



Ethics for the Insight Dialogue Community

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The Foundation of Buddhist Practice

The Buddha taught that ethical training (Sila) is essential for both individual and relational spiritual practice. He taught that the five basic trainings, or precepts, are a foundation for spiritual growth.

The Five Trainings, also known as the Five Precepts, in the original Pali and an English translation:

Paṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

We undertake the training-precept to abstain from harming breathing beings.

Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

We undertake the training-precept to abstain from taking what is not given.

Kāmesumicchācāra veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

We undertake the training-precept to abstain from misconduct concerning sense-pleasures.

Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

We undertake the training-precept to abstain from false speech.

Surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

We undertake the training-precept to abstain from substances that create heedlessness.

As a community, centered on interpersonal meditation practices, we pay special heed to upholding ethical integrity. We recognize that our relationships, and thus our practice, occur within systems of inequity and disproportionate harm. Humbly we bring the inevitable blindnesses and biases of our individual and cultural conditioning to a relational practice that is dedicated to freedom and to our awakening together.



Ethics for Daily Life

The five ethical guidelines serve as dynamic, living practices in everyday life that foster awakening in the modern world. We recognize that all life is relational and include multiple levels of relationality:

- as individual humans
- as participants in collectively constructed social worlds
- as members of a living natural world

Our practice deepens through growing awareness of how our words and actions, intentionally and unintentionally, impact ourselves, each other, and all sentient beings. The following commentaries and interpretations are presented not as static rules but as opportunities for ongoing individual and relational investigations in our sangha.

1. Refrain from taking life: *Reverence for Life*

We acknowledge and honor all life. We hold the intention to cultivate healthy and respectful relationships with the many life forms of which we are one. We strive to understand the systems of harm of which we are a part and to recognize how our actions or inactions perpetuate or diminish harm. Aware that our liberation is intertwined with that of all beings, we commit to understanding and transforming suffering, both individually and societally.

2. Refrain from taking what is not given: *Equitable Sharing*

We accept for nourishment and comfort what is freely offered while being aware of the needs of the whole living community upon which our existence depends. As individuals, we scrupulously refrain from taking that which does not belong to us, and also reflect collectively on how historical ownership has been established. We agree to be honest in our dealings with money and to exercise care when expending communal funds and resources. We work towards ecological systems of sustainability and renewal based on just and compassionate sharing among all peoples, animals, and plants.



3. Refrain from sensual misconduct: *Integrity in Sexual Behavior*

Aware of the power of sexual energy and its potential to open towards deep union as well as to activate deep wounding, we choose to engage in respectful sexual expression based on mutual consent. We are also aware of power inequities within relationships and will thus refrain from harmful or exploitative sexual speech and behaviors. In this way, we protect ourselves, those around us, our families, our community, and children everywhere. We undertake the practice of honoring our own partnering commitments and those of others.

4. Refrain from harmful speech: *Ethical Communication*

Aware of the power of both verbal and non-verbal expression to heal or to harm, we cultivate clear intention when speaking, and receptive attention when listening. We practice saying only what is true, kind, beneficial, and timely, while refraining from words that are harsh, idle, or divisive.

We recognize that conflicts naturally arise in community life due to our pervasive individual and social conditioning. We are open to applying relational practices to heal relational ruptures and nurture the skills and capacity for reconciliation whether as participant or as witness. We choose words that support harmony in the community but do not refrain from speaking truth where harm is perceived.

5. Refrain from actions that dull the mind: *Conscious Consumption*

As sensitive organisms, we are impacted by what we take in at all our sense doors.

We commit to health, clarity, and well-being for both our individual and communal body-mind. We refrain from that which leads to heedlessness, loss of awareness, or addictive mind-states.



Ethics for Formal Relational Meditation Practice

In order to create a safe and wholesome environment that supports the greatest benefit for all practitioners, we apply the five ethical trainings to Insight Dialogue retreats and all formal relational practice, whether in-person or online.

1. Refrain from taking life: *Reverence for Life*

We aspire to honor the life unfolding in ourselves, our sangha, and other living beings. We hold awareness of and regard for all practitioners and the diverse ways life manifests in each of us due to conditioning of class, ethnicity, race, culture, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, physical ability, etc. We express ourselves authentically and are open to hearing the impact of our words and actions, especially on those whose experiences may have been marginalized. In this way, we fully support and do not diminish the life of others.

2. Refrain from taking what is not given: *Equitable Sharing*

We honor the time and energy of the teaching community and our fellow practitioners during Insight Dialogue practice by offering our full presence and participation. Using an economy of words, we allow a generosity of time and space for others to be present. We fully respect the belongings of others and the resources of the host or retreat center.

3. Refrain from sensual misconduct: *Integrity in Sexual Behavior*

It is natural to feel attracted, repelled, or neutral towards another human being. Because these feelings can be powerful, we cultivate vigilance and refrain from speech or action intended to manipulate, control, or influence a fellow practitioner. During formal practice, we do not express romantic or sexual thoughts or feelings towards others.



4. Refrain from harmful speech: *Ethical Communication*

The Insight Dialogue guidelines of Listen Deeply and Speak the Truth form the foundation of ethical communication. We tell only our own truth, not the experience of others.

