

Introductory Talk including
The Five Precepts
And
Basic Instruction for Loving-Kindness Meditation
Dhamma Talk presented by Bhante Vimalaramsi
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Note: Time marks are for audio version.

BV: Today, I want everybody to take the five precepts.

Now, the precepts are really important when you're doing the retreat. If you break one of the precepts when you're doing your retreat you will find that you have exceeding amounts of restlessness because you have a guilty feeling for breaking the precept. It will interfere with your meditation a lot, and not just a little bit.

Monks have more precepts than laymen. I have 227 rules, you've got five. But even though we have so many rules, if we break one of those rules while we're doing any kind of meditation, our meditation is not very good.

The precepts, I'll give them to you, but I want you to understand that this is serious stuff. Don't take the precepts lightly and, in your daily life, if you can keep your precepts without breaking them, then your meditation will improve very quickly. If you insist on breaking a precept you will have consequences from that. Now, this isn't a threat in any way it's just information so that you know that you are responsible for your own practice. If the practice is good it's because you're keeping the precepts very well. If it's not good, it's because you break precepts.

Now, the first precept is not to harm or kill living beings on purpose. And, the key here is "on purpose". You can be walking down the street and you look down and you've just smashed a bunch of ants.

What was your intention when you were walking down the street. Your intention was to go from one place to another. Unfortunately, you didn't look down and see that there were some beings there until it was too late. You don't need to feel guilty about that just try not to do that in the future. If you intentionally hit or kill mosquitoes, any kind of bugs, it will affect your meditation very negatively. You will have a lot of fear arising. You'll have anxiety arising while you're doing your meditation and that's directly because you killed a living being on purpose.

The next precept is not to take anything that's not given. This means material things. Don't take something...we can say don't steal, that's a little bit closer to it actually. You know how it feels when somebody takes something of yours? Well, if you do that to someone else that's how they'll feel. Your prosperity will disappear when you take things that are not given. And, the things that you take will not last very long. They'll just disappear or, if not, they'll break or whatever. So, you don't want to break that precept.

{04:50}

The next precept is not to have any wrong sexual activity. Wrong sexual activity is sexual activity with someone that's too young; still under the care of their guardians. Sexual activity with another person's mate. Sexual activity with prostitutes. Outside of these three rules you want to look at any sexual activity that you have that causes any other being to have distress, to have dislike, then don't do it. That means forceful, harmful things. You don't want to harm anyone.

The next precept is probably the most difficult precept to keep. Don't tell any lies. Don't gossip, and what is gossip? It's saying lies and imagining bad things about other people and spreading those kinds of words. Don't slander. Slander means there's two different groups and in one group I say, "You know this other group they did such and such." And they start to get angry. And then I go from that group to the other group and I say, "They're really angry at you because of such and such and they're saying this." Slander means "splitting apart". So you don't want to do that. And don't use harsh

language. That means cursing, using really rough speech. The speech we want to develop is the kind of speech that is soothing to everyone's ears. Everyone can appreciate it and they'll listen to what you say. If you start using curse words people will turn off. They don't like to hear those kind of words. Look at your mind if you use a curse word. What does your mind feel like? Hard! And that's exactly the opposite of what the Buddha was teaching.

Now, the last precept is not to take any drugs or alcohol that dull mind. You have no idea how many people will come to me and say, "Well, just a glass of wine with a meal. It doesn't really matter." Yes, it does. "A little bit of pot now and then. It's okay." No, it's not. Why? Because it dulls your mind out and that dullness stays for a long time. I have worked with people that were alcoholics. Now, that's an extreme. But even though they haven't had any alcohol or any drugs for a number of years, when they start to sit and do the meditation their mind is dull. You take one glass of wine at the start of the week, at the end of the week you start sitting in meditation your mind is dull. Your awareness is almost non-existent until you go through and finally sharpen your mind. So, it wastes your time of mental development if you take drugs or alcohol.

