

Śīla Pāramitā

V. CHAPTER 5: THE PERFECTION OF MORAL VIRTUE

A. THREE KINDS OF BENEFIT AND PATH ADORNMENT FROM MORAL VIRTUE

How does the bodhisattva go about cultivating the observance of the moral precepts? If one cultivates the moral precepts for the sake of bringing about self-benefit, benefit of others, and the combined benefit of both, one thus becomes able to adorn the path to bodhi.

1. RIGHT MOTIVATION IN THE PRACTICE OF MORAL VIRTUE

In his cultivation of the moral precepts, the bodhisattva is motivated by a wish to so train and discipline beings that they are caused to abandon suffering and affliction.

One who cultivates the observance of the moral precepts entirely purifies all karmic deeds of body, mouth, and mind. He becomes able to relinquish and leave far behind any thoughts inclined toward unwholesome actions. He becomes well able to rebuke himself for any tendency toward evil actions or toward transgressing the moral prohibitions. His mind remains constantly fearful of committing even minor karmic offenses.

This is what qualifies as the mind observant of moral virtue as initially cultivated by the bodhisattva.

2. SELF BENEFIT

Through cultivating observance of moral precepts, one leaves behind all faults and calamities linked to evil deeds and is always reborn in a good place. This is what is meant by “self-benefit.”

3. BENEFIT OF OTHERS

One transforms beings through teaching and thus causes them to refrain from committing evil deeds. This is what is meant by “benefit of others.”

4. COMBINED BENEFIT

Through the moral precepts conducive to bodhi which one has personally cultivated, one teaches beings and thereby causes them to gain benefit identical to one’s own. This is what is meant by “combined benefit.”

5. ADORNING THE PATH OF BODHI THROUGH MORAL VIRTUE

On account of cultivating the observance of the moral precepts, one achieves success in abandoning desire and so forth on up to success

in ending the outflow impurities and success in realization of the most right of all enlightenments. This is what is meant by “adorning the path to bodhi.”

B. THE THREE TYPES OF MORAL PRECEPTS

Moral precepts are of three types. The first consists of those prohibitions which relate to the body. The second consists of those which relate to the mouth. The third consists of those which relate to the mind.

1. THE MORAL PRECEPTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE BODY

As for observing the moral precepts associated with the body, one eternally abandons all killing, stealing, and sexual conduct.¹³ One refrains from stealing away the lives of beings, refrains from intruding upon the wealth of others, and refrains from transgressing in the sphere of outward physical forms.

Additionally, one refrains from involvement in any of the causes, conditions, or means associated with killing or any of the other transgressions. One does not injure beings with staves, tiles, or stones. In an instance where some object belongs to someone else or is being used by someone else, so long as it has not been given, one does not take it, even if it be something so minor as a blade of grass or a leaf.

Additionally, one never so much as casts a sidelong glance at even the most minor displays of physical forms. In the four types of stately comportment one remains respectful, careful, and closely observant [of the correct standards]. This is what is meant by the moral precepts associated with the body.

2. THE MORAL PRECEPTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE MOUTH

As for observing the moral precepts associated with the mouth, one cuts off and eliminates all false speech, divisive speech, harsh speech, and frivolous speech. One never deceives others, causes estrangement among those who are united, engages in slander, ruins another's reputation, or artificially adorns one's words and speech. Nor does one create the means through which another person may become afflicted by torment.

When one speaks, his discourse is imbued with utmost sincerity, gentleness, loyalty, and trustworthiness. One's words are always beneficial, encouraging, and conducive to transformative teaching and the cultivation of goodness. This is what is meant by the moral precepts associated with the mouth.

3. THE MORAL PRECEPTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE MIND

As for observing the moral precepts associated with the mind, one eliminates desire, hatred, and wrong views, constantly cultivates a pliant mind, and refrains from committing karmic transgressions. One believes that this particular karmic offense will result in that particular bad resulting karmic retribution. By resorting to the power of meditative contemplation, one refrains from committing any sort of evil act.