It is our intention to be forthcoming and honest when beneficial, and refrain from speaking when harmful. We speak with care, aware of how our own personal and cultural conditioning shapes our expression. We aspire to foster an environment of safety and inclusion that encourages open dialogue, even when discomfort arises, and recognize that engaging in difficult conversations can be a source of learning and awakening for the community.

5. Refrain from actions that dull the mind: *Conscious Consumption*

As much as possible, we take care that body and mind are rested, alert, and in a state to be fully present. We refrain from engaging in digital distractions during formal practice. We avoid using any substance in a way that interferes with mindful awareness or reduces our capacity to be present with our fellow practitioners.



Ethics for the Community of Teachers and Event Coordinators

As Insight Dialogue teachers, facilitators, and event coordinators, we agree to follow the ethical guidelines described in the previous section under Formal Relational Meditation Practice. Out of respect for the unequal and potentially influential nature of the teacher-participant relationship, those of us who serve as teachers or facilitators also follow the additional ethical trainings below. Event coordinators and organizers are invited to join in these additional teachings. (For clarity, the Ethics for Formal Relational Meditation Practice are repeated *in italics*.)

1. Refrain from taking life

We aspire to honor the life unfolding in ourselves, our sangha, and other living beings. We hold awareness of and regard for all practitioners and the diverse ways life manifests in each of us due to conditioning of class, ethnicity, race, culture, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, physical ability, etc. We express ourselves authentically and are open to bearing the impact of our words and actions, especially on those who have been marginalized in some way. In this way, we fully support and do not diminish the life of others.

As teachers, we treat all participants with equal respect. We cultivate awareness of individual and societal similarities and differences so as not to praise and reward or diminish and demean anyone because of their background.

2. Refrain from taking what is not given

We honor the time and energy of the teaching community and our fellow practitioners during Insight Dialogue practice by offering our full presence and participation. Using an economy of words, we allow generosity of time and space for others to be present. We fully respect the belongings of others and the resources of the host or retreat center.

We hold the unwavering aspiration to exercise utmost care and integrity when assuming our role and authority as teachers. We are aware of power imbalances embedded in hierarchical and patriarchal social structures and their potential for exploitation. We avoid influencing practitioners to make



donations, gifts, or other favors for our personal enrichment, or pressuring them to support our organization. When teaching, we offer our own experience, and are careful to acknowledge and cite sources when repeating what was heard from others.

3. Refrain from sensual misconduct

It is natural to feel attracted, repelled, or neutral towards another human being. Because these feelings can be powerful, we cultivate vigilance and refrain from speech or action intended to manipulate, control, or influence a fellow practitioner. During formal practice we do not express romantic or sexual thoughts or feelings towards others.

We, as teachers, will refrain from language and behavior suggesting romantic or sexual interest, or any form of sensual contact with participants. We remain vigilant so as not to abuse the unequal relationship and any possible lasting influence we may have on practitioners. This training is observed even after the conclusion of a formal practice. If a teacher and practitioner choose to enter into a different kind of relationship at any time, they are expected to terminate the teacher-student relationship and take sufficient time to pause and reorient before forming a new relationship. In these situations, teachers are encouraged to consult with the Insight Dialogue Teachers Council for support and advice.



4. Refrain from false speech

The Insight Dialogue guidelines of Listen Deeply and Speak the Truth form the foundation of ethical communication. We tell only our own truth, not the experience of others.

It is our intention to be forthcoming and honest when beneficial, and refrain from speaking when harmful. We speak with care, aware of how our own personal and cultural conditioning shapes our expression. We aspire to foster an environment of safety and inclusion that encourages open dialogue, even when discomfort arises, and recognize that engaging in difficult conversations can be a source of learning and awakening for the community.

We teachers respect the trust that practitioners place in us to keep personal communications confidential. Teachers retell personal communications and the experiences of a participant only with their approval. Teachers will share with other members of the teaching community only when it is necessary and where it benefits the teachings. As teachers, we strive to nourish an environment where open and authentic speech is being modeled and encouraged, and where vulnerability in practitioners is held with care and compassion.

5. Refrain from actions that dull the mind

We avoid speaking and acting out of habit. We are aware of the diversion of seeking special or pleasant relational experiences. As much as possible, we take care that body and mind are rested, alert, and in a state to be fully present. We refrain from engaging in digital distractions during formal practice. We avoid using any substance in a way that interferes with mindful awareness or reduces our capacity to be present with our fellow practitioners.

We teachers undertake the training of refraining from substances and activities that intoxicate and lead to addictions or dependencies. As teachers, we remain humble and open to all feedback from practitioners and others in the teaching community. Teachers are encouraged to consult with other members of the teaching community to discern a beneficial ethical path.





As teachers, our work is based on a continuous practice of Sila. We cultivate genuine kindness and a flow in sangha relationships that goes beyond agreements on rules and norms. We relate to our colleagues, students and fellow Dhamma practitioners with integrity and authenticity, and do not turn away from areas of relational stress or conflict. By fostering the qualities of spaciousness, safety, and openness in our sangha, we invite the emergence of insight and the courage to investigate all truths.

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2021-2022 Ethics Sub-team

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