

# 2005-10-17 Precepts: Not Taking What Is Not Given

Thu, 7/16 10:01PM • 33:06

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

precepts, stealing, people, monks, objective criteria, rules, understand, life, mind, feel, harm, thought, consequences, behavior, act, buddhism, buddhist, full moon, property, karmic

## SPEAKERS

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So I'm going to talk continue to talk now about virtue. Beautiful Thing. So we're talking about beauty. When you talk about virtue, you talk about beauty, and beautiful actions, beautiful speech, beautiful, mind, people thoughts. And this is a third talk in a series on the five precepts. And the first week was introduction to them last week, it was on the first precept, and today is on the second precept. And it's a we'll take it as being an auspicious evening to talk about the precepts, because it's the full moon. And there's an ancient tradition, going back to the Buddha, of Buddhists gathering the time of the full moon. It's kind of like this Buddhist Sunday, holy day. And one of the things especially late people would do, monastics would do During this time is they would purify themselves from for whatever unethical behavior they're done. So they would amongst get monks nuns get together and they do a confession and they get down they they get bent, bent down on their knees with another fellow monk or nun, and they say, Uh hum Mondays sub their patio or coil karami which means something like a venerable sir. I would like to acknowledge or confess the transgressions I've made against the precepts or against the rules. So the discipline and then the confessions made and then everyone is kind of like, kind of like the Jewish, you know, Yom Kippur kind of thing, right. And rather than once a year, it's done every two weeks. And then once that confession has happened, then it said that the monastic order is pure. And then they men they go into the meditation hall or they place it Particularly GLE Hall, and then they recite, they're all the rules that they live by. So it's kind of time to kind of remind themselves of the rules of the discipline. It's also the full moon night time when lay people will go visit a monastery. And what laypeople will do with it during this time, is they take the precepts and try their best to try to live with the precepts for that day, the whole day or time in the monastery or something. And they either will follow the five precepts or they'll add three extra, what's called the eight precepts for that day and try to live as purely as I can, it's beautiful, least I can. So part of the exploration here looking at virtue, ethics, the precepts in Buddhism is trying to understand what what is it has to say about more decisions, ethical Decisions, decisions about how we make how we

behave. upon what basis do we make decisions about how we live our lives ethically. And the you know, there's many different theories around ethics. There's some people who feel that ethics should be objective, you should have objective criteria for this is the way things are. And you know, what the, what the rule is, and you follow that rule various other people think feel nice to be very subjective. And so all you know, has to do with not not with rules has to do with your inner feelings, your how it feels to you or something. Some people feel that it should be some absolute standard, some people feel it should be relative, it's situational, all kinds of things. In the Buddhist tradition, as I understand it, ethical decision making has both an objective criteria for making decisions and a subjective criteria. And so it's not just simply a matter of what you feel, but it's not Also just a matter of what some absolute rules are, for laypeople, the five precepts are considered to be universal precepts. The 227 precepts. For monks, most of them are not considered to be universally applicable. They're called convention conventions conventional rules. There are conventions which are adapted for training purposes for particular reasons. Some of them have various things to do with particular historical context of Indian ancient times. And so, they're not seen as being universal. But the five precepts are considered to be of universal applicability or universal laws. People don't like talking about this universal laws. So what does that mean? So first of all, the five precepts are not to kill, not to steal, not to lie, not engage in sexual misconduct, and not to intoxicate oneself. So why are they Universal. One of the reasons is that is that when you can when you transgress against these precepts, you're creating the traditional language language, you're creating karma for yourself. There's karmic consequences to those that behavior. And because there's karmic consequence, there's it's a natural law. If you break some of the other training precepts, you know, 227 doesn't have the same kind of karmic way to Universal karmic quality to it, than it does if you kill somebody. So, you know, for what, like the first tool I broke when I was a monk. I didn't even know I broke it was the first day I'd been ordained. And this man came over to me and said, You have to make a confession to Southern monk. You know, I just basically got ordained and walked from the ordination Hall back to my room. I've done and what happened was one of the 227 rules is that you're Outer robe, the hit the bottom hem of it has to be lined up parallel to the hem of your skirt. Monks wear skirts and I've broken one of the rules. Now this is a very, very minor rule. But, and he was, I thought this guy was a little uptight. But you know, I thought about these things, you know, but but, you know, I there was no ethical, you know, consequence, particularly having my hands a little bit off askew right? There was no big deal. There's just something you have to train yourself to do. Let's do etiquette more than anything else. But when you lie, or you kill, or you steal, you can't do that behavior. Without somehow or other having unwholesome or unhealthy states of mind. All you do them. There has to be hate, it has to be greed, there has to be fear. There has to be something delusion in your mind or to do that. And when that when you act from Greed, hate and delusion that creates repercussions consequences in the mind, it sets in motion certain chain of cause and effect, which Buddhist tradition will define as karma karmic effect, and some of that is very obvious and some is kind of not so obvious how that karmic consequence operates. But, you know, mostly we can understand that, I think, has a lot to do with how we conditioned the mind and the kind of things that we kind of shape how we shape the mind. So, these five precepts are considered universal, because universal laws, because they have to do with these karmic patterns, these karmic laws of how the mind operates and functions, and how we

