

# **Avoiding *pamāda*: An analysis of the Fifth Precept as Social Protection in Contemporary Contexts**

## **with reference to the early Buddhist teachings**

Paul Trafford  
paul.trafford@stx.oxon.org

### ***1. Introduction***

In many schools of Buddhism today practitioners undertake basic rules of moral training. Whilst these rules are not commandments, they express a commitment to ethical steps along a spiritual path taught by the Buddha, a path leading ultimately to *nibbāna*, the Enlightenment he realized.

In this dissertation attention will be focused on lay practitioners (or synonymously *householders*). Although according to the early canonical sources the Buddha taught primarily the homeless life, he also gave instruction on the basic moral framework that lay people could follow for their social well-being. For such householders one of the most popular formulations is *pañca sīla* (five moral virtues), more commonly referred to as the *Five Precepts*. At first sight the precepts appear quite obvious in their meaning, but when subject to application in varying contexts, particularly in contemporary society, the interpretation may not be a straightforward matter and the process of determining the meaning may reveal subtleties in the original formula that merit more attention. This can be shown for the Fifth Precept, which is commonly translated as 'refraining from taking intoxicants (alcohol and drugs).' A more literal translation from the Pāli does not mention drugs, but only kinds of alcohol, but it adds 'which are causes of *pamāda*'. The term '*pamāda*' means 'heedlessness' or 'carelessness'. Is this a reference just to the aforementioned strong drinks or does it become a catch-all for 'intoxicants'? Then what should we understand by 'intoxicants'? How should the precept be observed and what are the conditions for breaking it? What are the impacts in observing or not observing the precept, especially with regard to social care and protection? Are there variations in interpretation? These are some of the questions we shall seek to address here.

### **Provenance of this work**

The precepts have traditionally been the formal mainstay of moral practice amongst many Buddhists, undertaken at various levels (Keown 2005:8-9). Perhaps scholars have taken them for granted: Keown found in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century that academic research into Buddhist ethics as a whole was greatly neglected: “the total number of books on Buddhist ethics of all schools can be counted on the fingers of one hand” (Keown 1992:4). Since then Keown has been a prime mover in addressing this shortfall through his many edited volumes and particularly through the online Journal of Buddhist Ethics (Keown and Prebish 1994). Significant attention has been paid especially to the study of contemporary issues as regards some of the precepts – Keown's *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics* (Keown 2000) is quite representative, with various authors covering topics such as animal rights, euthanasia, ecology, abortion and contemporary business practice.

Keown introduces his chapter on human rights by recounting the Declaration of a

Global Ethic, which was a fruit of the 1993 Parliament of the World Religions<sup>1</sup>. He informs us that the declaration sought in principle to “see the universal recognition of human rights and dignity by the religions of the world as the cornerstone of a 'new global order'” (57). Whilst Keown finds the particular philosophy of 'rights' as not native to Buddhism, he does view as a legitimate response its relation to the centrality of duty in the practice of precepts, maintaining: “that the transition between rights and precepts is accurate” (73). Further, Keown makes links from the precepts to the Global Ethic: “A direct translation of the first four precepts yields a right to life, a right not to have one's property stolen, a right to fidelity in marriage, and a right not to be lied to” (73-4). However, there is no such link for the Fifth Precept and Keown doesn't comment on its absence. In the collection as a whole, none of the contributions deal with the Fifth Precept. Indeed, generally speaking there is not much reflection on its origination, historical development or operation in contemporary social contexts.

## **Outline of content and main arguments presented**

This dissertation seeks to fill these gaps regarding the Fifth Precept with an emphasis on praxis and its relationship to the teachings recorded in early texts – that is, to what people make of the teachings and how they have been putting them into practice in recent decades. We start with the basic notion of *sīla*, moral virtue, its relationship to Buddhist ethics and how it is supported through moral codes. We examine the traditional formulations for precepts, particularly the Fifth Precept; their relation to the *vinaya* (discipline for the Sangha), contrasting lay and monastic observances. We also look at the underlying meanings and significance of *pamāda* and *appamāda*, which we aim to show as providing the foundational basis on which the whole notion of *sīla* (moral virtue) is actually practised and developed.

Questions relating to meanings and interpretations of the Fifth Precept need to take account properly of broader contextual factors. Accordingly, there will be some investigation into whether significant variations and general trends may be discerned that distinguish different traditions, especially in their historical development. Some scrutiny of any theories derived from this process will be made by reference to contemporary observations, results from first hand accounts and fieldwork to establish what is actually happening in practice. This should corroborate textual analysis, which has been traditionally the basis for discussion and interpretation. Broadening the social dimension, we develop the notion and use of the Fifth Precept as a contribution to social protection, still drawing on the early texts, to see what it means to householders today in the relationships they form, and on a much broader collective scale how it guards the fabric of society as a whole.

Two main arguments are presented here. The first is that we can establish fairly firmly from an analysis of the early Buddhist texts (to be specified) what is the basic principle, its purpose and scope, together with what lies behind the statement and how it was derived. This requires careful consideration of scriptural materials. The second is that there is a diversity in contemporary practices that can be shown to reflect historical and cultural factors: their application in a given context is dependent on historical developments, notably in the interpretation of key texts, both canonical texts and those created subsequently and vested with authority.

To help articulate our arguments, we explore the contemporary situation through a threefold grouping of organisations, teachers, and individual practitioners, which should give us a sense of how practice is operating at individual and collective levels. This is mediated by

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<sup>1</sup> Initially drafted by Hans Küng, this work has subsequently been further developed with many others in the Global Ethic Foundation. See: <http://www.weltethos.org/dat-english/index.htm>

an examination of some online communications, specifically Web sites, plus reference to a recent survey that was carried out specifically on the Fifth Precept, which gives voice to individual practitioners.

## A Note on 'Early Buddhist Teachings'

We briefly reflect here on what we mean by the phrase “the early Buddhist teachings.” Our explanation is largely dependent on the concept of *Buddhavacana*, where *vacana* may be translated as 'speaking, utterance, word, bidding' (Rhys-Davids and Stede:1921-5).<sup>2</sup> Its interpretation can vary according to whether it is regarded historically or ahistorically and has been the subject of detailed investigation by MacQueen (1981,1982). However a detailed elaboration treating questions of authority, transmission and texts lies outside the scope of this work.

For our purposes we consider it important to compare current practice in the first instance with a commonly agreed scriptural basis, which means the historically established canonical literature. Bearing in mind that considerable differences exist, we take *Buddhavacana* to connote the teachings that are regarded by Buddhist scholars as providing a reasonably reliable record of what the historical Buddha (Siddhatta Gotama) taught during his lifetime. This leaves us with the Pāli canon and the Sanskrit Āgamas as the primary materials, because these are recognised as being a record from the time of the historical Buddha, providing a large common core of agreed teachings, albeit with some variations, and also because translations are generally available<sup>3</sup>.

However, in tracing the development of practice we will make reference to other texts, especially literature that is relatively early in the history of *Mahāyāna* (literally 'Great Vehicle') and introduce new concepts or signal key shifts in emphasis. Reflecting this, there will be a brief initial presentation of the scriptural materials with an outline of the principles illustrated by reference to a few suttas and then some discussion of the moral code, starting with the Buddha and his ordained disciples, formally the *bhikkhu sangha*<sup>4</sup> (or monastics<sup>5</sup>). Further texts – usually offering more details - will be introduced later on where discussions are contextualised in contemporary circumstances and the impact of these texts can be assessed. These include commentaries that have become accepted alongside the original Pāli canon, most notably those composed in Sri Lanka from around the 5<sup>th</sup> Century CE by Bhikkhu Buddhaghosa<sup>6</sup>. In addition some tertiary sources will be deployed: modern commentaries that take advantage of updated methods of scholarly analysis.

## 2. *Morality, Ethics and Moral Codes*

Buddhist morality and ethics are oriented around a path in which followers take responsibility for their own volitional actions, i.e., their own *karma*. We take *morality* to mean what people are to do and actually do with regard to their cultivation of virtue and human flourishing, whilst *ethics* concerns philosophical reflection on morality; such reflection may lend itself towards systematisation and therefore structuring.

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2 The Pali Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary (Rhys-Davids and Stede 1921-5), is henceforth abbreviated as *PED*.

3 Most references here will be to Pāli versions (as opposed to the Āgamas), but Sanskrit forms will be used for references to materials where there is no Pāli equivalent.

4 Henceforth reference to the *bhikkhu* [and *bhikkhuni*] *sangha* will be denoted simply by 'Sangha.'

5 The term 'monastic' is used loosely since initially the Buddha and his disciples did not settle, but wandered a great deal from place to place; later on the monasteries were constructed as numbers grew.

6 For instance, Ñāṇamoli indicates some time after 400CE (1976: ix).

Throughout his lifetime, the Buddha taught in pragmatic manner with the ethical systems conceived to show the way to *nibbāna*, a way he termed *Magga*; the moral code, as came to be enshrined in the Vinaya, was designed to support the practitioner in making progress along that way. At the heart of Buddhist ethics is the desire to distinguish between right and wrong so as to lead to happiness:

“What is good, what is bad? What is right, what wrong? What ought I to do or not to do? What, when I have done it, will be for a long time my sorrow ... or my happiness?”

Lakkhaṇa Sutta [DN 30; iii:157]<sup>7</sup>

One takes responsibility for one's actions because, as Conze remarks, “behind the respect for the moral rules lies the respect for the inexorable Law of Karma, which rewards good deeds and punishes misdeeds” (Conze 1959:69). This observation is epitomised in the first two verses from the Dhammapada:

All mental states have mind as their forerunner; mind is their chief, and they are mind-made. If one speaks or acts with a defiled mind, then suffering follows one even as the wheel follows the hoof of the draught ox.

All mental states have mind as their forerunner; mind is their chief, and they are mind-made. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, then happiness follows one as one's shadow that does not leave one.

(Rahula 1967:125)

This can be viewed as the starting point and motivation for Buddhist practice.

## 2.1 *Sīla* and the Eightfold Noble Path

In the Buddha's first sermon (the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta)[SN 56:11], the Buddha related very succinctly the core insights of the Four Noble Truths (*Ariya Sacca*): the reality of *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness or suffering), its origin, its cessation, and the path to cessation by way of the Eightfold Noble Path (*atthangika-magga*). It is the Path the Buddha prescribed for the attainment of *nibbāna* (Skt. *nirvana*) (or *Enlightenment*) and was underlying most of the Buddha's mission – thenceforth most of what the Buddha taught can be traced back to this foundation. The Path itself is characterised by undertaking a threefold commitment to *sīla* (moral virtue), *samādhi* (meditation) and *paññā* (wisdom). These are interdependent - *sīla* is necessary for *samādhi* as an impure mind won't be able to become calm or focus; *samādhi* is necessary for *paññā* as wisdom arises out of a clear and still mind.

*Sīla* is thus the basic foundation for making one's way on the Buddhist path, it's the basis of moral behaviour. Its pervasive quality is evoked by the following verse from the Dhammapāda [Dh 54]:

No flower's scent goes against the wind — not sandalwood, jasmine, tagara. But the scent of the good does go against the wind. The person of integrity wafts a scent in every direction.

