promiscuousness outside of the sanctity of marriage. In other words the strict adherence to the faithfulness of partners within the union of marriage.

This means to undertake the training to avoid such sensual misconduct. This precept is often mistranslated or misinterpreted as relating only to sexual misconduct but it covers any overindulgence in any form and of sensual pleasure such as gluttony as well as misconduct of a sexual nature.

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6. *Vikala bhojana veramani sikkhapadan samadiyami*

This means to abstain from taking food at inappropriate times. This would mean following the tradition of Theravadian devotees, *upasaka* and not eating from noon one day until sunrise the next.

7. *Nacchagita vadita visuka dassana mala gandha vilepana dharana mandanna vibhusa natthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

This means to abstain from dancing, singing, music and entertainments as well as refraining from the use of perfumes, ornaments and other items used to adorn or beautify the person.

8. *Uchcha sayana mahasayana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

This means to undertake the training to abstain from using high or luxurious beds are rules regularly adopted by members of the Sangha and are followed by the layperson on special occasions.

Rituals of Buddhist Alms giving – Dhana

According to the Buddhist way of life there are several forms of alms giving, which is referred to as *Dhana*. *Dhana* has a prime concern of

requesting that the lay folk should remove any impurities of the mind before they can participate in such rituals. In other words a purified mind is required of the participant. Apart from *dhana* connect to family rituals, there are also other related to the doctrines of Buddhism related to the religion it self. This in itself is divided into three categories.

Aaminssa dhana

This means the donating under the heading of *dhana*, of attire, food and beverage, shelter etc. to any persons lay or *sanga* and *bhikkunis*.

Abhaya dhana

This means that if an animal or human being was saved from death and the individual then can attain the blessings of *Abhaya dhana*. This also is when one buys caged birds or animals and releases them back to their habitat.

Dhamma dhana

Charitable forms of teaching, missionary work, publishing of material relating to the Buddhist doctrines is also considered a form of alms giving or *dhana*.

Meditation – Bhavana

Buddhism is 2500 years old, and any thought system of that vintage has time to develop layers of doctrine and ritual. Nevertheless, the fundamental attitude of Buddhism is intensely empirical and anti-authoritarian. Gotama the Buddha was a highly unorthodox individual and real anti-traditionalist. He did not offer his teaching as a set of dogmas, but rather as a set of propositions for each individual to investigate for himself. His invitation to one and all was “Come and

See". One of the things he said to his followers was "Place no head above your own". By this he meant, don't accept somebody else's word. See for yourself.

The teaching of the Buddha contains the solution to all problems in life. It involves self-discipline and self-understanding. Meditation has always been the direct way to perceive for oneself both the problems and their solutions. The practice brings relaxation, mental stability and calmness in daily life- we could even say it polishes our life.

There is no meditation without wisdom, wisdom without meditation. One who has both wisdom and meditation is close to peace and emancipation.

Meditation is a word, and words are used in different ways by different speakers. This may seem like a trivial point, but it is not. It is quite important to distinguish exactly what a particular speaker means by the words he uses. Every culture on earth, for example, has produced some sort of mental practice which might be termed meditation. It all depends on how loose a definition you give to that word. The techniques are enormously varied.

Vipassana is the oldest of Buddhist meditation practices. The method comes directly from the *Sitipatthana Sutta*, a discourse attributed to Buddha himself. *Vipassana* is a direct and gradual cultivation of mindfulness or awareness. It proceeds piece by piece over a period of years. The student's attention is carefully directed to an intense examination of certain aspects of his own existence. The meditator is trained to notice more and more of his own flowing life experience. *Vipassana* is a gentle technique. But it also is very, very thorough. It is an ancient and codified system of sensitivity training, a set of exercises dedicated to becoming more and more receptive to your own life experience. It is attentive listening, total seeing and careful testing. We learn to smell acutely, to touch fully and really pay attention to what we feel. We learn to listen to our own thoughts without being caught up in them.

The object of *Vipassana* practice is to learn to pay attention. We think we are doing this already, but that is an illusion. It comes from the fact that we are paying so little attention to the on going surge of our own life experience that we might just as well be asleep. We are simply not paying enough attention to notice that we are not paying attention. It is another Catch -22

Though the process of mindfulness, we slowly become aware of what we really are down below the ego image. We wake up to what life really is. It is not just a

parade of ups and downs, lollipops and smacks on the wrist. That is an illusion. Life has a much deeper texture than that if we bother to look, and if we look in the right way.

Vipassana is a form of mental training that will teach you to experience the world in an entirely new way. You will learn for the first time what is truly happening to you, around you and within you. It is a process of self discovery, a participatory investigation in which you observe your own experiences while participating in them, and as they occur. The practice must be approached with this attitude.

