

# 2013-11-03 The Second Precept Sila

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## SPEAKERS

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That was impressive. Kind of it was kind of long, long for all these announcements. The part of it that made me happy was to feel the vitality and the generosity of all these people who are doing things and offering things and standing up and making announcements and it's and all the stuff that goes on here. There was a time when we, you know, 10 years ago, we first had this building that almost nothing happened here. So it's a nice to hear all that. So about a month ago, I started to give what will be probably once a month a series of talks on ethics, Buddhist ethics, sila. And a month ago I gave a talk on the first precept which is not to cause injury, harm not to kill. And today, I'd like to cover the second precept, which is not to take what is not given. It fits under the category of sila, sila as the Pali word for usually translated into English as ethics or virtue. And if the one idea about this topic of sila, is that when you hear it evoked, it's supposed to make you happy, is supposed to feel joy and delight. So I doubt I've managed to do manage that in the course of our time here. But at least that was that's the direction we're, you know, we're hopefully going that you'll come to have such appreciation of this that it will bring you joy. And this certainly was a foreign idea to me when I was a high school student or my early years, that somehow ethics would be a joyful topic. It's kind of a drag, I thought The so the some of the functions, or ethics or some of the associations that the Buddhist tradition puts with ethics is that ethics is a gift. We give people, the gift or society the gift of safety of trust, by living an ethical way. So as an association that ethics is not a duty, like you kind of weigh you down, but rather it's a gift that we offer to others. And the other is association with sila ethics is that it's a protection. It protects us and protects others as well. That's why it safety's involved. So it protects us as an individual, because we have less to worry about. If we live ethically we have to worry about getting caught. We don't worry about defending ourselves about retribution, punishment, whatever else comes with. You know, when we do Things unethically the definition of or they're kind of the crux or the guideline for understanding what's ethical in Buddhism is very simple is whether or not it causes harm. Does it cause harm to yourself? Or does it cause harm to others. And if it causes harm, then it's considered not sila, you know, in English, we say unethical. And the point of living by sila is to avoid causing harm. And even better than that, hopefully, benefiting the world around us. So in that, in that kind of measure of ethics, Buddhism is fits closer into what's called situational ethics, where it's a situation that we look at, to see whether something is going to be ethical or not, because in any given situation, what causes harm and what doesn't cause harm can vary. And so we have to consider the situation where In, and therefore, generally Buddhism doesn't have kind of abstract ethics or you know, moral commandments that come from outside, that are supposed to be kind of overlaid on top of the experience, independent of, you know, the situation where there but rather, it's based on this principle, the principle of non harming.

So if we look at sila, ethics, it's possible to divide it into three aspects. And the three aspects are called in Buddhism, the three trainings and the three trainings are the training and ethics. The training in usually says Samadhi, but the training and inner cultivation in our development of our hearts and minds