(Thanissaro

1997d)

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<sup>7</sup> References to primary texts in Pāli are given in square brackets and italicised; the main style is according to the canon's arrangement into books, number, divisions, and so on. Some references will occasionally be made, as here, to Pali Text Society printed versions – in volume and page numbers (Roman numerals). Translations of these texts will be provided in round brackets following conventional Harvard referencing.

Using the threefold grouping according to *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, the Eightfold Noble Path consists of the following:

**Wisdom (*paññā*).**

1. Right<sup>8</sup> view (*sammā-ditthi*)
2. Right thought (*sammā-sankappa*)

**Morality (*sīla*).**

3. Right speech (*sammā-vācā*)
4. Right bodily action (*sammā-kammanta*)
5. Right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*)

**Concentration (*samādhi*).**

6. Right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*)
7. Right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*)
8. Right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*)

Focusing on *sīla*, Morgan defines these limbs on the path (Morgan and Lawton 2007:64):

- *Right Speech* means the discipline of not lying, and not gossiping or talking in any way that will encourage malice and hatred
- *Right Action* is usually expanded into the Five Precepts [listed in section 2.3] with positive actions such as being generous and compassionate
- *Right Livelihood* is a worthwhile job or way of life, which avoids causing harm or injustice to other beings.

The path spirals upwards as can be illustrated as follows. From *right view*, one formulates *right intention* and is able to express that in *right speech*. Right speech can be put into *right action* and contribute towards *right livelihood*. Having set oneself up with right livelihood, one's mind can be at ease and when focusing the mind inwards, one applies the *right effort*, paying attention to the object of meditation, not elsewhere, thereby with *right mindfulness* so as to developing *right concentration* accordingly. Through meditation, the mind becomes clearer and a refined form of *right view* arises and so on.

## 2.2 Moral Code of the Vinaya: The Book of the Discipline

Motivated by compassion, the Buddha gave teachings and devised a code of conduct to support all three of the limbs of *sīla* from the eightfold ethical system. Keown explains that when the Buddha originally taught there was little formality in terms of admittance to the Sangha (ordained community) – to observers they were wanderers like many other *sramanas*, but “from these simple beginnings evolved a complex code for the regulations of monastic life which eventually became formulated in the part of the canon known as the Vinaya Piṭaka” (Keown 2005:10). *Vinaya* means 'discipline' and its texts comprises the first of the *Ti-pitaka* (three baskets) – the other two being the *Suttas* (discourses, literally 'threads') and the *Abhidhamma* (further teachings). The *Vinaya* texts are considered to be amongst the oldest in the canon (Rhys Davids and Oldenberg 1881:ix).

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8 This is a translation of the Pāli *sammā*, which may also be rendered as 'appropriate.'

The Buddha saw a major difference in the functions of lay and ordained life, as illustrated by the following well-known formula:

'The household life is crowded, a dusty road. Life gone forth is the open air. It isn't easy, living in a home, to lead the holy life that is totally perfect, totally pure, a polished shell. What if I, having shaved off my hair & beard and putting on the ochre robe, were to go forth from the home life into homelessness?'

[DN2: *Samaññaphala Sutta*]

This quote features on one of the leaves at the beginning of a guide to ordination at a Thai temple (Phrabhavanaviriyakhun 2004). In the preface it is stated: “Those who choose the path of ordination must abide by certain precepts of purity, and follow the rules and regulations of the Sangha, or Order of Monks.” Phrabhavanaviriyakhun enumerates ‘the precepts of purity’ (*Patimokkha*) with respect to the Pāli canon: “There are 227<sup>9</sup> precepts, which include rules, regulations, and traditions that serve as guidelines for those who are ordained” (14). Yet despite their number and breadth, the purpose of precepts remains simple: “The precepts are tools that help define the differences between right and wrong, good and evil” (*ibid*).

### 2.3 Moral Code for Lay People: The Five Precepts

The simple underlying purpose allows this monastic training to be the basis for a lay moral code, albeit one that translates *Right Action* more simply to precepts you can count on your fingers. It thus allows for a close relationship between ordained and lay, one of symbiosis. Whilst the several formulations of Precepts reflect differing levels of commitment, they all share the common characteristics of being rules of training in body, speech, and mind designed to develop and purify moral virtue. They are obligations in the sense of a personal undertaking with a typical recitation of “*sikkāpadaṃ veramaṇī*,” meaning ‘I undertake the rule of training’. They are designed with the practical view of enabling spiritual flourishing at successively higher levels, since, as Harvey notes: “Virtue generates freedom from remorse and this leads on through gladness and joy to meditative calm, insight and liberation. (A.v.2)” (Harvey 1990:196).

The most basic formulation of rules for lay followers is the *pañca-sikkhāpada* or five virtues (*pañca-sīla*), already mentioned as the *Five Precepts*. They are traditionally recited in the presence of bhikkhus, but nowadays are often conducted at home, perhaps in front of a shrine containing a Buddha image.<sup>10</sup> The precepts are rendered in English and Pāli as follows:<sup>11</sup>

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| 1. | I undertake the precept to abstain from the taking of life.            | <i>Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.</i>        |
| 2. | I undertake the precept not to take that which is not given.           | <i>Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.</i>        |
| 3. | I undertake the precept to abstain from misconduct in sensual actions. | <i>Kāmesu micchācāra veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.</i> |
| 4. | I undertake the precept to abstain from false                          | <i>Musāvāda veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ</i>                      |

9 Conze indicates that in the Sarvastivadin school there were “some 250 rules of monastic restraint.” (Conze 1959: 69). In both schools, bhikkhunis had more than 300 rules.

10 Some rationale for such observance is provided in Khantipalo (1982).

11 This translation, which is common in Sri Lanka, is provided by Saddhatissa (1987:73). More recent translations often mention drugs.

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| speech.  | <i>samādiyāmi.</i>   |
| 5. I undertake the precept to abstain from liquor that cause intoxication and indolence. | <i>Surā-meraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.</i> |

These precepts are given very concisely. As such it seems sensible to treat them as principles that an individual should apply intelligently according to their specific situation, but what this means in practice is not immediately obvious. To what extent should they be observed literally? Morgan offers a view that implies the importance of purity of intention: “Buddhist ethics are not absolutist in any stipulation of how compassion or wisdom are exercised, are put into practise; this depends very much on the context” (Morgan and Lawton 2007:61). We might add that there is scope for local interpretation insofar as this is in keeping with the overall goal of progress in virtue. Yet, however much this sounds reasonable, reference should be made to the texts for clarification.

It is important to recognise that the precepts are only part of the moral compass or at least that each precept implies a much broader response as regards virtuous conduct. A contemporary Bhikkhu remarks: “The precepts are only the most rudimentary code of moral training, but the Buddha also proposes other ethical codes inculcating definite positive virtues. The Mangala Sutta, for example, commends reverence, humility, contentment, gratitude, patience, generosity, etc.” (Bodhi 1981).

### **Principles of Virtue: *vāritta* (avoidance) and *cāritta* (positive performance)**

There is especially an important point to make with regard to the way the precepts are formulated: at first glance they appear entirely negative, but there is naturally a positive aspect to keeping virtuous conduct.<sup>12</sup> This paired relationship is mentioned especially in Buddhaghosa's commentary, the *Visuddhimagga*. In his introduction he has a section enumerating virtues: 'how many kinds of virtue are there?' [*I ii.5: Sīlappabhedakathā*]. He lists 19 [verse 25] and explains [verse 26]:

In the section dealing with two kinds: fulfilling a training precept announced by the Blessed One thus: 'This should be done' is *keeping*; not doing what is prohibited by him thus 'This should not be done' is avoiding. Herein, the word-meaning is this; they keep (*caranti*) within that, they proceed as people who fulfil the virtues, that is keeping (*cāritta*); they preserve, they protect, avoidance, thus it is *avoiding* [*vāritta*]. Herein, *keeping* is accomplished by faith and energy; *avoiding* by faith and mindfulness  
(Ñānamoli 1976:11).

The PED gives several references to these separately which illustrate their meaning. In the *Sīlavīmaṃsa Jātaka* [*No. 365: J iii: 194-195*] a brahmin learns that practising virtue through avoidance (specifically by realising that acting contrarily gets him arrested) is higher than any learning. In the *Atthassadvāra Jātaka* [*No. 84: J i:366-367*], the Bodhisatta advises his son on six paths leading to spiritual welfare, one of which is *sīla*.

A contemporary interpretation that stresses both aspects is given by Bhikkhu Bodhi, who informs us: “Each moral principle included in the precepts contains two aspects — a negative aspect, which is a rule of abstinence, and a positive aspect, which is a virtue to be cultivated. These aspects are called, respectively, *varitta* (avoidance) and *caritta* (positive performance). Thus the first precept is formulated as abstaining from the destruction of life, which in itself is a *varitta*, a principle of abstinence, whilst corresponding to this, we also find

<sup>12</sup> We also remark that it is consistent with the oft-quoted threefold characterisation of 'cease to do evil, cultivate good and purify the mind' [*Dh. 183*] and as preached at the 'Ovāda Pāṭimokkha.'

in the descriptions of the practice of this precept a *caritta*, a positive quality to be developed, namely compassion” (Bodhi 1981). As compassion is just one of a number of qualities, *varitta* and *caritta* are connected into more general cultivation of positive practice that can lead to a great flowering in this life and beyond.

## 2.4 The origin of the Five Precepts

Basic moral restraints on one's conduct were in existence long before the time of the Buddha and the five lay precepts in Buddhism likely evolved from the Brahminical tradition (Tatz 1986:10). One such formulation made the following legal crimes: the killing of a Brahmin, the destruction of an unborn fetus, drinking of wine and spirits, stealing of gold and having sexual intercourse with a guru's wife, which came to be encoded in, for instance, the Institutes of Vishnu. Warnings on alcohol abuse were included in some of the earliest known texts such as the Rigveda [8:2:12 and 8:21:14-15]. However, whereas in earlier traditions the moral code was usually couched in quite specific terms, sometimes reflecting the caste system, these basic Buddhist precepts were universal, stated independently of social context.