understand the kind of causal laws of how of operation of the mind. So, so, the objective side of the precepts are considered considered very important objective how to understand them Actively. And that is there's three objective criteria for making decision in Buddhism, I think called decision. One is, is it going to harm you when you do it? And that's considered to be somewhat objective, and sometimes you can't always know. But is the behavior you're going to do and it caused harm for you. So if you're going to kill something, because some life if you're going to steal from someone, if you're going to lie or somehow get involved in sexual misconduct, or if you're going to toxic yourself, is that going to harm you in some way? And many people have found out afterwards, they've done something it's a guy wish I didn't do that. I mean, I can't believe it. Now I have to live with the consequences. Sometimes the consequences last a lifetime. So there's some that do some kind of analysis and kind of look at our behavior and kind of have some sense of understanding what is the consequence? What's the likely consequences of doing this kind of behavior? Is it going to cause harm, so likely to cause harm. And that's considered to be somewhat objective criteria. The second objective criteria is, is it going to cause harm to someone else, this behavior. And so to best of our ability, we try to have that analysis trying to figure out is going to cause harm to someone else. I remember once someone said that he didn't like to cross the street. When the pedestrian cross light, said, Don't walk. Even though there's no traffic coming in, other people would kind of look both directions. And if there's no traffic, no cars inside, they'd walk across anyway. And that person said, I don't like to walk across, because I know it's safe to walk across. But I actually don't know who's watching. And there might be kids watching, maybe other people watching and it creates a condition for other people to make it easier for them to walk across. Maybe not. So say it's a very kind of a very interesting way of thinking Prince is concerned about the welfare of others and how they impact the consequences for other people. I don't know if there's anything particularly karmically unethical about, you know, crossing the street and says, Don't walk. But but the, you know, the we think about other people, we think about the effects of our behavior on other people. If we, if we start thinking that way, I think and start expanding the causal network network, the cause and effect network of our effects of our lives and the world around us. It gets very interesting very quickly. So that's the second objective criteria. The third objective criteria has to do with the and this is very important in Buddhist ethical analysis. And that has to do with the quality of the intention. Behind the choices you make, what's the what's the quality, what's the characteristics of the intention, and that's it, that's supposed to be some objective that you can actually feel or sense or see inside of yourself. So is the quality intention, one that's has treated it has hated it, or has the illusion that it those three are kind of the umbrella terms for many other kind of things underneath it, but greed, hate and delusion are the root root kind of unhealthy states of mind. And when those three are present, or it's kind of Descendants to kind of its kind of cousins or presence. If you're really sensitive, really pay attention, you feel that they're painful. It hurts to have those. If you're busy or preoccupied or engaged and you know what you want, and you're greedy, you might not notice the cost that we'd have on ourselves. So and If the intention is one of love, generosity, wisdom, the opposite of those three root poisons, then that feels a lot better. It feels good. So that's considered to be some objective criteria, you can actually do enough sensitivity you can feel the texture, the quality of these intentions in the here and now. And then iteration says don't do something that causes you harm that was the first criteria is going to cause you harm then