and the training in wisdom. And what's significant in Buddhism is that the emphasis is over and over again to where we're pointing to is training As opposed to a belief system, many people coming out of a Western religious background, assume that to be a religion, any self respecting religion is supposed to have a set of beliefs. And if you just understand those beliefs, then you can be a card carrying member of that religion. The Buddha in his time, was very clearly put himself into a category of religious people in ancient India, who did not rely on sacred texts, did not rely on a tradition that was received from a tradition of teachers or elsewhere, did not rely on reasoning for their spiritual guidance, but instead relied on what can be known through direct experience. And he was presented himself as fairly unique in his environment, as someone who discovered truths through his own death, direct experience, independent of any other authority. Figure. And in teaching, then he didn't say, Well, now I know now I'll tell you how it is. So you don't, but rather what he did was he offered a training system, technology for having the direct experience for yourself. And so that's why training gets priority in Buddhism. Some people would say more than beliefs because it's the training that's really important is a train and that allows us to have in liberating experiences to understand our life, in the immediacy of our life, rather than abstractly. So, this idea of situational ethics to actually be present for our life as it is, and then to be able to reflect and consider it is part of this approach. And so training. So from the point of view of training ethics involves these three different areas, training and the ethics itself, training in In your cultivation, transformation, and training and wisdom. The first when we look at the very same thing, episode ethics, this includes all three. If we look at the narrowest meaning of ethics, in the Buddhist, early Buddhist tradition, it's most often associated with restraint that we restrain ourselves from behavior that's going to cause harm. And sometimes it's used sometimes it's good to have certain guidelines to make it easy for us because sometimes we don't have the ability to look at situations and try to understand situationally, what is actually the best thing to do here. So sometimes if we don't know it, sometimes it's better to have default positions. And a pretty safe default positions is the five precepts. A good default is not to kill anyone. If you need one, right? A good a good default is not to steal a good default is not to harm through your sexuality. Good default is not to lie and a good default is don't get intoxicated. So if some people, it's really helpful to have those defaults, and to restrain their behavior by it, because chances are pretty high that you'll cause less harm in the world if you avoid doing those things, that it's the greater good is found by not doing those things. And by doing those things. So some people practice the practice these precepts. From the point of view of restraint. We don't do these things. And there's something some people put a very strong boundary among up. I'm not going to cross that line. And part of the motivation for that is that it protects us. We're protected we're protected from the, from the, the cycles cycle of cause and effect. As you sow, so shall you reap. That if you lie to your friends, your friends won't trust you. And you beat that mistrust. If you steal a people won't trust you perhaps. And I talked to someone just recently who had a family member who was involved in embezzlement, and most family members had net worth wouldn't have anything to do with this person anymore. So that's kind of, you know, a big consequence. So we protect ourselves from the deleterious consequences by following this default of restraint and crossing these lines.

But ethics doesn't stop there. Because what's most important, I think, in Buddhism is not that we follow guidelines or default guidelines, or even that we have to follow the principles, but rather than we become transformed from the inside out, so that rather than acting ethically, we become ethical. So that the ethics becomes just how we are as a person, part of our character, our characters changed and that involves developing a variety of inner capacities that maybe are not so well developed, developing a higher, higher ethical sensitivity, like capacity of mindfulness and attention that will take in and feel and sense people in ourselves. And so in this higher ethical sensitivity, you're much less likely likely to want to cause harm. If you are deeply at peace and happy and relaxed and contented, and you're probably much less likely to say something spiteful, harmful to your best friend, then if you're angry and upset and harried that the quality of how you are, affects tendencies for ethics. So we cultivate a higher inner

quality of heart and mind and sensitivity. And we can cultivate such things as compassion, love and generosity. And then wisdom has to do with Understanding this it has to do with in terms of ethics has to do with a variety of different things we can understand about the world we live in, we can understand ourselves better, we can understand what motivates us, so that what motivates us to do things in the world comes from the best inside of us rather than the worst. We can understand the consequences of our actions. And so we can understand the consequences and how our actions affect other people. And we understand the consequences and how it affects ourselves. Sometimes people who do unethical things, do not consider the consequences of what they're going to do. Some of you have been here with Jacques verda, has taught to awkward and teaches mindfulness at San Quentin. And he has a program for inmates there. And one of the first things he does and beginning of their program is he writes on a chalkboard, how long the prisoners had been in jail, and he's in San Quentin, where they All these lifers So, you know, 20 years, 25 years, 35 years, I've been there a long time. And you know, it's a roomful of 20 men maybe. And so they add, he adds up all the years together, they've served time, you know, 700 or 800 900 years total. It's a big, big number, right? And then the other half of the chalkboard says, Now, how long was your period of? Of what do you call it? The The, the time of danger, every time an imminent danger, meaning, how much time were you in where you were in that it took for you to be in danger to do the crime you did? You know, what, you know, like sometimes some of these people and they they kill, it wasn't premeditated murder, but, you know, isn't the passion of the moment. And so they added up, and, you know, three minutes, four minutes and so, and this is at any add up all the minutes It's of imminent danger, that they got them into trouble. And it's something like, I didn't know for the 20 men, maybe it's, you know, 90 minutes total. And they see this bell and 90 minutes versus 900 years. Those are big consequences, right? you kind of see dramatically. And he does that, to train people to emphasize the importance of being present and mindful all the time and not to lose one's attention in these times of imminent danger. So to take the time to reflect on consequences to others to oneself, the causes inside of us to source the impulses that we have. And then also a part of the wisdom training is to consider which takes work and effort and thinking what are the alternatives to whatever thing you're going to do that might be unethical. Are there alternatives that's better for everyone, including for yourself. The Wisdom side Some people don't like because it requires some work. So there was a whole generation of Buddhists coming out of the hippie era that, you know, Mr. Natural, where you know, you're just supposed to be naturally ethical.