There are quite a number of suttas that refer to the precepts, but it is an open question as to how the particular formulation arose. Although the Vinaya makes clear that the Buddha and his monastic disciples had contact with lay followers from the beginning<sup>13</sup>, it charts the development of the monastic rules, not the lay rules. However, we might reasonably expect that the precepts in their present formulation were known early on. Further, they were basic to the training expressed in the Vinaya and a stepping stone to observance of more refined training. This is evident from the account of the introduction of the Ten Precepts for novices instituted by the Buddha when his son Rāhula sought admission to the order (*Vin. Mahavagga: Sikkhāpadakathā*). The Ten Precepts contains exactly the same formula concerning intoxicants as the Fifth Precept<sup>14</sup>. The same applied when women were first admitted into the Order. In addition, if they wished take higher ordination as a bhikkhuni, they were required first to observe 6 rules of training continually for 2 years as probationers<sup>15</sup>. These 6 rules were the Five Precepts, the Third Precept being extended to complete celibacy, plus abstaining from eating outside of the morning time [*Vin. Bhikkhunivibhanga: Pācittiya* (Expiation) *LXIII. I*].<sup>16</sup>

## Relationship of Tracts to Precepts

In the Dīgha Nikāya, the first division (Silakkhandha Vagga) comprises 13 suttas concerned with *sīla*, each containing three tracts (Short, Middle and Long) where the Buddha gives an eulogy on morality. They are first mentioned in the Brahmajāla Sutta (on the 'All-Embracing Net of Views.')[*DN I*]. In his analysis, Keown points out that since this Vagga is regarded as one of the oldest parts of the Dīgha Nikāya, this formula would appear to be of some antiquity (Keown 1992:26). The Short Tract contains 26 abstentions, whilst the Medium and Long tracts contain fewer, appearing to qualify or add detail to the shorter tract (27) and also to distinguish their ideal behaviour from the lesser behaviour of other wanderers (29). These are rules for *sramanas* as distinct from Patimokkha rules for settled monastics (32).

Canonical texts also list Five (*pañcasīla*), Eight (*atthangasīla*) and Ten (*dasasīla*)

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13 Yasa is stated as being the first lay discipline who in turn helped furnish 50 of the first bhikkhus.

14 For a translation see Horner (1951:105).

15 *Sikkhamana* ('woman in training') - as a female novice (*samaneri*) she already observed Ten Precepts, but in order to go on to full *bhikkhuni* ordination needed to most strictly keep these six rules in particular.

16 For a translation see Horner (1942:365).



Precepts plus Ten Good Paths of Action (*dasakusalakammamatha*). How do they relate to the Tracts? If we take precepts as modelling the virtuous behaviour of the Buddha, albeit to a lesser degree, we might well expect them to have been formulated afterwards. Keown takes this view and goes on to make a natural conjecture: “The four formulations of precepts mentioned above can be regarded as attempts to compress and summarise the *Short Tract*” (31). This indicates a common ground in discipline between all disciples – lay and ordained – which will be particularly helpful when analysing the meaning of the Fifth Precept.

### 3. The Fifth Precept and its underlying significances

In this section we examine the meaning of the formula for the Fifth Precept with particular attention to the qualities of mind that it is designed to support. Some commentary is provided from contemporary analysts, particularly practitioner-teachers.

#### 3.1 The derivation of the Fifth Precept with reference to the Vinaya

Recall that the Fifth Precept reads: *Surā-meraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*. A literal translation is: "I undertake the training rule to abstain from fermented and distilled intoxicants which are the basis for heedlessness."

In seeking a precise meaning, we refer to the Vinaya, both as a primary source, but also because the rules were often given careful explanations. Breaking the rules are graded in terms of seriousness of offence, especially in terms of preservation of the community: for instance, the Therāvāda Patimokkha with 227 rules is divided into eight groups with the rule about intoxicants given as one of the ninety-two *Pācittiyas* (rules entailing confession), of relatively moderate seriousness [*Pāc LI:1-2*]<sup>17</sup>.

The account starts with 6 monks asked by lay people what might be a rare offering, to which they reply “*kāpotikā nāma pasannā*,” which are white spirits<sup>18</sup> [*Vin: iv:109-110*]. When Venerable Sāgata subsequently goes on almsround, he receives and consumes this drink in several homes. He then collapses at the town gate and has to be carried back to the Buddha, to whom he points his feet disrespectfully. The Buddha picks up three changes in behaviour, first the impaired conduct: “Monks, formerly was not Sāgata respectful, deferential towards the Tathāgata?” [109]; second, the loss of capacity and thirdly, perhaps most significantly, the loss of consciousness: "But, monks, could he become unconscious, having drunk that which may be drunk?" The Buddha declares: “Monks, it is not fitting for Sāgata, it is not becoming, it is not suitable, it is not worthy of a recluse, it is not allowable, it is not to be done. How, monks, can Sāgata drink strong drink [*majja*]? It is not, monks, for pleasing those who are not (yet) pleased . . . And thus, monks, this rule of training should be set forth: In drinking fermented liquor [*surā*] and spirits [*meraya*] there is an offence of expiation.”

The text offers some definitions of these terms:

*Fermented liquor* means: if it is fermented liquor from flour, fermented liquor from cakes, fermented liquor from cooked rice, if it is worked-up yeast, if it is mixed with ingredients.

*Spirits* means: if it is an extract from flowers, an extract from fruits, an extract from honey, an extract from sugar, if it is mixed with ingredients.

*Should drink* means: if he drinks even (as much as) with a blade of grass, there is an offence of expiation.

Thus alcohol (or 'strong drink'), *majja*, is specified in terms of both fermented drink

17 A lengthier exposition of the story is given in the *Sur p na J taka* [J.i.360 ff].

18 Horner explains that *pasannā* is a synonym for *surāmaṇḍa*, the finest fermented liquor (1940: 383).

and spirits; and these are forbidden whether taken neat or mixed. In addition, the last clause makes clear that not a drop is permitted. This is echoed in the Jātakas, which are the birth stories of the Bodhisattva, where the Buddha provides accounts concerning his perfection of virtues in numerous previous lives. The Paniya Jātaka [*Jātaka 459*] describes how five laymen, each having reflected on a minor transgression of one of the precepts, turned away completely from sense pleasures and subsequently became Pacceka Buddhas (literally 'Silent Buddhas'). The Buddha concluded: “Monks, there is no such thing as a petty sin (*kilesa khuddako*); the very smallest must be checked by a wise man” (Cowell 1897:IV:75).

Some commentators have suggested that what really matters is not consuming intoxicants to the point of intoxication. This is a stance related by Harvey, who, after remarking that the Vinaya rule is very close to the wording of the lay Fifth Precept, writes: “Nevertheless, in following the fifth lay precept, while some people seek to avoid any intoxicating or mind-altering substances, except for genuine medicinal purposes, others regard intoxication, and not the taking of a little drink, as a breach of the precept” (78). Harvey goes on to refer to Abhidharma specialists who considered there was no offence by nature if taken by someone with a pure mind, but does not provide references from the early Canon; instead he cites from the *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya* (auto-commentary on the compendium of Abhidharma) written by Vasubandhu.<sup>19</sup>

Such a view begs questions, not least how one may really know what “will not be inebriating.” A Thai metaphor of unknown date states: “Just as a single match can burn down an entire town, even a little alcohol can cause a lapse of mindfulness that may ruin your whole life” (Phrabhavanaviriyakhun 2005:237). Bhikkhu Pesala provides a modern example of driving to illustrate how subtle the effects can be: “Buddhists should observe the five precepts, which means total abstention from intoxicants. To control a car is simple, but even a tiny amount of alcohol impairs one’s ability to drive. To control the mind is far more difficult, so one should not do anything to make it harder” (Pesala 2009).

The rule also appears to apply to every stage of the Path, as the Buddha indicated that those who had obtained Enlightenment were consummate in their observance: “Bhikkhus. Ariyan disciples in this Religion reflect thus: 'All arahants, for as long as life lasts, have given up the taking of liquors and intoxicants, of that which intoxicates, causing carelessness. They are far from intoxicants' [*AN 8.41:Uposatha Sutta*] (Ñānavara & Kantasilo 1993).

The Buddha did stipulate an exception for medicinal purposes, but made it very restricted when there was a case of intoxication. In [*Mahavagga VI 13.1-13.2*] there is an account of a bhikkhu (Pilindavaccha) who was afflicted with wind. On the advice of a physician, the Buddha initially permitted as one of the treatments: “I allow you, monks, to mix strong drink in a decoction of oil.” However, a group of monks subsequently became intoxicated so the Buddha refined this rule to: “I allow you, monks, if neither the colour nor the smell nor the taste of strong drink appears in any decoction of oil, to drink oil mixed with strong drink if it is like this” (Horner 1951:278). However, if the concoction was too strong, the Buddha allowed it to be applied externally: “I allow you, monks, to employ it as an unguent” (Horner 1951:278).

The Vinaya does not cover all eventualities and there are cases open to interpretation. For instance with regard to palliative care, whereas morphine – as an addictive substance – would usually be considered an intoxicant, for patients unable to cope with pain, administering a low dose would at least appear consistent with allowing alcohol to be consumed in a medicinal mixture. Further, a case could be made that it would enable the

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<sup>19</sup> Vasubandhu lived in North India in the Gupta period (4<sup>th</sup> Century) and is regarded as a co-founder of the Yogācāra tradition of Mahāyāna (Williams 2009:85).

patient to more easily maintain calm awareness.

It is not stated what actually constitutes *consumption*, but Buddhaghosa explains in *Paramathajotika*, specifically in his commentary to the Ten Precepts, that it has four factors: the intoxicant, the desire to drink, making an effort and the absorption of the intoxicant being drunk (passing the throat) (Ñānamoli 1960:28). Thus, it would not break the Fifth Precept if someone were to accidentally swallow some alcohol thinking it were a non-alcoholic beverage or if it were used as a mouth wash.

### The significance of *pamādaṭṭhāna*

As *Pācittiya LI* includes the threefold compound of *surā-meraya-majja*, it seems reasonable that the Fifth Precept (for Five, Eight and Ten Precepts) is derived from this rule or, at least, can be interpreted in light of it. However, this passage doesn't actually mention *pamādaṭṭhāna*, so some further investigation is needed into its meaning – both of itself and of its relation to the other items in the formula.

The term *pamādaṭṭhāna* is also a compound: *pamāda* plus *ṭhāna*; the former has two basic meanings particularly pertinent here: 'heedlessness' or 'carelessness,' connoting inattention; and 'indolence,' connoting sloth and lack of effort in performance. It relates to mind states and is especially important, meriting a separate discussion (given below). The term *ṭhāna* also has many shades of meaning: according to *PED*, it literally means 'place, region, locality, abode, part,' but it can also mean 'an occasion' or 'causal condition.'

By itself, then, *pamādaṭṭhāna* may stand for 'causes of heedlessness.' However, the term doesn't generally appear alone, but is usually associated with or attached to other items and so interpretations need to be made in these textual contexts<sup>20</sup>. In terms of the philology, Gombrich offers: “the Pali words of the fifth precept can be taken to mean abstention from strong drinks *which* are the occasion of intoxication and carelessness or *when* they are the occasion for intoxication and carelessness” (Gombrich 1995: 298). In the Vinaya, only the former interpretation appears to be consistent with the rule of training given above – there is no leeway. It could be suggested that for lay people there is more leniency, a view that would imply separating lay and monastic goals, a topic discussed in section 4.2. However, we note that the transition from lay to even a novice would then almost need a new rule to emphasize the change in meaning.