When I was in Burma, I started to catch a cold so I went to somebody and they said, "Well, here, take an aspirin." And, I didn't want to take anything. I took the pill, I cut it in half. I took half an aspirin and it affected my meditation negatively the whole day. Now, this is aspirin! People pop aspirin like it's going out of style and they don't notice that it does change your awareness. It changes the way you're able to see things. It does dull your mind.

{9:48}

So, you really want to develop your mind so that it will become calm and very alert as quickly as possible. Taking drugs or alcohol leads to the opposite direction and it does take a period of time to overcome that. In a one day retreat that's not enough time to overcome taking drugs and alcohol for a period. It takes longer than one day to go through this. So, it's really not recommended.

And all of these precepts are recommendations that lead to a peaceful calm mind. You can break any of those precepts you want. It's up to you. Nobody is going to sit and throw down lightning bolts and zap you if you break one of the precepts. But, if you break one of the precepts, as soon as you recognize that you've done that, forgive yourself for making a mistake. Take the precepts again with the determination not to break them. Now, the precepts are real interesting because the more you keep your precepts without breaking them the faster your mind becomes calm.

I had a student in Asia...in Malaysia, that she wouldn't break the precepts for any reason at all. She was a very, very good kind person. She spent a lot of time helping other people and she wanted to learn about meditation. So, I told her to come for a retreat. Now, she came, I gave the instructions, she started sitting in the morning. In the afternoon I came over to her and I said, "Well, how is your meditation going?" And she said, "Ah, it seems to be okay." And I said...I asked her how long she was sitting. She said, "Only 45 minutes." And I said, "Why are you sitting for such a short period of time?" She said, "I'm sitting on the floor and it kills my knees! I'm not used to sitting on the floor. I'm used to sitting in chairs." So, being an unattached monk I said, "Well, why don't you sit in a chair then? Just don't lean heavily into the chair."

You want to sit...if you're sitting in a chair, you want to sit with your back a little bit straighter than normal. You want your chest to be up and open while you're sitting and it's easier to radiate the loving-kindness that way.

So, she sat on a chair and her next sitting was four hours and she got into the first stage of the meditation. That's remarkable for one day! Believe me, it's remarkable! The reason that she was able to do that was because she kept her precepts without breaking them and even if she thought about breaking her precepts her mind would just revolt and say, "No! I can't do that!" So, she kept the precepts in her mind all of the time. She had been practicing a general kind of mindfulness because she kept her precepts so closely. And that kind

of mindfulness, it helps you to see and know what you're going to do before you do it. And then you make the conscious decision whether to do that action or not.

{14:30}

Now when I give retreat, every day we take the precepts; not as a rite and ritual...I don't have you take it in Pali. I have you take the precepts in English. I want you to understand what you're saying. I want you to pay attention to what you're saying and follow those precepts. Now, if somebody, by chance, they break one of the precepts, I want you to come and tell me and then we'll take the precepts again right then. Otherwise, your whole meditation retreat is not very useful. Your mind will become very agitated and it gets more and more agitated as time goes by.

When I was in Burma, there was a Korean monk that came to do a retreat. And he had been a Mahayana monk and he became a Theravada monk. Mahayana monks have a tendency to eat in the evening and one of the rules for the Theravada monks is you don't eat in the evening. So, when he first came he could sit for three hours every time he wanted to sit. No problems. As he stayed there he started eating in the evening meal. It got so that he could not sit for more than fifteen minutes just for breaking this one little minor thing. And that's what can happen for you if you break one of the precepts.

You feel agitated all the time? Look at your precepts. Look at how you're practicing your precepts.

Okay, so I'm going to give you the precepts now and I want you to repeat this after me:

I undertake to keep the precept...

Students: I undertake to keep the precept...

BV: ...to abstain from killing or harming living beings on purpose.

Students: ...to abstain from killing or harming living beings on purpose.

BV: I undertake to keep the precept...

Students: I undertake to keep the precept...

BV: ...to abstain from taking what is not given.

