

**The Importance of
Being
Morally Virtuous**

Aggacitta Bhikkhu



Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

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To Dolly,
who is such a loving,
considerate sister

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Preface

Back in 1978, when I was a newly ordained novice monk (*sāmaṇera*) in Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre, Penang, I wrote an essay called “The Importance of Keeping the Five Precepts” as a Dhamma gift for my eldest sister, Dolly Leong. She was very loving and considerate, and I was especially grateful to her for her quiet support of and trust in my unexpected decision to become a Buddhist monk. Furthermore, she was the only one in my family who had some inclinations towards Buddhism then, so I wanted to express my gratitude with this parting Dhammadāna¹ before I disappeared to pursue serious study and practice of the DhammaVinaya².

She showed the typewritten manuscript to a Buddhist friend who found it inspiring and informative, and subsequently got my permission to stencil-print it for circulation among fellow Buddhist practitioners. Since

1 [Pāli] Gift of the Buddha’s doctrine.

2 [Pāli] Doctrine and Discipline of Gotama Buddha.

then, it has been reprinted numerous times by many different people without even my knowledge.

Twenty years later, when I reappeared from seclusion in 1998, Doreen Lim of Sukhi Hotu, Penang, requested for permission to reprint it, but I asked her to hold on as I felt that it needed to be revised. However, I never got down to doing it because many other matters seemed to have taken priority all these years. Moreover, I was also beginning to be aware of many controversial issues coming to the fore that were related to the precepts, such as euthanasia, copyright infringement, homosexuality, plagiarism and pharmaceutical ethics. The thought of having to deal with these sensitive and challenging matters was also one of the major factors that contributed to the procrastination.

Finally, circumstances have now prompted me to produce this revised version, but not to address the above controversies as

yet—for I think they belong to another genre of publication. Instead, I have decided to retain the somewhat colloquial style of the original while revising the grammar and flow of the language. Nonetheless there are also some new additions:

- ◆ Some tips on how to get rid of insects without killing them.
- ◆ Teenage sex.
- ◆ Drastic changes to my earlier explanation of the fifth precept due to a serious mistake (originating from faulty notes that I was then referring to) in one of the conditions for breaching the precept.
- ◆ Exhortation to complement the passive aspect of observing the precepts by being pro-active as well.
- ◆ Benefits of observing the precepts, from both the suttas and the commentary.

Basically, *The Importance of Being Morally Virtuous* is still a primer for aspiring Buddhist practitioners. For a more profound treatment of the kammic consequences of breaking the precepts, I'd like to urge you to listen to my audio CD #18 "Occasions for Breaking Precepts", which is an edited version of a Dhamma talk that I gave in Metta Lodge, Johor Baru, on 20 June 2010.

With purity of moral conduct, may all your lofty aspirations be fulfilled.

Monks, the aspiration of the morally virtuous is fulfilled due to [his moral] purity.

BUDDHA IN DĀNŪPAPATTI SUTTA
(AN 8:35)

Aggacitta Bhikkhu
September 2010

Introduction

The familiar excuse

“Waah! Easy only to talk about keeping precepts, but how not to break them? Cannot-lah for working people like us! Aiyah! Difficult you know.” We must have heard this excuse being uttered umpteen times. Probably we ourselves are guilty of having spoken in this manner at some time or another. Of course it cannot be denied that it is difficult to keep the precepts. And in some ways, even more so for householders than for monks. Although monks have a lot more precepts to observe, their lifestyle is more conducive to the practice of moral virtue. But then, the way to happiness, prosperity and security is not easy. All of us know that if we want to succeed in anything—exams, working life, business, or spiritual practice—we must first of all resolve to work hard and then put in the appropriate effort. In the same way, how can we expect to reap any fruits when, even

before starting, we are giving excuses for not being able to observe the precepts?

Resolve... and after that *patience*

We should try to be positive in our thinking. And practical too, of course. For example, in resolving to undertake the precepts, we should not expect our efforts to be perfect right from the beginning. Being a perfectionist in this way will only bring us more frustration, aversion, anger and impatience instead of happiness and peace of mind.

The proper way to do it is to progress step by step. Be patient. Do not have expectations of immediate results. Instead, persevere and slowly but surely we will succeed so well in keeping the precepts that ultimately it may become so automatic that we need not even have to make any special effort to check our behaviour.

“But why bother to keep the precepts? Why not just do what we think is right?” our

friend the sceptic may ask. A very good question indeed. Before we can give a satisfactory answer to this interesting question, we need to digress a little.