We remark that this Vinaya account mentions only spirits, but the Buddha generalised the rule to include *majja*, which explicitly contained fermented as well as distilled liquors. This suggests that the Buddha was applying a broader principle, which the other reference to the Vinaya appears to make explicit as *pamādaṭṭhāna*. Thus the formula provides successive generalisation: in terms of drink, *surā* and *meraya* are evidently generalised as *majja*; similarly *majja* may be generalised as *pamādaṭṭhāna*. Technically, the difference concerns whether we have a straight list of three items whereby *pamādaṭṭhānā* is a *kammadhāraya* compound qualifying the alcohol ('which are occasions for heedlessness'), or whether it is overarching ('as they are occasions for heedlessness'). Given that the rationale concerns effects on the mind, it seems appropriate to argue: “the precept implicitly proscribes these drugs [such as the opiates, hemp, and psychedelics] by way of its guiding purpose, which is to prevent heedlessness caused by the taking of intoxicating substances” (Bodhi 1981).

There is another related compound in the canon, based on the root *jūtappamādaṭṭhāna*. It occurs in the Brahmajāla Sutta, where in the Medium Tracts the Buddha includes

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20 A search on 'pamādaṭṭhān\*' (\* denoting a wildcard) revealed only matches in commentaries and subcommentaries in the Chattha Sangayana Tipitaka v.4.

recreational games in his list of items that he avoids, including *jūtappamādaṭṭhānānuyoga*, for which *PED* translates *jūta* as 'gambling, playing at dice.' Thus the phrase literally means: 'gambling, a yoke that is the cause of heedlessness.' As the Buddha discourages a long list of games, we may similarly expect that any form of gambling, not just dice would be covered by this rule.<sup>21</sup> Taken together, these observations suggest a tendency to generalisation, particularly to any substances that would befuddle the mind, adding weight to the suggestion that *pamādaṭṭhānā* supports a broad sense of meanings relating to intoxication and particularly validating Bodhi's extension to mind-altering drugs. It may also be remarked that gambling and related activities may be naturally associated with alcohol consumption (Ledi Sayadaw:19nn). This is certainly applicable to the contemporary British social context, where, for instance, pubs have traditionally been venues for various recreational games such as card games, some involving gambling.

As to what drugs, there appear to be few clues in the Vinaya, which may indicate that these were not much in use or otherwise didn't occur much as a problem.<sup>22</sup> In the Vinaya, at least, it appears that the only allusions are in connection with herbal medicines to be physically applied. Venerable Pilindavaccha appeared to be quite a sick monk who failed to respond to many attempts to heal him. Among the course of treatments, the Buddha permitted in particular sweating treatments, including *sambhāraseda*, which the commentary to the Vinaya indicates as "sweating by the use of hemp and a variety of leaves" [*V A. 1091*], cited by Horner (1951:279). In assessing what constitutes intoxication and their causes, the formula – as typically quoted today – expresses avoidance of both alcohol and drugs. This, at least, is what has been inferred by Ven. Buddhaghosacariya (1993):

The precept is broken with the use of opium and marijuana. Brandy, champagne and other spirits (even though not specifically mentioned) are included in *sura* and *meraya*; if used for medicinal purposes in small amounts, not causing one to become inebriated, then the precept is not broken.

The extension of meaning appears reasonable and is widely adopted.

### **Kammic Consequences of Observance and non-Observance**

The references to the precepts for lay followers are relatively few (in general the suttas are not much concerned with householder life), but such references make quite clear that in keeping with the fundamental teaching of *kamma-vipāka* (intentional action and results) there are consequences. The Buddha made explicit the adverse effects of not keeping this precept in the Sutta to Dhammika [*Khuddaka: Culavagga: Sutta Nipata 2:14*]:

400. A layman who has chosen to practice this Dhamma should not indulge in the drinking of intoxicants [*majja*]. He should not drink them nor encourage others to do so; realizing that it leads to madness [*ummāda*].

401. Through intoxication foolish people perform evil deeds and cause other heedless people to do likewise. He should avoid intoxication, this occasion for demerit [*pāpa*], which stupefies the mind, and is the pleasure of foolish people.

(Ireland 1983).

21 The Prātimokṣa rules for monks in the Community of Interbeing, the Zen order of Thich Nhat Hahn has been extended to specify electronic games and entertainment (Keown 2005:35).

22 For further clues as to what mind altering substances might have been around at the time, two key references are the Ayurvedic texts written in early in the first millennium BCE: the *Caraka Saṃhitā Sutra* and the *Sushruta Saṃhitā*, for which English translations are available (Charaka 1949) and (Sushruta 1963).

The reference to intoxication makes clear its mental peril through the word *ummāda* and the effects clearly show the inter-relatedness of individual observation and the impact on society. There are further more serious longer term consequences given in the Vipāka Sutta (Sutta of Results) [AN 8.40]:

The drinking of fermented & distilled liquors [*surāmerayapānaṃ*] — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from drinking fermented & distilled liquors is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to mental derangement [*ummattaka*].

(Thanissaro 1997b)

Both these teachings provide examples of 'demerit' (*pāpa*), which the *PED* translates as 'evil, wrong doing, sin.' Thus keeping precepts is to protect against such *pāpa* by avoidance (*varitta*). Its converse is *puñña*, translated as 'merit, meritorious action, virtue,' for which the *Puññakiriyavattusuttaṃ* ('Meritorious actions discourse') [AN 8.36] describes three sources: *dāna*, *sīla*, and *bhāvanā*. All these practices, examples of *caritta*, are intrinsic to the Eightfold Path.

In the Abhisandha Sutta [AN 8.39] the Buddha illustrates *puñña* through *sīla* by observance of the Fifth Precept: “Monks, there are these eight rewards of merit [*puññābhisandā*], rewards of skillfulness, nourishments of happiness, celestial, resulting in happiness, leading to heaven, leading to what is desirable, pleasurable, & appealing, to welfare & happiness.” (Thanissaro 1997a). Observance of the Fifth Precept (as with the others) brings especially far-reaching rewards of freedom: “...Furthermore, abandoning the use of intoxicants, the disciple of the noble ones abstains from taking intoxicants. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings.” Additionally, in giving such freedom to others, “he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression. ...”

In the Buddhist scheme of affairs, we thus see that *pāpa* and *puñña* can have effects in this life and in future lives; in some sense it can be said that *pāpa* and *puñña* are for a *kamma*-producing 'individual' all that get carried over from one life to the next. Arahants do not produce *kamma*, so are beyond merit and demerit, but for all others yet to attain *nibbāna*, *pāpa* and *puñña* still apply. They are thus naturally important concepts for lay practitioners and can feature prominently as will be highlighted in section 4.

### 3.2 The significance of *pamāda* and *appamāda*

Within the straightforward statement of avoidance of physical substances, far deeper meanings lie behind the term *pamāda*, which we have so far translated as 'heedlessness.' Its opposite is the negative form, *appamāda*, which may be translated literally as 'non-heedlessness.' Thus avoiding *pamāda* is a *varitta* and the performance of *appamāda* is a *caritta*.

A whole division of the Dhammapāda, the Appamādavagga is devoted to *appamāda* and opens with [Dh. 21]:

*Appamādo amatam padam Pamādo maccuno padam*  
Heedfulness is the path to the Deathless. Heedlessness is the path to death.  
(Buddharakkhita 1985)

In the Appamāda Sutta [SN 3.17], King Pasenadi Kosala asks the Buddha: "Is there, Lord, any one quality that keeps both kinds of benefit secure — benefits in this life & benefits in lives to come?" "There is one quality, great king, that keeps both kinds of benefit secure — benefits in this life & benefits in lives to come. ... Heedfulness" (Thanissaro 1998). Thus there are senses of ensuring that what one has or possesses (merit) is kept and not lost.

That the term *appamāda* is fundamentally core to the Buddhist path (*magga*) to nibbāna, is reinforced by the Buddha right at the end:

*Handa'dāni bhikkhave āmantayāmi vo:  
Vayadhammā saṅkhārā appamādena sampādethā'ti*

“Behold now, bhikkhus, I exhort you:  
All compounded things are subject to decay.  
Strive on [to completion] with heedfulness!”

[DN 16: Mahaparinibbāna Sutta: verse 108 (part)]

These are the last recorded words spoken by the Buddha to his disciples and may be regarded as capturing in a nutshell what the Buddha was teaching. The term *appamādena* is in the instrumental case of *appamāda*. For *pamāda*, PED offers: 'carelessness, negligence, indolence, remissness,' whilst *appamāda* is rendered as 'earnestness', 'vigilance' and 'zeal.' Thus the meaning here should convey basically a twofold sense of care or watchfulness plus application or drive; in the given phrase, the term 'diligence' is quite common.

As *appamāda* occupies here a central place in the context of core practice, it's worth looking carefully at the meaning of each of the other words in this clause and how *appamāda* (and hence *pamāda*) relates to them.<sup>23</sup> *Vaya* conveys basically two meanings, the more common being 'decay,' which relates to an impersonal objective process. However, the other (which PED lists first) is 'loss' or 'want,' which we may associate with a subjective cognitive response of disappointment. *Dhammā* here are 'things' or 'phenomena', and *saṅkhara* are 'compound formations.' Thus *appamāda* implicitly aids knowing this reality of impermanence, whereas *pamāda* implicitly hinders it. *Sampādetha* (vowel lengthened to *ā* by conjunction with *iti*) is the second person plural of the verb *sampādeti* which PED defines specifically with respect to its occurrence here as “to strive, to try to accomplish one's aim.” What constitutes 'success' in this context is implicit (the Buddha having taught it for 45 years), namely the attainment of *nibbāna*, so *appamāda* implicitly works towards success, whereas conversely, *pamāda* implicitly works towards failure.

Payutto (1988) provides numerous other instances of *appamāda* in the canon. The importance and extent of the application of *appamāda* at various levels of practice of ethical conduct may be seen from the Buddha's own words in the following example ([S.V.43] translated by Payutto):

"O Bhikkhus. The footprints of all land-bound creatures fit within the footprint of the elephant; the elephant's footprint is said to be the supreme footprint in terms of size. Similarly all skilful dhammas have heedfulness [*appamāda*] as their base, converge within the bounds of heedfulness. Heedfulness may be said to be supreme amongst those *dhammas*."

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23 For a more detailed analysis that emphasizes the response in one's personal practice, see the discussion by Dharmacari Jayarava in 'The Last Words of the Buddha': <http://www.jayarava.org/buddhas-last-words.html> and (on *appamāda*): <http://jayarava.blogspot.com/2006/02/last-words-of-buddha.html>

Once again such a general statement about *appamāda* alerts practitioners to wider implications of the Fifth Precept.

### 3.3 *Sati* (Mindfulness)

Some of the qualities inherent in *pamāda* were specified as 'carelessness, negligence, indolence, remissness.' In its entry the *PED* also mentions two compound terms with the root *sati*, viz: *satiossagga – lakkhana* [sign of relaxation (or lapse) of *sati*] and *sati – vippavāsa* (absence of *sati*) [*SnA* 339]. The term *sati* features as the seventh quality of mind to cultivate in the Eightfold Path, but it is arguably the one most needed at every moment. It is usually translated as 'mindfulness,' explained by the Buddha in the *Indriya-vibhanga Sutta* (Analysis of the Mental Faculties) [*SN* 48.10] as follows:

"And what is the faculty of mindfulness? There is the case where a monk, a disciple of the noble ones, is mindful, highly meticulous, remembering & able to call to mind even things that were done & said long ago. He remains focused on the body in & of itself — ardent, alert, & mindful — putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings in & of themselves... the mind in & of itself... mental qualities in & of themselves — ardent, alert, & mindful — putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world. This is called the faculty of mindfulness."