Students: ...to abstain from taking what is not given.

BV: I undertake to keep the precept...

Students: I undertake to keep the precept...

BV: ...to abstain from wrong sexual activity.

Students: ...to abstain from wrong sexual activity.

BV: I undertake to keep the precept...

Students: I undertake to keep the precept...

BV: ...to abstain from telling lies,

Students: ...to abstain from telling lies,

BV: ...harsh speech,

Students: ...harsh speech,

BV: ...slander,

Students: ...slander,

BV: ...and gossip.

Students: ...and gossip.

BV: I undertake to keep the precept...

Students: I undertake to keep the precept...

BV: ...to abstain from taking drugs or alcohol.

Students: ...to abstain from taking drugs or alcohol.

BV: Sadhu...Sadhu...Sadhu.

Okay, now you're officially in the retreat.

I want to give you the instructions. Now, this...the loving-kindness that I'm going to be teaching you is probably different from any other loving-kindness that you've practiced before, so please pay close attention and follow the directions as closely as you possibly can.

Don't add anything, don't subtract anything. That is how you will get the fastest progress in your meditation.

When you practice loving-kindness meditation you first start by sending loving and kind thoughts to yourself. You remember a time when you were happy. When that happy feeling arises it's a nice warm glowing radiating feeling in the center of your chest. As soon as that radiating feeling arises then you let go of that past memory and make a wish for your own happiness. "May I be happy. May my mind be peaceful and calm. May I be filled with joy. May I be clear and observant." Whatever wish you make for yourself you want to feel that wish. You know what it feels like to be happy. You know what it feels like to be peaceful and calm. You take that feeling and put it into the center of that glowing, radiating feeling and put yourself right in the middle of that and give yourself a great big heart-hug!

{20:24}

You don't make the wish over and over and over again very quickly, "May I be happy may I be happy may I be happy may I be happy." You do the wish one time, bring that feeling up, put that feeling in your heart. You don't need to verbalize after that. If there's any tension and tightness in your mind, relax.

When that feeling starts to fade then you can make another wish. It can be the same wish over and over again as long as it has meaning for you and it's not turned into a mantra. Or you can change it to another wish. Whatever wish you change it to you want to feel that wish. This is a "feeling" meditation. We don't three or four different wishes in a row and turn it into a mantra. That's a mental process. This is a "feeling" process.

While you're doing this, your mind will begin to think about other things. Welcome to the real world. And that's okay. It doesn't matter. As soon as you notice your mind is thinking about something else, let that thought be there by itself. Now, every time mind's attention moves from your object of meditation to something else there is a tension and tightness that arises in your head and in your mind, and sometimes in other parts of your body. You can be sitting very nicely and all of a sudden you notice that your hand is tight. Well, let that go. You can be sitting very nicely and you can feel like coughing...you've got a tickle in your throat. Now, you don't want to cough but the more you don't want to the tighter you get in your throat and the more you're going to cough. So, what to do? Let go of that tension and tightness in your head and in your mind. Also, let go of all of those tight muscles in your throat. If you're going to cough let your body cough automatically. You keep your mind on your object of meditation.

Now, it doesn't matter if your mind wanders away fifty times and fifty times you notice that your mind has wandered away. You let go of the distraction, relax and come back to the feeling of loving-kindness and radiating that feeling. That is a good meditation. It's an active meditation to be sure. But that doesn't mean that it's bad.

When you stop meditating is when a thought arises and you think it's

so important that you have to continue thinking it. Now you're not meditating at all. As soon as you notice, even if you're in mid-sentence, that your mind has been distracted then let go of that distraction right then. Relax the tightness caused by that distraction. Come back to the feeling of loving-kindness, making a wish for your own happiness.