No, we're just to relax, hang out, and, and just change tensions about change yourself that way. But I think to be a responsible citizen in our society requires active active consideration and thinking about this world. So three aspects of ethics, three trainings in ethics, trainings in restraint, training and transforming our character and training in wisdom and understanding. So I would like to try to apply this to the second precept, which is taking what's not given. It's a beautiful way of stating it, because rather than saying not stealing, it has a higher order of care than not stealing, you have to actually feel or experience someone offering you something in order for you to take it that was not offered. We don't take it. And, and the so as a precept of restraint, it's protects us because if we take things that aren't offered, someone will probably be upset and upset with you. If you take something which is not offered, other people will feel upset to feel hurt. I was very, very, very meaningful for me to experience the feelings my wife had after her car was broken into. She felt violated the issue is kind of really kind of shook her up, even though she wasn't present for the crime. The fact that it kind of came it kind of like was coming into her private life. Someone came into her car. And so I think We were living in San Francisco then. And I think from then on the neighborhood we lived in, she no longer felt safe, big impact on someone. So not to take what is not given to get to restrain oneself from that. One of the values of this restraint, of not restraining myself from taking what's not given, is it devalue in personal mindfulness. Some people use the precept of restraint, to hold back from the impulse of what they're going to do, and not to hold back just because for his own sake, but the whole back to be more

carefully attentive to what are the beliefs, what are the emotions, what are the desires, that are operating, that would motivate us to take what is not given. And for mindfulness practitioners, this is a great thing to have a kind of a mindfulness spell. And the mindfulness spell is when you notice you're about to take what's not giving I suspect that most of you here are not too inclined to go do the big ceilings like you probably not, you know, stealing cars and robbing banks and stuff like that. So probably in a conventional way, you're relatively ethical. But I suspect that for many people, there are certain areas that are gray gray areas. And some kind of the stereotype is kind of gray area for people who work for companies. Is that the company pencil, you know, the yes they Yes. You know, is the company pencil offered. I'm going to work at home and doing company work at home so of course, I should take the pencil home Of course, I should take the computer home Of course, I should take my whole office home. Of course, I should know, you know, where's the where's the gray line? Where is the limit? And, or even if it is offered, yes, you know, you could take a pencil home because you're doing work at home. And so you think Take 300 pencils home, they're offered, aren't they? And then you and then you sell them on the black market. You know, yes, they're offered they were offered, offered freely.

The I'm inspired by the example of Buddhist monastics. They have very strong rules by this. In fact, they're so strong they rule against not stealing, that if Buddha if a Buddhist monastic steal something of any value, I think they automatically stopped becoming a monk. It's one of the most serious crimes they can do. And it translates to if you invite a Buddhist, monastic Buddhist monk, you know, bhikkhu bikkhuni into your home. If you have a you know, I don't know a coffee table with a coffee table book, you know, that's meant for viewing and looking and picking up you know, and you Your friends come over and they're sitting there had to have the Lino it seems normal, natural, they would look at it because it's just kind of offered in a sense. A Buddhist monastic won't pick it up, don't touch it. Even until it's offered until you know, big, even idea of picking something up like that is crosses the line for them. And you might think it's too extreme. But I think it does two things. It heightens the mindfulness of the monastic. They get to look at their impulses and learn how not to get into them too easily. And it makes them trustable it means that you can you don't have a lot of doubts about you know, is it okay to leave this monk in my house alone, you know, chances that's a person the chances are very high that your stuff is safe. So I've gotten around this rule as a lay person, I have monks thing in my house. I get around this rule for them and helping them I stand outside my house when they come. And I say I offer you the house where there. And then. So then they know they can come in and, you know, and pick up the we don't have coffee table, but you know, if they need something they can they can use it. So not to take what's not given. And it might be interesting to consider some of the common areas that where people in our society take what's not given that maybe are kind of a gray area. And I wouldn't I wouldn't have much time now. But you might want to have a conversation with some of your friends. And think about where are the gray areas in our society? for this? For example, one gray area is what if you're, what if you're, you pay a bill and they give you more change back than they're supposed to? Or what if they give you the bill at the restaurant, but they left out one of the items that you ate Well, you know, they made a mistake, right? Food wasn't very good. The service wasn't very good. You know, they were pretty. They let me let us waiting outside for a long time. And you know, I think we deserve to get a little, you know, perk here. So I'm not going to say anything about the fact that I'm not being charged for everything. Is that taking what's not given? It hasn't been offered if maybe with someone's mistake. I was kind of painful for me to read a few weeks ago. I think it was in someplace like Louisiana or Mississippi, that the government of food stamp computers broke or had a flaw so that people have this guess is like this debit card for the food stamps. And there was it was unlimited amount. There was no, there was no limit on it. And when people in those counties got wind, enough people that you know, there were unlimited debit cards. They went to the supermarkets and got cartloads and cartloads of food and When the store managers thought this was really strange, I guess they called the food stamp company and department. I guess they thought they would they honored honored them, I guess before