(Thanissaro 1997e)

In this sutta the Buddha describes five faculties that are essential for progress along the Path - *saddhā* (faith or conviction), *virīya* (energy), *sati*, *samādhi* (concentration), *paññā* (wisdom or discernment). Each faculty is to be applied to the intense analysis of *kāya* (body), *vedana* (feelings or sensations), *citta* (mind) and *dhammā* (mental formations). Here is brought to the fore in the meaning of *sati* the faculty of clear recollection with a considerable degree of precision. *Sati* thus lies right at the heart of Buddhist practice, which *pamāda* would clearly jeopardise; so the Fifth Precept in the basic rules of training for *sīla* is designed to protect it from being compromised.

The closeness of the relationship between *appamāda* and *sati* is strongly emphasized by Payutto (1988), where a whole chapter is devoted to the topic of '*Sati as appamāda*.' Payutto likens the function of *sati* to a moral gatekeeper "whose job is to keep his eyes on the people passing in and out, regulating affairs by permitting entrance and egress to those for whom it is proper and forbidding it to those for whom it is not. ... Put in simple terms, *sati* reminds us to do good and to give no ground to the bad." Its relation to *appamāda* is made explicit: "Conducting one's life or one's Dhamma practice constantly governed by *sati* is called '*appamāda*', or heedfulness. *Appamāda* is of central importance to progress in a system of ethics, and is usually defined as non-separation from *sati*." Whilst the inseparability may hold, as discussed above from the *PED* definition, there is also the facet of application which Payutto implies: "This may be expanded on as implying constant care and circumspection ... a clear awareness of what things need to be done and what left undone; non-negligence; and performing one's daily tasks with sincerity and with unbending effort towards improvement. It may be said that *appamada* is the Buddhist sense of responsibility."

This notion of responsibility naturally expands into society, as will be described in section 5, where the ramifications of observing of the Fifth Precept become very broad in their impact on body and mind both individually and collectively.

## ***4. Contemporary Views and Practices of the Fifth Precept***

We have established through analysis of the canonical texts a fairly straightforward view of what the Fifth Precept means together with various implications concerning its practice and non-practice. We have included contemporary interpreters, mostly scholars of the early texts and practitioners in Therāvāda whose formal instruction appears usually to adhere strictly to the early texts.

However, in assessing what happens more widely in the social dimension, we need to look more closely at Buddhist practitioners across the world today and draw out a number of factors that affect them, including further historical developments in the teachings and cultural conditions. By doing so, we show how the evaluation of the Fifth Precept has, especially in Mahāyāna traditions, become more complex. To provide some validation of the theoretical analysis, we ground our analysis of such factors in a recent survey that offers indications of actual practice of the Fifth Precept by individuals across the main traditions.

### **4.1 Introduction to a survey on the Fifth Precept**

An online survey was recently carried out on the Fifth Precept (Trafford 2009). One of its particular objectives was to gauge “whether views and practices vary among different traditions and whether such variations may be attributable to some extent to distinctive teachings in the respective schools” (2). It comprised 30 questions divided into three sections: demographics; views and practice of the precept; and responses to hypothetical situations. Broadly speaking, it was set up in a way that enables correlations to be tested between question pairs, each question selected from different sections.

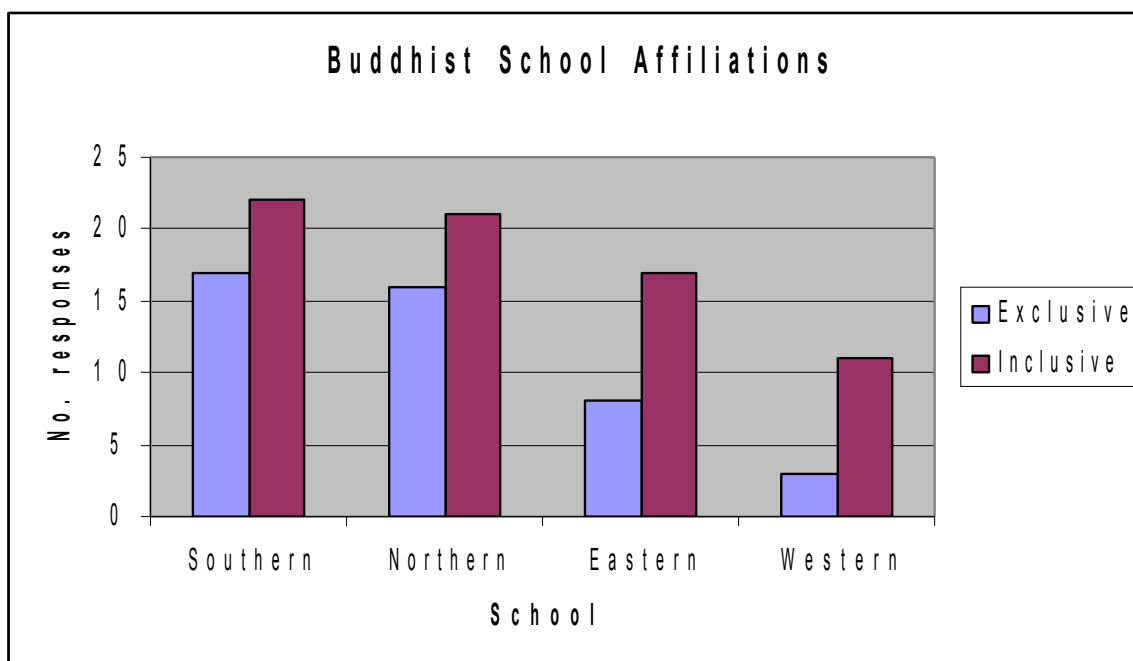
The survey was implemented as an anonymous questionnaire open to anyone with an Internet connection and Web browser. It was selectively advertised in a way designed to attract responses across different traditions (5) and received a total of 61 responses, all of which were sufficiently complete to be included in the analysis (6). However, it should be stressed that the sample was self-selecting and responses were mainly from regions where English was native or widely spoken. So the survey cannot be regarded as definitive, though it can provide useful pointers.

For testing theories about how respective teachings may have affected responses, the profiling section included a question that asked for affiliation in terms of *Schools*:

- A. *Southern Schools* (most popularly known as Theravāda, including Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia)
- B. *Northern Schools* (most popularly known as the Mahayāna traditions including Tibet, Mongolia, Bhutan and parts of Western China)
- C. *Eastern Schools* (most popularly known as Mahayāna traditions including China, S. Korea, Japan and Vietnam)
- D. *Western Schools* (may incorporate aspects of other traditions plus particular adaptations)
- E. Other

The totals were as follows:





**Figure 1: Affiliations of respondents by School (Trafford)**

More than one option could be selected, which proved pertinent as 11 respondents selected at least 2 options, with 45 indicating only one affiliation. This also provided a fair spread with at least 10 inclusive responses for each of Southern, Northern, Eastern and Western traditions (6). Thus Figure 1 shows two totals for each School – the inclusive total incorporates everyone's response, whereas the exclusive total adds up those who indicated just one affiliation. Whilst mindful of the global mixing tendency of the Internet affecting the sample, this hybridity may be indicative of a growing trend that is blurring differences between traditions.

For general findings, we refer the reader to the survey report. Here we focus on responses distinguishing the Schools, associating them with particular cultural and historical issues.

## 4.2 Practice: absolute and relative

Preliminary examination of the Fifth Precept has been defined with primary reference to texts aimed at monastics, with a number of canonical passages suggesting a close relationship between the rules in the Vinaya and the lay precepts. However, the consideration of how the Fifth Precept is interpreted and practised today entails exploring more fully the relationship of the Sangha to the laity and their religious goals.

Winston King, a scholar in the history of religions, carried out fieldwork in Burma in the late 1950s<sup>24</sup> and considered that practice had absolute and relative dimensions: ““Yes” says the Buddhist, “the Five Precepts do represent absolute principles which ideally all men ought to observe in all their absoluteness.”” Yet, “One can approach the ethical absolutes in practice only so far as his capacity allows him to; the degree to which he has matured his *paramis* or perfections, in past lives, determines his present capacity for approaching perfection” (King 1964:77-78). When compared with the Five or Eight Precepts of a lay person, the rules for those who have taken full ordination certainly imply a psychological

24 Donald K. Swearer 2001. *In Memoriam: Winston L. King*, Buddhist-Christian Studies Volume 21, 2001, vi-vii

commitment of a generally higher order. Therefore given the Sangha's commitment to the cultivation of virtue through more rigorous training, do the aims and objectives for monks and nuns differ from lay people? Are these two groups effectively working on different trajectories? Does it affect *how* precepts are practised?

Several years after his anthropological study of Burmese practitioners in 1961-2, Melford Spiro had come to the opinion that there was a distinct difference. Drawing inspiration from Edgerton (1942), who observed two “norms of conduct,” he wrote: ‘the “ordinary norm” was intended for the religious majority; the other – “the extraordinary norm” – was confined to a much smaller group, those whose primary concern was with salvation’ (Spiro 1971:11). Spiro went on to define the goal of liberation from the *Wheel of [Samsaric] Life* as *nibbanic Buddhism*, whereas to merely enhance one's position in it – through generating *puñña* – was *kammatic Buddhism*. Spiro's treatment subsequently argues for a dichotomy in which only the Sangha pursued the former, whilst lay practitioners pursued the latter. King derived a similar thesis: the lay person generally follows the *kamma-rebirth* ethic and aims at accumulating merit in order to improve but not transcend one's lot in Samsara, whereas the Sangha generally follow the *Nibbāna-ethic* (1964:Chapter 3 *passim*). Other scholars, especially social anthropologists, have made use of parallel terms. For example Samuel devises and applies similarly the following categories in his studies of Tibetan Buddhism – *bodhi-oriented* and *karma-oriented* (Samuel 1993:33).

We cannot go into detail here, but we draw attention to the work of Keown (1992: chapters 4 and 5), who has closely scrutinised the contention of what he refers to as the ‘Transcendancy Thesis.’ In short, he rejects the crude disjunction of *nirvana* and *karma* in which a layperson merely seeks to generate *puñña* through *dāna* and *sīla* in the hope of good rebirth, whilst a monk seeks to eradicate all *karma* through mental culture (*bhāvanā*) in the hope of *nirvana*. Instead, he argues that the path to *nirvana* is a continuum and develops his refutation in Chapter 5 through “an alternative account of the Eightfold Path and its role as the medium between *samsāra* and *nirvana*.”

We observe that rigid separation or severe attenuation of the link would have major implications, not least making ordination a huge conceptual leap. Keown's argument for a continuum appears to be more consistent with accounts in the early texts such as the Mahavacchagotta Sutta [*MN 73:14*]:

“Just as the river Ganges inclines towards the sea, slopes towards the sea, flows towards the sea, and merges with the sea, so too Master Gotama’s assembly with its homeless ones and its householders inclines towards Nibbāna, slopes towards Nibbāna, flows towards Nibbāna, and merges with Nibbāna.”