Even with respect to minor karmic offenses, one generates thoughts by which one regards them as extremely serious. In the event that one errs and commits such an offense, then he becomes filled with fearfulness, worry, and regret.

With respect to other beings, one refrains from bringing forth any hatefulness or torment towards them. Whenever one observes other beings, he brings forth thoughts of fond mindfulness towards them. One recognizes the kindnesses of others, repays kindnesses, and maintains a mind free of miserliness. One delights in doing meritorious deeds and constantly uses them as means to teach others. One constantly cultivates the mind of kindness and extends pity to all. This is what is meant by the moral precepts associated with the mind.

4. FIVE BENEFITS ARISING FROM THE PRECEPTS OF THE TEN GOOD KARMAS

These moral precepts implicit in the ten good karmic deeds bring about five sorts of beneficial circumstances:

First, one becomes able to control evil actions.

Second, one becomes able to create a wholesome mind.

Third, one becomes able to block off the arising of afflictions.

Fourth, one perfects a pure mind.

Fifth, one becomes able to bring about growth in one's practice of the moral precepts.

5. SUMMARY DISCUSSION OF THE PRECEPTS OF THE TEN GOOD KARMAS

In a case where a person skillfully cultivates non-negligent practice and perfects the right mindfulness which distinguishes between good and evil, one should realize that this person is definitely able to cultivate the moral precepts contained within the ten good karmic deeds.

The countless aspects involved in the eighty-four thousand categories of moral precepts are all contained within the moral precepts contained within the ten good karmic deeds. These moral

precepts included in the ten good karmic deeds are able to serve as the root of all precepts associated with goodness. It is through the cutting off of all evils associated with the body, mouth, and mind that one becomes able to control all unwholesome dharmas. It is on this basis that one defines moral precepts as such.

C. THE FIVE CATEGORIES OF MORAL PRECEPTS

There are five categories of moral precepts:

- First, the *pratimokṣa* moral precepts;
- Second, the moral precepts linked to meditative concentration;
- Third, the moral precepts associated with the absence of out-flow impurities;
- Fourth, moral precepts involving withdrawing sense faculties;
- Fifth, spontaneous moral precepts involving no intentional effort.

Those precepts taken on in the context of the four proclamations occurring during [official Sangha] *karman* proceedings are referred to as the *pratimokṣa* moral precepts.

Moral precept observance associated with acquisition of the four basic dhyānas and the four dhyāna preliminary stations constitutes what is referred to as the moral precepts linked to meditative concentration.

Moral precept observance associated with the four basic dhyānas and the preliminary station at the threshold of the first dhyāna may qualify as circumstances involving precept observance free of out-flow impurities.

When one draws in the sense faculties and cultivates a mind characterized by right mindfulness which, in its seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing permits of no negligence regarding forms, sounds, smells, tastes, or touchables, this is what constitutes moral precept observance involving withdrawing the sense faculties.

When, having already relinquished this body, one continues to refrain from committing evil deeds even after rebirth into a subsequent existence, this is what is referred to as spontaneous moral precepts involving no intentional effort.

D. RATIONALES FOR OBSERVING PRECEPTS LINKED TO SPECIFIC PATH PRACTICES

A bodhisattva's cultivation of the moral precepts is of a class not held in common with either the Hearer Disciples or the Pratyekabuddhas. It is because it is of a sort "not held in common," that it qualifies as "skillfully upholding the moral precepts." On account of skillfully

upholding the moral precepts, one then becomes able to benefit all beings.

When one upholds the moral precepts associated with the mind of kindness, it is for the sake of rescuing and protecting beings and causing them to be happy. When one upholds the moral precepts associated with the mind of compassion, it is for the sake of being able to endure all manner of suffering as one extricates beings from danger and difficulty.

When one upholds the moral precepts associated with sympathetic joy, it is for the sake of delighting in the cultivation of goodness and remaining free of negligence.