they had time to close them down or change the floor. But I thought that was kind of bizarre kind of painful. That's clearly taking what's not given, even though you know, it's, you know, you had access to it. So where do we have a gray area in our society for people. The second aspect of stealing has to do with training and transforming our character transforming our hearts and minds, is kind of the most beautiful part I think of this whole ethics things. Because we have the potential of tremendous beauty within us. And the purity of the beauty of a pure heart, a pure mind, the beauty of generosity and compassion and caring for others and for ourselves. It's very inspiring to see I've been very inspired by people I've known who I felt had very high ethics, and lived a very ethical life, and not just inspired to be ethical myself and, and inspired to do this practice that we do, because the way this practice transforms our character for the better.

So in terms of not taking what is not given, one of the interesting areas to explore in practice, is the role of greed in taking what's not given, I think, I think it's probably relatively safe to assume that greed often plays a role in taking what's not given. Maybe not all the times, maybe there's other motivations as well. But often greed has some role to play. And, and so then if we're interested in inner transformation, we have to come to terms with our greed, which involves the Think of the very important task of understanding it. Buddhist mindfulness path has a lot to do with understanding. And so it's good to stop and take the time to understand. It means that we don't want to be in a hurry to get rid of something like read, don't look for the first opportunity to abandon it. Look for the first opportunity to study it. Because if you let go over too quickly, it'll probably come back. But if you take the time to get to know it, then you can begin uprooting it, then you cannot be tricked by it in the future because you know all its tricks. So begin understanding what it feels like, what it feels like in your heart and your mind with an impulse feels like understand what are the belief systems that are associated with it? The values that are associated with that greed, the fears that are associated with it, to really take time to study. This is one of the first steps in this personal transformation. The second is to begin appreciating some of the opposite impulses or motivations to begin to develop and cultivate the impulse towards generosity, to non greed, to caring for others as well. And so we don't leave our, the quality of our heart or mind to chance in Buddhism, we don't just kind of like you know, wake up in the morning and just kind of go ahead and live with whatever ethical sensibility we have for that day. But rather, we take responsibility for our character and Buddhist practices involved in changing that for the better. The third aspect has to do with understanding. So part of taking what's not given is to be engaged in the act of reflection about what is mean not to take what's not given? And where are the gray areas? Or how do I understand this in my life to become more sensitive, more attuned to paying attention to consequences of our actions, to be more attuned to paying attention to the sources within us, to pay people to be more attentive to the inter connected network of our lives that we live in. And I think this is where maybe the most amount of work needs to be done. Because the consequences of our actions are not only what we can see. There's a whole, you know, that our patterns of consumption the patterns in which we acquire our income, involves a network of interconnectedness that goes way beyond what we can to actually see, and to what degree do we take responsibility for our patterns, our participation in the economic system? So that we can our participation is ethical, or is out of sight out of mind, meaning I'm ethical, I don't have to worry about what's out there. I only have to worry about what's in here. As someone said on Friday, there is I don't know the details of this, but there's some kind of metal that is apparently into every computer that is mined in the Congo, and conditions which are close to slavery for the people who are mining them. And so if people are conditions of slavery, and we and we're, we're consuming we're using we're taking those things for our computers. Are we taking what's not given? Oh, no, no, those slaves meant us to have it. You know, that they're working hard for us. Thank you. And there's a lot of Places, you know, sweatshops around the world, you know, blood diamonds in Angola. And the variety of places, you know, it is, are things really being offered freely? Or are they basically being stolen sometimes? And if we're participating in a system like that, are we then, you know, we kind of