(Ñānamoli & Bodhi 1995:599)

Thus the declaration of a fourfold Assembly (*cattaro parisā<sup>25</sup>*) of bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, and upāsakas, upāsikās. In summary, the texts point to a shared ultimate goal of *nirvana* with different levels of intensity in practice, operating not disjointly, but in a broad continuum. It confirms that the analysis of section 3 does substantially address lay practitioners.

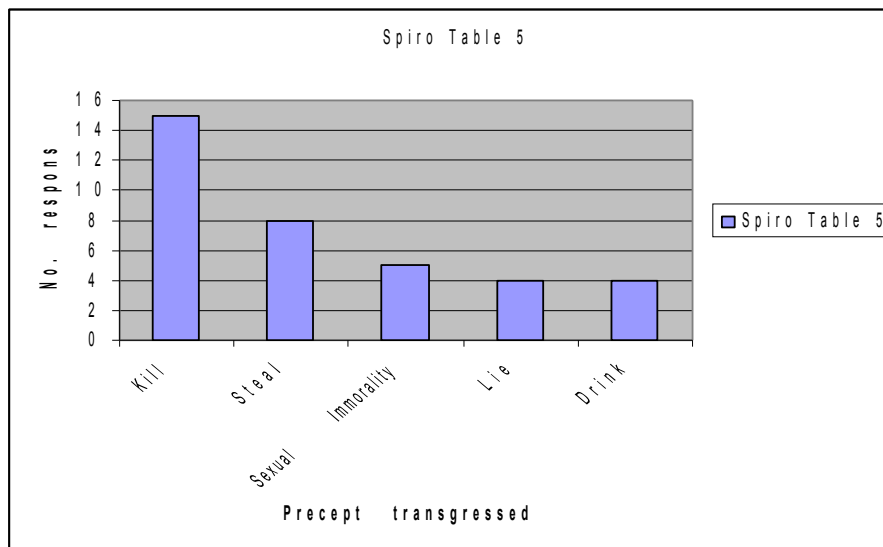
## A Broader Moral Compass

Spiro drew a significant distinction in responses with regards to performing meritorious deeds and avoiding demeritorious deeds: observation of the precepts was hardly considered meritorious, but breaking them was widely considered demeritorious (Spiro

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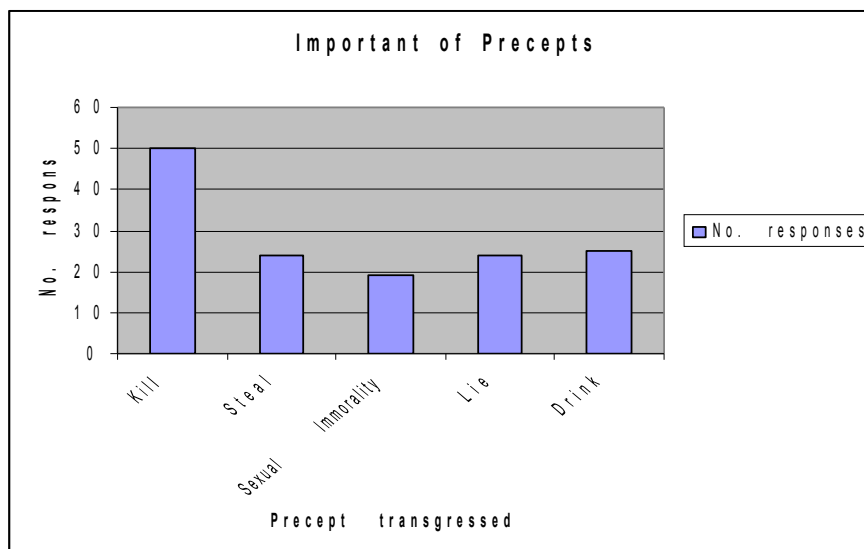
25 These are mentioned in the popular chant: *iti pi so ... supatipanno ... yadidaṃ cattari purisayugāni...*

1971:102). Spiro asked villagers for their views on behaviour deemed most demeritorious, with 36 out of 42 responses expressed in terms of the precepts (Figure 2 below) – the other options were 'Ill-will envy', 'Abusive' and 'misc.' (103).



**Figure 2: Behaviour Deemed Most Demeritorious by Burmese Villagers (Spiro) [abridged to include only those choices relating to the Five Precepts]**

Trafford's survey does not focus on merit, but asks about the significance of the respective precepts in Question 10: “The five precepts (or rules of moral training) are traditionally given as rules of training to avoid particular actions. Please select which you consider the most important.”



**Figure 3: Precepts considered most important by respondents to online survey**

Comparing the respective figures, there is an obvious correspondences in the priority given to the first precept, in roughly the same ratio of 2:1 over any other choice. Spiro's question allowed just one selection, but Trafford's survey allowed more than one, a decision that appears to have been validated by the fact that 61 respondents gave a total of 142 indications. Furthermore, it was evident in the comments, that there are in fact interdependent relationships that may be observed between them. In particular, six people commented on

how breaking the Fifth Precept could lead to breaking the other four and other responses indicated contextual factors.

The full and varied nature of the responses suggest that there's considerable significance to the precepts outside of merit-making and would indicate that Spiro's questions are narrowly framed. This calls for elaboration of the moral compass to give greater breadth to Buddhist ethics, leading to a discussion that goes beyond particular instances of *vāritta* to *cāritta* actively pursued in 'positive' values of *dāna-sīla-samādhi*. The notion of merit is then set in a wider perspective (as mentioned above in connection with kammic consequences). King relates that considerable merits may be accrued through many kinds of devices, and the Four *Brahmaviharas* (or *Illimitables*), to which he devotes detailed coverage (1964:149-161). This widening is echoed by Gombrich in his study of Buddhist practice among villagers in Sri Lanka: “The Five Precepts are, however, negative; there is a list of Ten Good Deeds, which is not canonical but widely influential.” These Ten Good Deeds [*Dasa kusala karma*] are: giving (material), keeping morality (i.e. the precepts), meditating, rejoicing in (another's) merit, giving (transferring) merit, giving service, showing respect, preaching, listening to preaching, right beliefs (Gombrich 1995:87).

However, whilst the formulation of the Five Precepts may be in negative language and appear to be separate, might their practice have many positive implications? Question 16 of the survey (Table 4) investigated this broader stance and asked: “What do you regard as the main benefits of observing the 5th precept (tick all that apply).” The responses in decreasing order of popularity were:

Option	No. Responses
C. Improved awareness and clarity of mind	53
I. A good discipline for practice in general	44
H. Health and safety for society	35
J. Peace of mind	32
A. Good physical health in this life	30
D. Help in meditation	30
F. Setting a good example	23
E. Saving money	18
B. Skilful karma leading to rebirth in heaven realm	12
G. Attracting good friends	8

**Table 4: Responses to Survey Question 16**

This most popular option was C, chosen by the vast majority (irrespective of tradition), which our analyses has shown as supportive of the *nibbānic* Path, an orientation confirmed with about half also selecting options D and J, supported by almost three quarters choosing option I. One person commented simply, “Citta visuddhi (mind purification).” On the other hand, option B, which most resembles the merit-making orientation of *kammatic* Buddhism was chosen by only a few, with one comment making this explicit: “I'm not much concerned with rebirth, but I definitely see clarity of mind leading to more ethical choices, therefore greater happiness for me and those on whom I have an effect.” The social awareness appeared about midway: slightly more than half of the respondents saw it as good for social welfare (option H), but very few would go so far as selecting the *kalyanamitta*

(good friend) connections (option G).

Thus for many the observation of the precept fits in with a very broad ethical system and has numerous inter-related and positive aspects. However, a question arises as to introducing other aspects (such as Ten Good Deeds): to what extent might they lead to removing the spotlight from the Five Precepts?

### 4.3 Bodhisattvas: Perfections and 'Skill in Means'

Whilst canonical statements and explanations may appear straightforward with regard to the precepts, at least in terms of alcohol, developments in Mahāyāna have introduced other factors that can make more complicated any assessment of the merits of their execution. Historically Mahāyāna is not a unitary phenomenon (Williams 2009:3), being diverse in practices and overloaded with multiple meanings, but two senses are commonly conveyed: one as a 'great' vehicle in terms of being open to all sentient beings; the other as a vehicle to greatness, that is to Buddhahood. It can also have the sense of being 'great' in offering many approaches to liberation.

For many followers there lies at the heart of such liberation the *Bodhisattva* (Pāli: *Bodhisatta*) *ideal*, the aspiration for full Buddhahood out of compassion for all sentient beings. This has a major impact on the notion of *sīla*, which becomes defined in terms of assisting beings generally. Furthermore, the Bodhisattva 'vocation' is open to all: "Everyone who subscribes to the Mahāyāna technically becomes a bodhisattva... So important was the bodhisattva ideal that, particularly in its early stages, the Mahāyāna was simply known as the *Bodhisattva-yāna*" (Keown 2005:58). As Mahāyāna Bodhisattvas may be lay or ordained, it follows that ethical developments for all practitioners are closely related to Bodhisattva ethics, so the precepts and ethics as a whole come to be situated within the Bodhisattva world-view.

Bodhisattva practice is defined around the cultivation of perfections (Sanskrit: *pāramitā*), of which a sixfold characterisation was adopted in Mahāyāna: *dāna* (generosity), *śīla* (moral virtue), *virīya* (vigour, energy), *kṣanti* (patience), *dhyāna* (one-pointed concentration), and *prajñā* (wisdom). Given the widespread aspiration to the Bodhisattva path, they have had greater currency. Further the ordering of the Six Perfections deliberately gave the ultimate place to *prajñā*, which provided a significant draw away from *śīla*. Such changes became apparent in one of the earliest and best known Mahāyāna texts – the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (*Perfection of Wisdom or Transcendental Wisdom* in 8,000 lines)<sup>26</sup>, where it is stated: "Ananda: The Lord does not praise the perfection of giving, nor any of the first five perfections; he does not proclaim their name. Only the perfection of wisdom does the Lord praise, its name alone he proclaims" [Chapter 3] (Conze 1994:111). The *pāramitā* have featured very prominently ever since.<sup>27</sup>

So what then is quintessentially characteristic of *prajñā*? The sūtra recounts: "The Lord: He courses in all the six perfections. But it is the perfection of wisdom [101] which controls the Bodhisattva when he gives a gift, or guards morality ... All of them upheld by skill in means [*upāya-kausalya*], dedicated to the perfection of wisdom, dedicated to all knowledge" (Conze 1994:119). This makes plain the connection between wisdom and the performance of *skill in means*, a pivotal term carrying a number of different senses.<sup>28</sup> At a basic level in the Bodhisattva Path it requires cultivation of merit, which can accrue through

26 See, for instance, Warder (2000:347)

27 The *pāramitā* appear in many other sūtras, notably in the *Saddharma-pundarika* (*Lotus of the True Law*) *Sūtra*, more popularly known simply as the *Lotus Sūtra*, an early Mahāyāna text of roughly same age as the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*.