{24:50}

When you're sitting in meditation please do not move your body at all! Don't wiggle your toes. Don't wiggle your fingers. Don't scratch. Don't rub. Don't change your posture. Don't rock back and forth. Sit still! You can move as much as those flowers. So, while you're sitting like this there can be some sensations that arise; itching, a want to cough, a want to sneeze, heat, vibration, pain. And as soon as that arises you will notice the first thing that mind does after it goes to that sensation is it begins to think about it. "Geez, I hate that feeling when it's like this. I want it to stop! I want it to go away!" Every thought about the feeling makes the feeling bigger and more intense. So, the first thing we want to do is let go of the thoughts about the feeling and relax the tension and tightness caused by that mind's movement.

Next, you'll notice there is a tight mental fist wrapped around that sensation. That is aversion. "I don't like it! I don't want it to be there! Why does it have to distract me now?" But the truth is when a sensation arises it is there. That's the truth! That is the Dhamma of the present moment! Anytime you try to fight with the truth, anytime you try to control the truth, anytime you try to change the truth, it's a cause of suffering. So, your job is to allow the truth to be there without any resistance at all. Make that sensation just like it's a bubble floating in the air. If the wind blows one way the bubble will move that way. If the wind changes and goes the other way the bubble will move again. It doesn't matter.

This is learning how to lovingly accept whatever arises in the present moment. As you stop making a big deal about a sensation it turns into JUST a sensation. And when it turns into JUST a sensation is

becomes much easier to endure. It doesn't bother you so much. Now you relax and then redirect your attention back to the feeling of loving-kindness; that radiating feeling and making a wish for your own happiness. The nature of these kind of sensations is they don't go away right away. So your mind is gonna bounce back to it.

What you want to start to notice is, how did mind's attention do that? How did it go from being on your object of meditation to the sensation? It didn't just jump there by itself. What happened first? What happened after that? What happened after that?

As you take an interest in how mind's attention moves, you'll begin to see that there's a lot of little parts that are put together to make this movement occur. As you bounce back and forth between that sensation and your object of meditation, right before your mind gets really caught up in your thoughts about it you'll notice that something else happened right before that. So the next time you see that you let go right then and relax and you notice that you're not dragged away for quite as long a period of time. As you begin to see how the process works, the amount of time that is distracted becomes less. The amount of time that you're on your object of meditation becomes more. Eventually, you will get to a place where that distraction just doesn't arise anymore and when that happens you have a strong sense of relief.

{30:23}

You want to sit radiating this loving and kind feeling to yourself for the first ten minutes of every sitting. After ten minutes then you want to start sending loving and kind thoughts to your spiritual friend. Your spiritual friend is someone of the same sex and they are alive. A spiritual friend is someone when you think of them and their good qualities you have a lot of respect for them. You really like them. You want them to be happy. You really like them. You really sincerely do wish them well. The more sincere you are with wishing your spiritual friend happiness, the easier it is to stay with that friend without being distracted.

So, you're sending loving and kind thoughts to yourself; "May my mind be peaceful and calm. As I feel this peace and calm, I wish this feeling for you. May you be peaceful and calm." You want to take your friend and put them right in the middle of that radiating calmness and surround them with that feeling. See them in your mind's eye, smiling. That can help remind you to be smiling and happy, too. This is a smiling meditation. You want to smile with your mind, smile with your eyes, even though your eyes are closed. Put a little smile on your lips and a smile in your heart. Anytime you see that you're not smiling you cannot criticize yourself, just start smiling again.

Turn this into a game. Don't be over-serious with it. Anytime you're self-critical that means you have aversion in your mind. That means that you're not being loving and accepting of what's happening in the present moment. And that's what we want to practice. That's the way we want our minds to be.

Again, it doesn't matter how many times your mind gets distracted. What matters is as soon as you notice that distraction, let the distraction go, you let it be, you relax, you redirect your attention back to your object of meditation. Now your object of meditation is your spiritual friend. Making a wish for their happiness, feeling that wish, surround them with that feeling, and give them a heart-hug. Again, the more sincere you really do wish them well, the more sincere you are, the easier the meditation becomes.