don't do it. So you can feel how these intentions create karma within ourselves. So in living by the precepts, they're really expressions, kind of practical expressions or guidelines for how to live our life. We wish that we would live naturally if we were very attentive. Through these three character criteria, if you were very attentive to those three all the time, you wouldn't have to have the five precepts. You wouldn't go kill, you wouldn't steal, you wouldn't do these other things. But it's useful sometimes to have shorthand. It's useful sometimes to have these guidelines that are readily at hand, rather than thinking of whether this be kathiria criteria not to kind of analyze a situation, is it or isn't it and all that, but you have the shorthand says, you know, these are the precepts. And one of the advantages of the precepts is that when you find yourself about to cross the line, break one of them because you have those little shorthand expressions in your mind, then it's a wake up call and say, wait a minute. The Buddhist tradition says, These are precepts that I should keep. Let me stop and look at what's really going on here for me now, let me use these presets as mirrors to look within me try to understand what's going on. And this is a very efficient aspect of Buddhist precepts is to use them as mirrors for self understanding. Because what you don't want to do in Buddhism, I don't think is take the precepts kind of blindly it turns out this is the way it is, I have to be kind of not lie, not steal, do not do this, and not kind of understand ourselves in more deeper, deeper way to be kind of blind, how we hold it, it can be self righteous, people will follow the precepts to blindly and self righteously can cause a lot of a lot of harm. So, but it is to use the priests to be very serious about them, but use them as mirrors, and then to understand ourselves. So, the second precept is a precept of not stealing the literal translation of the Buddhist wording of this is to avoid the refrain from taking what is not given. And it's that is a different is a broader connotations to say don't take what's not given to Say, don't steal. So it has to be kind of offered in some way. It's not offered, don't take it. The corollary to not stealing is generosity, the ability to let go, and contentment. So, all three of which are very important qualities being cultivated in Buddhist practice, generosity, the capacity to let go and contentment and the way, the way to develop oneself and go really deep and discover liberation Buddhism is through the doors of those three qualities you want to cultivate and develop. And so if we start doing behavior, which does the opposite comes from discontent, comes from greed comes from grasping and holding on, then we're not creating the conditions in our hearts is beautiful conditions. That becomes a spring for springboard for liberation. So not to take what is not given. There is a description by mahasaya Tao of this precept, which I thought was kind of nice. kind of puts flesh on it kind of makes you makes me think when I read it, then, you know to say don't steal, that's kind of nice. You know, I'm not gonna steal pencils at work, or I'm not gonna steal apples from my neighbor's apple tree or I'm not gonna steal, you know, my friend's car or anything and of course, right. But so mahasaya Tao, the Burmese teacher says, taking what is not given literally means taking anything that is not given by the owner. This is of course, stealing and stealing includes taking a person's property surreptitiously or taking it by force. Stealing is taking surreptitiously what belongs to another person without his knowledge while he is asleep or off his guard are absent elsewhere to cheat a buyer by using false weights and measures to fall off a worthless article on a buyer fobbed off. I thought that I don't use that word reason. I kind of kind of understand what it means but anybody know that word fobbed off? English term British term love off. Well, what does that mean in American English PAMA I see Thank you. I had a different Yeah, okay, the father of a worthless article and a