28 Harvey describes at least five (2000:134-5).

the practising of *dasakusalakammāpatha*. These are described in the suttas, particularly in [AN 10.176: *Cunda Kammaraputta Sutta*]. They comprise:

- 3 *Skilful actions in body*: not to take life, not to take that which is not given;  
not to engage in sensual misconduct
- 4 *Skilful actions in speech*: avoids false speech, divisive speech, abusive speech, idle chatter
- 3 *Skilful actions in mind*: not covetous, bears no ill will, has right view

Here they incorporate the first four of the Five Precepts, but not the fifth. However, in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, the fifth is included [Chapter XVII, verse 324]: “Furthermore, Subhuti, an irreversible Bodhisattva undertakes to observe the ten avenues [ways] of wholesome action. He himself observes, and instigates others to observe, abstain from taking life ... abstention from intoxicants as tending to cloud the mind ... abstention from wrong views” (Conze 1994:200). Yet the force is somewhat mitigated as *prajñā* is “this heap of merit that is declared to be superior to ... someone who would instigate to, and establish in the ten wholesome ways of action [*daśakuśalakarma*] of all the beings in the great trichilocosms which are countless as the sands of the Ganges” [Chapter VI: *Dedication and Jubilation*, verse 155] (Conze 1994:131).

So *prajñā* as skill in means, which is a widespread view in Mahāyāna literature, has the power to override the Fifth Precept, but how does it operate in practice? There are many factors, but the main principle that distinguishes it from the Therāvāda is the view of altruism (the consideration of the greater good). In her study of *Śikṣāsamuccaya* ('Cultivating the Fruits of Virtue'), a significant text on ethics authored by Śāntideva in about the 8<sup>th</sup> Century CE<sup>29</sup>, Clayton notes “Śāntideva takes a rather conservative approach to training precepts (*śikṣāpada*) at the beginning of a bodhisattva's career” (2006:103). However, Clayton also reports: “On the other hand, he also offers examples of the principle that precepts and ordinary moral prescriptions may be transgressed by a bodhisattva as a form of skilful means. In the section of [on?] purification of the self (*ātma-śuddhi*), Śāntideva cites various sūtras that indicate that a bodhisattva may, for example, ... give gifts of intoxicants ... (BR 248)” (103). This is dependent (crucially) on a compassionate motive and benefit being realized by sentient beings, whence rules no longer apply: “in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, Śāntideva quotes from the *Akṣayamatisūtra* where it is explained that if there is a greater benefit to beings, the bodhisattva should “discard” (*nikṣipet*) the instructions (*śikṣā*) [167.2; BR 164].”

In the survey, question 13 provided a wide selection of alternatives that include some of these more sophisticated attitudes to test for effects in current practice. It asked: “Which of the following options would you emphasize with regards to the fifth precept?”

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29 Williams (2009:41)

Option	Inc. Total	Inc. Proportions			
		S	N	E	W
A. There is no need to take a drop.	22	0.50	0.38	0.29	0.27
B. It is difficult to know what ill effects may arise following consumption	16	0.18	0.33	0.18	0.09
C. There is a danger that taking even very small amounts may lead to consuming more.	20	0.36	0.24	0.29	0.36
D. It is important to guard against any loss of mindfulness	45	0.68	0.62	0.76	0.73
E. Practise moderation in consumption	20	0.14	0.48	0.35	0.45
F. We should not be too rigidly attached to rules.	12	0.09	0.29	0.12	0.09
G. Practising skilful means may mean that perfections such as generosity take priority	17	0.18	0.33	0.29	0.18

**Table 5: Responses to Survey Question 13**

The table provides totals for each option followed by columns for *inclusive* responses as a proportion of respondents; thus of the 22 people who indicated Southern School affiliation, 11 checked the first option, resulting in a proportion of 0.5. The fourth option – to guard against loss of mindfulness – was chosen by about three quarters and echoes the close relationship presented between *sati* and *appamāda* discussed earlier.

An examination of responses according to tradition shows some differences: for example, responses from Southern Schools are noticeably higher than expected for Option A, but lower for Option E; whereas the converse is true for Northern Schools. However a statistical relationship between affiliation and attitudes towards options A and E could not be confidently established using a Chi-squared test for independence. Similarly, a hint of divergence between Northern and Southern Schools emerges in correlation analysis between length of practice (Question 6) and alcohol consumption (Question 22) suggesting that as years of practice increase for members of Northern Schools the consumption can go up, with the reverse for Southern Schools. However, it's not statistically significant (Trafford 2009:14,15). In both cases a larger sample may be needed.

Statistically relevant results were observed in particular scenarios. Question 26 asked: “If you are at a social function, do you handle alcoholic drinks (tick all that apply)?”

(Exclusive)	S	N	E	W
give alcohol as presents	2	7	0	0
open bottles	3	10	0	1
pour glasses	3	10	1	1
offer to buy alcoholic drinks for others	3	5	1	0
don't do any of the above	11	4	6	2

**Table 6: Responses to Survey Question 26**

The full response from Northern Schools is conspicuous and Fisher’s Exact Test for

all but the last row gives a  $p$ -value<sup>30</sup> of 0.031, which means that its likely there is some relationship between School and options chosen (18). Similarly, Question 27 gave respondents a number of options on being awarded a prize of a bottle of champagne – giving the bottle away proved very popular for Northern Schools, but not for others.

The above analyses appear to show some indications that reflect different emphases in teachings, with the last two examples echoing Śāntideva's statements on giving gifts. There are probably many other facets that could and should be investigated, particularly regarding Eastern Schools and the faith traditions of Pure Land and the emphasis in Zen on *satori* – instantaneous enlightenment experience. Many of these orientations complicate views on the Fifth Precept.

## 5. Protection in Wider Society

We have seen how observance of the Fifth Precept is taught and reflected on by teachers and practised by individuals, with some indications of social behaviour. In this section, we consider notions of 'social protection' and the broader collective impact, in terms of wider social structures, examining a few responses from Buddhist organisations and how they are relating to secular structures.

### 5.1 Sati and notions of protection (*rakkhati*) among individuals and society

In section 3 we determined *appamāda* (heedfulness) to be the underlying rationale for the Fifth Precept and established a fundamental link with *sati* (mindfulness). One might reflect that personal practice has little impact on wider society, but the following extract intimates how individual practice can influence those around and subsequently scale:

"When the King is heedful, conducts his life relying on heedfulness, then the Inner Circle, the Nobles of the Court ... the Royal Guard ... right down to the townsfolk and villagers will all think, 'His Majesty the King is a heedful person, he conducts his life relying on heedfulness. We also will be heedful people, we also will live relying on heedfulness.'

"O King, if you are a heedful person and conduct your life in reliance upon heedfulness you will be cared for and protected. The Inner Circle will receive care and protection ... everything right down to the houses and barns of your subjects will receive care and protection."

[SN 3.18 *Appamāda II*]

This sutta makes the link between heedfulness and social welfare in terms of care and protection. There is implicit a symbiosis between internal and external factors as Buddhist notions of protection are inevitably defined in terms of safeguarding the Path to *nibbāna*. In the Sedaka Sutta [SN 47.19], the Buddha uses an analogy with two acrobats to illustrate this interdependence and describes the qualities needed for protection.

The story concerns a master and assistant acrobats, with the latter balancing on top of the former. The act requires teamwork and the pupil makes the case for ensuring one's own balance to ensure mutual protection, an approach endorsed by the Buddha:

"The Blessed One said, 'That was the correct way of practice in that case. In the same way as the pupil spoke to his master, Bhikkhus, when thinking, 'I will protect myself' you must practise *satipatthana* (be mindful), and when thinking, 'I will protect others' you must also practise *satipatthana*.' "O Bhikkhus, protecting oneself, one protects others; protecting others, one protects oneself.

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30 This is the probability of such a table or a more 'extreme' one being generated assuming independence.



And how does one, in protecting oneself, protect others? By earnest practice, cultivation and development (of *satipatthana*). In this way, by protecting oneself, one protects others (Thanissaro 1997c)

Whether or not one wishes to protect oneself or society, the method is the same: to protect one's own mindfulness. The various forms of protection described in the sutta are denoted by the verb *rakkhati*, which contains many shades of meaning. *PED* provides three senses, the first being 'to protect, shelter, save, preserve'; the second meaning is 'to observe, guard, take care of, control (with ref. to cittaṃ the heart, and sīlaṃ good character or morals)' and the third is 'to keep (a) secret, to put away, to guard against (i.e. to keep away from).' All these senses can be applied individually and collectively.

However, the Buddha also indicates that *satipaṭṭhāna* should be used in conjunction with other practices of *carita*:

And how does one, in protecting others, protect oneself? By forbearance [*khantiyā*], by non-violence [*avihimsāya*], by possessing a heart of *metta* [*mettacittatāya*] and compassion [*anudayatāya*]. In this way, by protecting others, one protects oneself.

Nyanaponika Thera (1990) highlights the connection: “It sums up in a succinct way the Buddhist attitude to the problems of individual and social ethics, of egoism and altruism... Self-protection and protection of others correspond to the great twin virtues of Buddhism, wisdom and compassion.” Such protection is thus part of a complete ethics.

## Protecting against Contagious Effects

Although his primary attention was on guiding followers to salvation through their own efforts, the Buddha also addressed society in a large collective manner. In the Kumbha Jātaka (Story of the Pot) [*Jātaka 512*], he provides a lesson concerning the successive knock-on effects of alcohol consumption arising from natural fermentation of fruit that falls into a hollow. It starts with birds drinking from the hollow out of thirst, who subsequently chirp in intoxicated merriment; soon a hunter observes this behaviour, has a taste, shares it with a hermit and so it flows on, driven especially by greed, leading to large-scale production, widespread indolence and then poverty.

The rot is stopped at Savatthi when Sakka, king of the devas, is alarmed at the sight of King Sabbamitta about to sanction drink. Seeking to dissuade through skilful means, he “instantly disguised himself as a brahman and, carrying a jar full of liquor in the palm of his hand, appeared standing in the air in front of the king. "Buy this jar! Buy this jar!" he cried.” (Kawasaki & Kawasaki 1997). He goes on, though, to spell out just what the king can expect, giving many details of desensitisation, the removal of inhibitions and so on, “In short, drinking this will destroy every virtue.... If you can allow yourself to drink this intoxicating liquor, sire, buy my jar.” We are informed the king realized the danger and the city was spared the adverse consequences.

## 5.2 The link between *appamāda* and good relationships

The Buddha also made remarks about associations, frequently referring to the *kalyanamitta*, good and noble friend. Payutto (1988) identifies a link between the internal focus of *appamāda* and external social connections: “From the point of view of its significance, *appamāda* is classified as an 'internal factor', as is *yoniso-manasikara* (skilful reflection), and forms a pair with its external counterpart, *kalyanamittata*.”