“Never mind what I have been taught. Forget about theories and prejudgments and stereotypes. I want to understand the true nature of life. I want to know what this experience of being alive really is. I want to apprehend the true and deepest qualities of life, and I don’t want to just accept somebody else’s explanation. I want to see it for myself”. If you pursue your meditation practice with this attitude, you will succeed. You ’ll find yourself observing things objectively, exactly as they are flowing and changing from moment to moment. Life then takes on an unbelievable richness which cannot be described. It has to be experienced.

The Pali term for Insight meditation is *Vipassana Bhavana*. *Bhavna* comes from the root “*Bhu*”, which means to grow or to become. Therefore *Bhavana* means to cultivate, and the word is always used in reference to the mind. *Bhavana* means mental cultivation. “*Vipassana*” is derived from two roots. “*Passana*” means seeing or perceiving . “*Vi*” is a prefix with a complex set of connotations. The basic meaning is “in a special way”. But there also is the connotation of both “into” and “through”. The whole meaning of the word is looking into something with clarity and precision, seeing each component as distinct and separate, and piercing all the way through so as to perceive the most fundamental reality of that thing. This process leads to insight into the basic reality of whatever is being inspected. Put it all together and “*Vipassana Bhavana*” means the cultivation of the mind, aimed at seeing in a special way that leads to insight and to full understanding.

In *Vipassana* meditation we cultivate this special way of seeing life. We train ourselves to see reality exactly as it is, and we call this special mode of perception “mindfulness”. This process of mindfulness is really quite different from what we usually do. We usually do not look into what is really there in front of us. We see life through a screen of thoughts and concepts, and we

mistake those mental objects for the reality. We get so caught up in this endless thought stream that reality flows by unnoticed. We spend our time engrossed in activity, caught up in an eternal pursuit of pleasure and gratification and an eternal fight from pain and unpleasantness. We spend all of our energies trying to make ourselves feel better, trying to bury our fears. We are endlessly seeking security.

Meanwhile, the word of real experience flows by untouched and untested. In *Vipassana* meditation train ourselves to ignore the constant impulses to be more comfortable, and we dive into the reality instead. The ironic thing is that real peace comes only when you stop chasing it. Another Catch – 22

When you relax your driving desire for comfort, real fulfilment arises. When you drop your hectic pursuit of gratification, the real beauty of life comes out. When you seek to know the reality without illusion, complete with all its pain and danger, that is when real freedom and security are yours. This is not some doctrine we are trying to drill into you. This is an observable reality, a thing you can and should see for yourself.

Meditation is a straightforward practice designed to cultivate awareness of the present moment.

The Perceived Responsibilities and Celebrations of a Buddhist Monk

All Theravada Buddhist lay people require the following responsibilities sometimes referred to as “Celebrations” to be carried out by their duly appointed Theravadian Buddhist monk. These rituals are the corner stones pertaining to everyday activities in any Buddhist family. These rituals when performed by the monks give a sense of relief and well being and peaceful mindfulness in the thought that the lay person has adhered to their religious belief passed on through generations. Some of the duties of the resident monk are as follows:

1. Angulimala sutta – A special pregnancy chanting

Several times during the period of pregnancy, the mothers are giving blessings in the form of chanting to enhance a safe pregnancy and final delivery.

2. Kess Kapima – Ritual cutting of the first hair of a new born child

This ritual is performed under auspicious time by the monk to be blessed for the future.

3. Indul kara gama – Ritual food given to a child at the age of 1 ½ years.

This is a ritual performed with various selected items of food on a well laid out table. Each food served denoting significance for the child and parents. This is also done under an auspicious time in which the monk participates.

4. Akuru Kiyavima – The ritual of making the first written and audible words of learning.

On this ritualistic occasion, a table of special foods is arranged and the mother tongue alphabet is phonetically said to the child by the monk. The child then repeats it after the monk. This too is under an auspicious time. This blessing is to enhance future learning abilities.

5. Vivaha mangalya – Marriage ceremony rituals –

The ritual marriage is conducted by a monk either at the temple of worship or at their own homes. Blessings are given. Lengthy chanting rituals are conducted. Such an occasion would warrant many chanting blessings by a Buddhist monk. No written records of the marriage are issued or kept.

6. Lade suwakirima – Health Blessings

Under this ritual the monk conducts blessings and chantings when illness prevails. The severity of the illness will deem how many times a week or month he does this. Sometimes the chanting ritual is carried on through out the night.