buyer to sell counterfeit gold and silver, not to pay due wages, or conveyances, conveyance charges or customs or taxes, and so forth. Wait until April to refuse to repay loans of money or property, or what is entrusted to one's care and to refuse to compensate for any damage or loss for which one is responsible. All these constitute acts of stealing. Robbery is using force to obtain others people's property includes intimidation and extortion of money or property, excessive and coercive taxation, unlawful confiscation of property for the settlement of debt, court mitigation for illegal ownership through false witnesses and false statements. Nice taking what's not giving, stealing One of the, you know, the corollary, the opposite of stealing is generosity. And which is a very important practice of cultivating developed in Buddhism. And one of the ways to be very generous is to create conditions of safety for others. And so when we don't steal when we create, then we can we are safe for other people. You know, I've been very inspired in environments where I've been, where I felt it was really safe, to leave things and not have to worry about things being stolen. Some countries I've been to I felt that way. And certain situations, Buddhist monasteries I've been to, it's felt really safe to me to leave doors unlocked and, you know, leave things out and remember once dropping my wallet and monastery in Thailand, and it was, you know, returned to me, whereas sometimes in the streets of Thailand, it would necessarily expected to be returned by the monastery was returned. So when we live by the precepts, it's an act of generosity for others, we don't just do it for our own sake. We also do it for others. In my own practice life, I've been very inspired by the example of other practitioners, who seem to abide very happily with great contentment. In lives of great simplicity, will you felt that you were around these people you didn't feel like they wanted a lot. You didn't feel like needed a lot. They were quite content. They sometimes have very little stuff, sometimes amongst I've known, had very little possessions and they seem to be very content. There's some people here in America that I've met, not monks just lay people, some of them are not even Buddhists. Who one person in particular I think about, I think I think of him as the wealthiest person. I know. But for Actually, he's one of the poorest. But the way he lives his life, he's, you know, he feels completely happy and do what he wants to do and generous. And, you know, he lives as if you know, you know, I know people I know people who are wealthy, who are not as free and happy and delighted as he is, I think of him as being very wealthy. Many years ago, I met a man, a psychologist in Los Angeles, introduced himself to me as a psycho economist. And he was a therapist, for people who are really wealthy, who really wealthy who felt terribly troubled that he didn't have enough money. And he had one client who had \$60 million and felt that You know, he didn't have enough was not enough. He was really worried and afraid but had enough sense to go go go talk to a therapist. And my friend has almost nothing so happy. There's a great story and the suttas have I think it's a king who ordained as a monk. And the other monks kind of bet the discard is not gonna last very long. He's used to the pampered life and all this well know stuff. And, you know, I bet he's gonna, you know, return to the day like soon come back to his king, his throne. And one day the monks are in the monastery in the year kind of off in the distance in the grove of trees, the king saying, oh, what happiness what happiness what happiness and amongst a sea, he decided to go back to the lay life. And so they go over and ask him, you know, when you said, Oh, happiness happy, where did you meet? And he said, all this life of Mark is so great because I can just be here. Sleeping and living under a tree, and I feel safe enough to worry about locking doors and blocking, you know, to have guards and because I've nothing to steal, I think nothing was stolen from