The role of the precepts in cultivating such a link is described in the Sigālovāda Sutta

(Advice to Sigāla) [DN 31], one of the few suttas that is dedicated to the householder's life (Rahula 1967:129-135). In this sutta, the Buddha counsels the young Sigāla on domestic duties and on forming relationships in the right way with different kinds of people so that he “is on his way to conquer both worlds, is successful in both this world and in the next.” The Buddha proceeds to advise on the need to observe the first four of the Five Precepts to put away “vices of conduct.” He then shows how breaking the Fifth Precept is also inadvisable as it has six associated dangers: “actual loss of wealth; increase of quarrels; susceptibility to disease; an evil reputation; indecent exposure; ruining one's intelligence.”

This door to ruin is closely associated with five others, many having obvious social facets – “sauntering in streets at unseemly hours; frequenting theatrical shows; indulgence in gambling which causes heedlessness; association with evil companions; and the habit of idleness” (Narada 1985). This is vividly illustrated in the commentary to the Dhammapada verses 155 and 156 [DhA.iii.129ff.], where Mahādhana's son manages to waste all his millions by keeping the company of drunkards and engaging in vast socialising extravagances until he is reduced to rags. The story is particularly poignant because the Buddha remarks that had he applied himself properly he could even have become an Arahant. As the selection and conduct of social interactions are key to prosperity, the Buddha proceeds to distinguish for Sigāla between the qualities of a dubious friend and a *kalyanamitta* with reference to these roads to ruin. He describes further how to form healthy relationships generally – from family members to business associates – and so create social well being.

Thich Nhat Hanh, A Vietnamese teacher in the Zen tradition, founder of the Order of Interbeing, with a large following in the West, has similarly recognised the importance of the precepts to wider society. In his book *For a Future to Be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Mindfulness Trainings* he brings together teachings on mindfulness and interdependence to make explicit the link between mindful practice of the Five Precepts and the prospects for society's future (Thich Nhat Hanh 1993). Each precept has a quite lengthy formulation followed by detailed commentary. He presents the Fifth Precept in terms of consumption, which opens:

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I vow to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking and consuming. I vow to ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society.

The intoxicants include “other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films and conversations.” Further, the target of such practice extends both socially and temporally:

I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society and future generations.

Finally, the undertaking addresses the emotional states at large:

I will work to transform violence, fear, anger and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.

(Thich Nhat Hanh 1993: 4-5)

Another sutta that describes flourishing through ethics is the Maha Mangala Sutta

(Sutta of Great Blessings) [*SN 2:4*], which was referred to by Bodhi in section 2.3. This sutta condenses many ethical practices into 38 blessings, each expressed as a short clause, taking one progressively as far as *nibbāna*. It has been the basis for a major education programme in Thailand called *Mongkol Chīwit* with an annual contest that has in recent years involved several million participants in Thailand and seen the launch of an international equivalent, the 'World Peace Ethics contest'.<sup>31</sup> A textbook for the contest includes a chapter on each blessing. For the twentieth blessing – on refraining from intoxicating drinks (*majjapānā ca samyamo*) – the book provides illustrations from the Kumbha Jātaka and Mahādhana's son (Phrabhavanaviriyakhun 2005:231-242).

### 5.3 Social Norms and Medical Issues

In many countries alcohol consumption is a social norm – the extent of its penetration is evident, in the UK for example, by directions being frequently given with reference to public houses. Buddhist practitioners reflecting on the significance of the Fifth Precept are thus subject to a multitude of influences; and certain Buddhist teachings in secular culture do not feature – those of rebirth and other unseen realms. This has a limiting effect in the application of Buddhist teachings, mainly to more tangible physical realities, particularly the human body.

However, even in secular society the teachings have immediate relevance for there is considerable concern on the impact of alcohol on general health – a search of 'The Lancet' for 'alcohol' occurring in articles titles returns over 750 matches. The editorial to a series on alcohol of 27 June 2009 states it's "one of the most pressing public health problems in the world." Further there is potential for mutual enrichment as medical science, especially psychology and neuroscience, can offer new insights into the meaning of the Fifth Precept today. Although the Five Precepts are fixed, the meaning within each can be elaborated. This is consistent with the way the Buddha was flexible in extending the rules in the Vinaya and probably necessary in view of the manufacture of a range of synthetic substances that may be deleterious to one's heedfulness. Medical sciences has defined in particular a certain class of mind-altering substances, *psychoactives*, which "have the ability to change consciousness, mood, and thoughts" (Vaccarino and Rotzinger 2004:7). The growing recognition of the scale and depth of the problem prompted an in depth review by the World Health Organisation: "the first attempt by WHO to provide a comprehensive overview of the biological factors related to substance use and dependence by summarizing the vast amount of knowledge gained in the last 20-30 years." The report included tobacco, alcohol, amphetamine-type stimulants and other illicit drugs – highlighting the global burden on disease through mortality and disability (10-12).

The impact of secular health campaigns has been felt in traditionally Buddhist countries with a marked change in attitude towards tobacco in Cambodia and Thailand, particularly through 'no smoking' campaigns. It is recognised that monastics in these countries can influence the habits of others (Smith and Umenai 2000). Whilst health professionals have led the way, some temples have joined in public health programmes. At Wat Phra Dhammakaya, a large temple near Bangkok, the abbot, Phrarajabhavanavisudh, has won an award from the WHO for his temple's anti-tobacco campaigns, which were incorporated into more general ethical training programmes (WHO 2004).

Nevertheless for addicts other approaches are needed: one survey respondent remarked: "As a sober member of Alcoholics Anonymous I do not campaign against alcohol

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31 Background information is provided from the official Web site at:  
[http://www.world-pec.com/en/background\\_eng.html](http://www.world-pec.com/en/background_eng.html)

use. Instead I offer support to those that are addicted to its use.” Indeed Buddhist approaches should be based especially on the *Brahmaviharas*, and just as the Buddha accepted advice from medical practitioners, Buddhists nowadays are informed by modern detox programmes. Yet some options require total abstinence, a most radical and severe example being the treatment offered at Wat Thamkrabok in Thailand (<http://www.thamkrabok-monastery.org/>). A number of organisations are offering support around this, for instance the TARA Detox Organisation in the UK (<http://www.tara-detox.org/>). Such networks are developing a balance of Western and Eastern treatments and supportive environments.

We briefly mention two more classes of substances that can be classified as 'mind altering' with measurable effects on cognitive functioning. The first class are hallucinogens, particularly psychedelics, which were the subject of considerable experimentation in the West in the 60s and 70s. In *Zig Zag Zen* (Hunt Badiner and Grey 2002) a wide range of contributors, including teachers and scholars, share personal experiences. Some of the contributions were reprinted from an earlier issue of the populist American magazine, *Tricycle: Buddhist Review*, which included findings from a poll showing that of 1,454 respondents a substantial proportion had experimented with psychedelics, and 59% claimed “psychedelics and Buddhism do mix” (Hunt Badiner 1996:45). Attitudes varied, but quite a number of contributors suggest the use of drugs open up new channels of 'experience'. This might appear to echo the value placed in Zen on *satori*, but is this faithful to the original meaning? More practically, what are the long term effects? A review by a medical doctor, Redmond (2004) finds the discussion shallow and is generally cautious, sharing evidence from his practice to highlight considerable price that can be paid – the risks of harm are too great. In terms of the Fifth Precept, the behaviours described clearly indicate *pamāda*.

The second class are anti-depressants, which being widely available on prescription come under the umbrella of *psychopharmacy*. Many such drugs include codeine and other psychoactive substances which have known adverse side-effects, including addiction. In response Buddhist practices are contributing to alternative mindfulness-based cognitive therapy treatments (Segal, Williams and Teasdale 2002), for which trials are being run by centres such as the Oxford Mindfulness Centre (<http://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/>). Such initiatives indicate how the principles of the Fifth Precept may provide safe and cost-effective health treatments that may eventually be widely prescribed on the NHS.

## 6. Conclusions

As with all the ethical rules of training that the Buddha devised for his followers, the Fifth Precept provides opportunities for human flourishing, but it takes effort and requires a particular discipline of mindfulness. The analysis of the early texts has shown that this precept in particular gets at the heart of the Buddhist practice as avoiding *pamāda* helps steer a practitioner onwards towards *nibbāna*, whether one is lay or ordained. It is part of a wider ethical system where the principles of *varitta* and *caritta* (avoidance and positive cultivation) complement each other and we see today the advice in the Mangala Sutta and the Sigālovāda Sutta having as much relevance as ever for social welfare.

Since the time of the Buddha there has been a further conditioned genesis of teachings to make them applicable in different contexts. They have given rise to new emphases regarding the Precepts, leading to some divergences in views and practices we find today among particular traditions. Contemporary society presents many complexities that did not exist at the time of the Buddha and attitudes towards them vary. Yet still consistent with the early texts, it is generally appreciated that a life of well-being inevitably starts with careful attention to one's own intentional actions. They show just how much individual protection *is*

social protection.

## ***Bibliography***

### **List of Abbreviations**

*AN*: Anguttara Nikāya  
*Dh*: Dhammapāda  
*DhA*: Dhammapāda Atthakatha  
*DN*: Dīgha Nikāya  
*Jāt*: Jātaka  
*KN*: Khuddaka Nikāya  
*MN*: Majjhima Nikāya  
*PED*: Pali-English Dictionary (Rhys-Davids and Stede:1921-5)  
*Sn*: Sutta Nipata  
*SN*: Samyutta Nikāya  
*Vin*: Vinaya  
*VA*: Vinaya Atthakatha

### **Primary Texts**

Vin. Mahavagga: Sikkhāpadakathā  
Vin. Bhikkhu: Pācittiya LI  
Vin. Bhikkhunivibhanga: Pācittiya (Expiation) LXIII.1  
DN 1: Brahmaṅgala Sutta (All-embracing Net of Views)  
DN 2: Samaññaphala Sutta (Fruits of the Contemplative Life)  
DN 16: Mahāparinibbana Sutta (Last Days of the Buddha)  
DN 30: Lakkhaṇa Sutta (Sutta of Characteristics [of a Great Man])  
DN 31: Sigālovāda Sutta (Sutta to Sigāla)  
MN 73:14 Mahāvaccagotta Sutta  
SN 2:4:Mahā Mangala Sutta (The Sutta of Great Blessings)  
SN 3.17: Appamāda Sutta (On Heedfulness)  
SN 3.18: Appamāda Sutta II  
SN 47.19: Sedaka Sutta (At Sedaka)  
SN 48.10: Indriya-vibhanga Sutta (Analysis of the Mental Faculties)  
SN 56:11: Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in motion)  
AN 8.36 Puññakiriyavatthu Sutta (Meritorious Actions discourse)  
AN 8.39 Abhisandha Sutta  
AN 8.40: Vipāka Sutta (Sutta of Results)  
AN 8.41: Uposatha Sutta  
Sn 2:14: Dhammika Sutta (Sutta to Dhammika)  
Jāt 84: Silavīmaṃsa Jātaka  
Jāt 365: Silavīmaṃsa Jātaka  
Jāt 459: Paniya Jātaka  
Jāt 512: Kumbha Jātaka, (Story of the Pot)  
Jāt 81: Surāpāna Jātaka (“We Drank”)  
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The total number of words used in this essay excluding bibliography is 14,999 – 14,936 (according to Open Office 3.1.0/ Windows XP) plus 63 additional words counted manually in Figures 1 to 3.