involved in with taking note what's given, are we offering the world the gift of our protection, the gift of safety, if we don't pay attention to these wider circles and wider things.

So what is the economic system we're in? And how do we participate in it is important. I think that, you know, as many of us know, in the last 25 years or so, in United States, there's been periodic cycles of outrage over corporate greed in corporate greed, where and you know, corporate greed where a corporation or an individual has Basically robbed hundreds of thousands of people, some people have their life savings because of how they invested the money how they took the money out and so it's clearly taken me what's not given but sometimes a white collar crimes, you know are not considered crimes or sometimes there's a huge gray areas in our investment system between what taking what's not given and, and taking what is given and how do we participate in this wider system? Does your investment is your income? What is the proper what is the proper distribution of, of wealth in society and system where wealthy are getting more wealthy? Is that really is that a system that's taken what's not given? Is it appropriate you know, people feel bad I earned it. I earned it. I earned it. You know that money Board of Directors gave me all this money so it was given to me but is that is a distribution of wealth freely given? I've been surprised sometimes by knowing people who received vast amounts of investment or stock options you know i mean start startup companies they got the other venture capitalists to offer them a lot of money or they got they sold their stocks finally and they got a lot of money and then they went around and bought monumentally big mansions and is it you know, yes they got the money but is that really what the money is for when people invest into buy stocks and you sell it is they buying it by buying a stock so you can build a big mansion is that taking was not given? Is it really that when our system is set up to do is to reward that way? So the actual economic system we're in the room I'm trying I'm trying to do here is to raise questions, not answers, hopefully. And the questions is, what I'm trying to point to is that to be ethical, and do it as the last of the three trainings, requires work requires educating ourselves thinking about what we're participating in, thinking about the consequences beyond what we can actually see. And, and that, you know, it's, it's not going to be, you know, given to you on a silver platter and made easy for you look on Wikipedia, and try it, you know, and look, take what taking what's not given all the different, you know, they explain it to you in great detail, and then you can know what to do. But it actually takes reflection, and some people are very adverse to doing this deeper education and reflection because it's tiring to have other things to do and sometimes because it's painful to read and learn about this thing. But that's why the second training is so important. The second training in mindfulness and transforming our character, hopefully gives us the capacity to be interested to study the world we live in, to do it in a way that isn't tiring, that's inspired by our goodness, rather than rather than worried about guilt and, and rather being repressed or way down to what goes on in the world, to be able to go into the world in a light way. Easy Way, but to do the work, to really be careful about this precept taking What's not to take what is not given.

And then if we turn it on its head around this precept, rather than a precept of restraint, we see it as a precept of action. Generally, the tradition says the action, the reciprocal action, would be generosity to live a life of generosity as opposed to taking what's not given. And some people say that this precept of taking when our kids are given implies the ethics of, of the gift economy of giving was not giving to people. So instead of taking what's not given, how about practicing, giving what's not asked for? That, wouldn't that be nice? I think that that's kind of the definition of generosity. Giving what's asked for isn't doesn't really allow for much generosity. But if we give more than what's asked for, that's where we start talking about generosity. And wouldn't it be great That's what everybody practiced. So I hope that though I didn't anticipate make this will make you happy. But this talk, but because my skills of presenting seal are not that great, but that's okay. Because maybe I gave you just enough information that now you could do the work of making yourself happy. So maybe today you can think about it. But end of the day, be really happy about this precept and your relationship to it. So thank you.