me and you know, and I feel so great and so happy. If I go back to my life, you know, with lock doors and guards and all this wealth, you know, I'll just be seen sleepless nights. So life is simplicity. You know, it can have tremendous blessings. So a part of, you know, cultivating simplicity that somehow connected this precept is also looking at fear, fear of what we feel we need to have and why we need to have it looking at greed. Looking at jealousy, looking at a lot of different things that come into play, around wanting, not wanting, having keeping, crossing the line of taking what's not given in subtle ways. There's many subtle ways of doing it. Thinking about this, talking about this today, I wanted to read this quote by Gandhi, the Gandhi on non stealing, not stealing. We are not always aware of our real needs. And most of us improperly multiply or once and thus unconsciously make thieves of ourselves. If we devote some thought to the subject, we will finally we can get rid of quite a number of our once one follows the observance of not stealing, will bring about a progressive reduction of his or her own wants. Much of the distressing poverty in this world has arisen out of the breaches of the principle of non stealing and I'm sure he was very aware of that How much the degree to which the wealth of England was done in the English taking from the Indians what the Indians hadn't offered? Right? And I've heard I suspect other civilizations, other countries are guilty of doing the same thing. We won't name any of course. But it's you know, happened down through history happens still today, taking from other people what's not given. And then using it without even knowing, not even having any sense of that. We're participating in such systems. This was published in a newspaper some time ago. Bakersfield. random acts of senseless kindness have been breaking out all over the city, since the professor turned his frustration over reporting and murder, over reporting over reporting of murder and mayhem. into a class assignment. chuckwalla human relations instructor at Bakersfield College was listening to television when the phrase another random act of senseless violence got stuck in his mind like a bad melody. Inspiration struck and replaced a single word. The result was an essay assignment and a bumper sticker. Today I will commit one random act of senseless kindness, will you the idea began when he asked students in his human relations class to do something out of the ordinary to help someone who wasn't expecting it. Then write about it. Shane, go throw 20 bucks 30 blankets at the Salvation Army and brought them to homeless people who gather under a bridge. Todd Madison 19 encountered a homeless father and son at a convenience store and bought them the sodas and chips they wanted. Ron Howard 32 but breakfast for a stranger standing behind him in the cafeteria line. The professor is not the first to promote the idea of random kindness. And Herbert of Marin County got credit for that and a book called random acts of kindness. But wall foster wall is responsible for the latest wave of kind heartedness in the southern San Joaquin Valley. This is an Associated Press article in the news release. Bad news perpetuates the attitude that we are islands onto ourselves in this sea of people, and we better stay that way if we are to survive. While said, but the bumper sticker races expectations and steers hope he said that hope motivated students, Jose Padilla 19, who paid his mother's gas and electric bill. He said in today's society, you know, how we're taught to compete and to step on other people to get to the Top while this bumper sticker to me says, Let's step to the top together. That's nice. So, probably all seen a bumper sticker was kind of fashionable for a while. So to take the precept not stealing seriously, is not to do it as some kind of moral commandment or some kind of way to put ourselves in a straitjacket. But it's it's a way of learning how to release to free, something that's quite beautiful inside of ourselves. It's actually brings

freedom rather than confinement to do it. And the task for people engaged in the Buddhist precepts is to find where the freedom is that the precepts are pointing to. So I would like to ask all of you, if I may, two things for this week. One is try to be more strict with yourself than you usually are around not taking what is not given. So I don't know what that you know what it I'm sure all of your ethical would be try to be more strict and see what that's like. To give you a little example of this. This is maybe a silly example but one that inspires me. So monastics, take this so seriously not taking was not given that if they go into your house to visit and you have a coffee table book, in which meant for guests to look at right sitting there on the table, coffee table and they sit down the couch, they will not touch it. They're not allowed to touch it until it's offered to them, because there'll be taken what's not given. A Zen teacher once said, you take what's not given, you're stealing when you from yourself when you spend time daydreaming You lost some daydreams, then you're stealing from yourself. That's interesting. So there's all kinds of ways you can kind of stretch this and make it interesting for you. So one, one thing I'd ask you to do is to take this precept of not taking was not given more strictly than you normally do in your life. And doing that being more strict about it. Do that as a way to understand yourself better, not as a burden, and see if you can find the freedom that that might point to. The second thing I'd like to ask you to do is to practice a random act of kindness of generosity. This week, wouldn't be great if there was a, you know, the local paper, Mercury News. We'd understand what's going on but there's a ripple things thing going on here. Great. So why don't you try it? Try to do a random act of generosity this week. They need someone you don't even know? It doesn't have to be anybody. And look for some opportunity opportunities. And then see what that does to you, to your heart to you. Learn with the teachers, but teachers about yourself. Study yourself as you do all these things, always study yourself. So tonight's the full moon night. And the full moon is a symbol in Buddhism, for enlightenment, for the awakened heart, the awakened mind. One of the very odd things about the moon we say the moon is full. It's new. It's a quarter moon. sliver Moon The moon is always full. Thank you. It's always cool. But there's these shadows up kind of the earth casts shadows on it, and we say what's a half moon or whatever, you know, whatever. But the moon is always cool. So I would say the same about you that your, your moon, your awakened heart is always there, it's always full. But there's shadows that come across it. And maybe you can understand those shadows and release them for you them so that the bright light that's in you can shine freely. And that's partly what the precepts are about. Well, I guess I'm allowed to talk to nine o'clock without taking what's not given. And now, but I did want to take time for questions, but do we have time so I apologize for that. And Maybe another time we can discuss all this some more. Thank you very much