{34:31}

Now, if you start to get sleepy and your mind starts to dull out, this is a process. What happens is you start to lose interest in sending loving and kind thoughts to yourself or to your friend and you let your mind kind of ho-hum. And before long it gets kind of dreamy. And before long it gets kind of sleepy. And then your body starts to droop and then you start nodding. And you think, "Oh no! I want to stay on my object of meditation!" and you straighten up really fast and you let your mind just kind of do what it's gonna do after a minute or so and now you're back down sleeping again. When you're

doing your sitting meditation, you want to sit with your back a little bit straighter than normal so there's a slight bit of tightness or tension. When you notice that, when you notice that your back is starting to slump, that means that the sloth and torpor is coming. You let that be and relax right then you won't get caught for near as long a period of time. Now, if the sloth and torpor is really heavy and you've sat for at least a half an hour then you can get up and do your walking meditation.

Now, the walking meditation is not for entertainment; to walk around to look at this and that. The walking meditation is part of the meditation and it's an important part of the meditation. You stay with your spiritual friend. You pick a place where you can walk back and forth and you walk to the end of that walking space and stop and don't turn around. Walk backwards. You get to the end of that walking space, stop. Go forwards. Stop. Walk backwards. When you walk backwards you have to pay more attention and you start putting more energy into watching. The next time you go for your sitting, the sitting will be without sloth and torpor. That's one of the ways that you can overcome this.

When sloth and torpor comes it starts as a feeling and it's not a particularly pleasant feeling. Right after that feeling there's craving; the tension and tightness, the I-like-it I-don't-like-it mind. Right after that there's all of these dreamy kinds of thoughts and your habitual tendency, when your mind dulls a little bit, you always act in this way. When you notice that your mind is caught by the sloth and torpor the more interest you take in seeing how the process works and the more interest you take in sending that loving and kind thought to your friend, the faster it will go away.

Now, don't get serious with this practice. I want you to smile. I want you to have a light, light mind. A mind that's alert. A mind that's very clear. And that means, play! If you see your mind distracts in one way or another, don't criticize it just start playing with it, make fun with it, laugh with it. Very important to do this! Laughter is an amazing thing even when you're just chuckling to yourself because it changes whatever is happening, "I am that" into "It's only that". It

changes whatever arises from a personal perspective into an impersonal perspective and it's very much easier to let it go. So the more you can have these little chuckles about how crazy your mind is the more balance you have in your mind.

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The more sincere your smile really is...so this is an important aspect. I had too many years of too serious a practice. I know that that doesn't lead to what the Buddha was talking about. Having a mind that is light with the sense of play in it does lead to what the Buddha was talking about because it changes your perspective. That's the first part of the Eightfold Path, isn't it?

Sit no less than thirty minutes. When your sitting is good, sit longer. We're not gonna have any bells here except for lunch and when I give the Dhamma talk in the afternoon. You're gonna be on your own time schedule. You can be sitting and you see that you've sat for a half an hour and this is going pretty well, so just sit longer. You can sit for an hour, you can sit for two hours, you can sit for three hours. It's okay, it's up to you. When you get up to do the walking meditation, don't let your meditation stop. Stay with your spiritual friend and you will start to see that you get into the deeper states of the meditation and you can continue on just like you would with daily activities. You can keep your meditation going all the time.

Anytime you see that you're not smiling, please smile again. Anytime you see that your mind begins to get serious, that's telling you that there is an attachment. Let go of that and smile some more. When you do your walking meditation I don't want you to walk super slow. I want you to walk at a normal pace just like you do every day. But stay with your spiritual friend. Keep wishing your spiritual friend happiness and feeling that feeling and placing them in your heart and radiating that feeling.
Keep the smile going.

May suffering ones, be suffering free
And the fear struck, fearless be

May the grieving shed all grief
And may all beings find relief.

May all beings share this merit that we have thus acquired
For the acquisition of all kinds of happiness.

May beings inhabiting space and earth
Devas and nagas of mighty power
Share this merit of ours.

May they long protect the Buddha's dispensation.
Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . .

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