When one upholds the moral precepts associated with equanimity, it is in order to regard adversaries and close relations with uniform equality while abandoning both desire and hatefulness.

When one upholds the moral precepts associated with kindly giving, it is for the sake of teaching and disciplining beings.

When one upholds the moral precepts associated with patience, it is for the sake of constantly keeping the mind disposed towards pliancy and gentleness while also keeping it free of the obstacle of hatefulness.

When one upholds the moral precepts associated with vigor, it is for the sake of causing daily increase in one's good karmic deeds while preventing retreating and turning back.

When one upholds the moral precepts associated with dhyāna absorption, it is for the sake of abandoning desire and unwholesomeness while also causing growth in the branches of one's dhyāna meditation practice.

When one upholds the moral precepts associated with wisdom, it is for the sake of creating roots of goodness leading to insatiability in the pursuit of extensive learning.

When one upholds the moral precepts associated with drawing close to the good spiritual guide, it is for the sake of aiding the realization of the unsurpassed path to bodhi.

When one upholds the moral precepts associated with leaving bad spiritual guides far behind, it is for the sake of abandoning the three wretched destinies and circumstances involving the eight difficulties.¹⁴

E. FACTORS DEFINING "PURITY IN OBSERVING MORAL PRECEPTS"

A person who is a bodhisattva is one who upholds purity in observing the moral precepts:

Not relying on the desire realm, not drawing close to the form realm and not abiding in the formless realm—these constitute “purity in observing the moral precepts.”

Abandoning the objects of desire, eliminating the hindrance of hatred, and extinguishing the obstacle of ignorance—these constitute “purity in observing the moral precepts.”

Abandoning the two extremes of “eternalism” and “annihilationism” while refraining from actions contradicting [the causal principles inhering in] causes and conditions—these constitute “purity in observing the moral precepts.”

Not courting in attachment to characteristics derived through false naming within the sphere of forms, feelings, perceptions, karmic formative factors, or consciousness—this constitutes “purity in observing the moral precepts.”

Not being tied to causes, not formulating views, and not abiding in doubtfulness and regret—these constitute “purity in observing the moral precepts.”

Not abiding in covetousness, hatred, or delusion, the three roots of unwholesomeness—this constitutes “purity in observing the moral precepts.”

Not abiding in self-imputing arrogance (*asmi-māna*), elevating arrogance (*atimāna*), overweening arrogance (*māna-atimāna*), generic arrogance (*māna*), or the great arrogance (*abhi-māna*),¹⁵ all while also remaining gentle, harmonious, and skillfully adaptive—this constitutes “purity in observing the moral precepts.”

Not being even slightly moved by gain and loss, disgrace and esteem, praise and blame, or suffering and happiness—this constitutes “purity in observing the moral precepts.”

Not being defiled by the false conventional designations within the sphere of worldly truth while abiding in accord with the genuine ultimate truth—this constitutes “purity in observing the moral precepts.”

Abiding in quiescent cessation wherein one remains neither afflicted nor inflamed and wherein one has abandoned all phenomenal characteristics—this constitutes “purity in observing the moral precepts.”

F. SUMMATION ON THE BODHISATTVA'S CULTIVATION OF MORAL PURITY

To sum up the essentials of the matter: when one continues to contemplate impermanence and continues to generate renunciation, even to the point where one refrains from cherishing his

own physical life—when one diligently practices the development of roots of goodness and when one acts with heroic vigor—this is what constitutes “purity in observing the moral precepts.”

G. THE ESSENCE OF THE BODHISATTVA’S PERFECTION OF MORAL VIRTUE

Even while the bodhisattva, *mahāsattva* cultivates the observance of the moral precepts, he does not perceive [the existence of] a “pure mind,” for he has abandoned thought [prone to seizing on such characteristics]. When one accords with this, one achieves the perfection of *śīla pāramitā*.