7. Pansakulaya – Funeral Rituals

At a time of such a sad occasion as death. There will be a gathering of monks. In this case also brought in from several places to participate in the ceremony. It is a vital that several of the monks are present or the funeral rituals cannot take place. On this occasion a ritual called the *Mathaka watyha puja* and *pang vadima* is carried out. Then a preaching, *Dhamma talk*, is given on the impermanence of life and the life of the deceased.

No records are kept nor written documentation given by a monk on this occasion either.

8. Aluth awrudu udawa – Chronological New Year

On the first day of every new year the lay people attend the temples and seek blessings for the coming year in great expectancy. Rituals include chanting, giving of alms, *Bhodi pujas* are offered. The monks tie blessed *pirith nula*, the holy thread on the lay folk. This is a thread that has been chanted upon several thousand times and more. This is supposed to contain manifold blessings.

9. Singhala saha Hindu aluth awrudda – Singhalese and Tamil Hindu New year

The Singhalese and Hindu New Year fall in April. All celebrations are done by the very strict adherence to the auspicious times. Every aspect of this period is guided by this. Included in this, is the auspicious time to attend the temple of worship. All lay folk bring their offerings to the Lord Buddha and in return they receive the blessings from the monks. At this time the lay celebrations as well as the spiritual and religious needs need to be met by the participation of the monks.

10. Hissa Thell Gama – Anointing with Holy Oil

A few days after New Year, the auspicious ceremony of anointing with Holy Oil is conducted. This is special oil made by the monks using a formula handed down through time. The ingredients are also hand picked by the monks.

It is a belief of the lay people that the application of such oils by the monks at this auspicious time heals them off any afflictions they have. Certainly aids in their wellbeing either in mind or body.

11. Vesak Puja – The Buddha Day

One of the major Buddhist festivals is **Vesak**, also known as **Wesak** and **Visakha** which takes its name from the month in which the Buddha was supposedly born, won enlightenment and passed into *Nibbana*. It is usually celebrated in May and is also known as Buddha day. It is particularly strong in the Theravadien tradition in countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand.

In such place temples will be adorned with lanterns, light symbolizing the Buddha's enlightenment and lay followers will involve themselves in acts of generosity, meditation and observing extra precepts.

It is a common custom for people to offer gifts and tokens to other as an expression of their love, appreciation or veneration. Similarly, the making of offerings at the shrine in the home or temple is away of expressing one's appreciation and veneration for the *Triple Gems*. A Buddhist offer to the Triple Gem only those things the he consider to be pleasant, pure or valuable. Some of the usual offerings at the shrine include light in form of lighted candles, oil lamp or even electric lights. Additional offerings may consist of flowers, incense, fruit, water and food.

Light

Light, symbolises wisdom as contrasted to darkness which symbolises ignorance. Thus the offering of light to the *Triple Gems* reminds a Buddhist that the goal of Enlightenment is attained when wisdom drives away the darkness of ignorance. There are also several forms of colourful hand made lanterns offered and hung in temples, homes, place of business. Huge arches or pandals are erected and adorned with light and colours.

The Flowers

The flowers, which are offered at the shrine are fresh, fragrant and beautiful at the time when they are placed before an image but will soon become withered, scentless and discoloured. The offering of flowers reminds the Buddhist of the impermanence of things, an important teaching of the Buddha.

Incense

When incense is lit, its fragrance fills the air. This is like the spreading of the purifying effect of wholesome conduct. So offering incense, a Buddhist not only expresses his veneration for the *Triple Gems* but also reminds himself of the practice Good Conduct.

The Buddhist who makes offerings to the *Triple Gems* gains merits. This is especially so when he is mindful of the significance what is being offered.

On this day, *Atta Sil* is observed, listening to the doctrines, Dhamma, meditation is practiced. Pilgrimages are undertaken by various forms of transport to holy temple sites. During this journey of lay people, other lay people give them food and beverage. This in turn gives these folk well earned merits.

12. Kathina Puja – Robe Offering Ceremony.

This is held on any convenient date within one month of the conclusion of the *Vassa* Retreat, which is the three month rains retreat season *Vassa* for the monastic order. This special robe is stitched at the temple premises on the day it is offered to one or two chosen monks after a short “official”

deliberation among the other participating monks at the *Kathina* Ceremony on that day. This is primarily what makes this the Robe Offering Ceremony.

It is the time of the year when not only new robes but other requisites may be offered by the laity to the monks.

The *Kapparukka* or the wish-fulfilling tree is a tradition brought forward from the time of the Buddha during the *Kathina* ceremony. This is normally set up a few days prior to the actual ceremony where devotees can make offerings and donations to the *Sangha*.

13. Daham Pasala – Childrens program

A vital part of the monk's duties include the teaching of the mother tongue to the children in order for them to understand the traditional culture, religious instructions and parables in Buddhism. This is an ongoing and continuous process well into adulthood.