A fact of life

All of us, I am sure, are well aware of the fact that there are all sorts of people in this world. Some are born deformed, invalid or spastic. Others are born into wealthy families. Those who are born mentally challenged are regarded as unfortunate. The lucky ones, we say, are those born intelligent, with healthy and beautiful bodies. Then again there are others born into poor families, deprived of health care, education, employment opportunities, proper housing, etc. Some are born healthy and intelligent but later on in life may become mentally unbalanced or senile. There are also cases of people at the peak of their careers suddenly deprived of their lives, or people successful in early life but who

suddenly become bankrupt through no apparent fault of theirs.

Law of kamma

Those are some examples of the results of beings who, in their previous lives, have not heard about precepts, nor kept them even if they had heard about them. They are the manifestations of the natural, universal, moral law of kamma, which is impersonal and operates irrespective of whether it is known, understood, or believed in. We are both the result of our past actions (in this life as well as in our innumerable past lives) *and* the makers of our destiny, whether in this life or in future lives.

The fruits of our past deeds

The five precepts are the principal or essential types of moral actions which, if properly and conscientiously observed, will conduce to our future welfare and happiness. Breaking them

increases our chances of falling into states of woe in future lives and even during this very life. For example, people who were regular drunkards (i.e. broke the fifth precept) in a previous life may

- ◆ be born mentally challenged,
- ◆ become mad later on in life, or
- ◆ be reduced to senility in old age.

Drunkards, in their present lifetime, are regarded as obnoxious people who are generally shunned by others. They bring lots of trouble to their family and friends, live in states of woe and emptiness when not intoxicated and make themselves vulnerable to many other forms of physical and mental suffering.

On the other hand, if a person conscientiously observes the second precept of refraining from taking things which have not been given, with intent to steal, she will be free from

- ◆ feelings of guilt,

- ◆ worry that she may be exposed,
- ◆ jeopardy to her reputation and position (social status, rank, etc.),
- ◆ uncomfortable feelings in the presence of the lawful owner of the stolen property, and
- ◆ other negative and unpleasant mental states resulting from the act of stealing.

In addition, an honest and trustworthy person increases her chances of acquiring a lot of property, inexhaustible wealth and even spiritual wealth. According to Buddhist texts, she can also get the property she wishes for quickly and her possessions will not be stolen, destroyed by flood or fire, or be confiscated by the government. (For a detailed list of benefits that each particular precept can bring—provided of course that it has been conscientiously and faithfully observed—see Appendix A.)

Towards our future welfare, happiness and security

If our future welfare, happiness and security are important to us we should vigilantly try to keep the precepts *now*. For the past is gone and we cannot change it with any amount of worry, regret or misgivings; the future is yet to come and we will never know for certain what it will bring. Only the present: *Now* is the moment to act—the moment upon which rest our future welfare, happiness and security of this life as well as of subsequent lives. So, *act now!* Spare no efforts in trying to observe the precepts.

Observing the five precepts in everyday life

Starting off

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, we should first try to observe the precepts without any unrealistic expectations. A strong and determined decision should be taken, but we may make slow progress. At the beginning it may be rather difficult because we are not yet used to such restraints and, as the saying goes, “Old habits die hard”. But we should not be discouraged: Rome was not built in a day; and tiny raindrops, with time, make up the mighty ocean.

Do not get upset when, in the act of doing something, we realise—alas too late!—that we have broken a precept. Realising that one has broken a precept is in itself a very big step—how often in the past did we do things in total ignorance without even having an inkling of what the precepts were? However, it is important that after realising so, we should make a conscious effort to refrain from

breaking the particular precept again when we are confronted with similar situations in the future.

So by constantly and patiently checking ourselves thus, we improve our mindfulness and, slowly but surely, we will become more cautious and careful in our thoughts, speech and actions. And one fine day, to our surprise, we may discover that we need no longer have to make any special effort to observe the precepts—they have all become internalised, automatic—an inseparable part of ourselves. We may also realise that with the virtue cultivated by keeping the precepts, we have become

- ◆ more at peace with ourselves and the world,
- ◆ happier,
- ◆ less encumbered with worries and anxieties, and
- ◆ much more likeable persons.

I hope that the above words of encouragement will help to allay the unfounded fears of the earnest householder who would like to observe the precepts, but is discouraged by the unrealistically high expectations she has set for herself.

The practical guidelines in the following pages deal with some specific instances that the householder is likely to come across in everyday life. They are by no means complete, but hopefully they can fulfil their purpose as guidelines for the householder, giving a feel of how the precepts can be applied in real life.

So read on, make a committed resolve, strive on with untiring effort... and ever be patient.

Observance of the five precepts

1. *Pāṇātipātā veramaṇi-sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the precept of refraining from destroying living beings.

2. *Adinnādānā veramaṇi-sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the precept of refraining from taking what is not given.

3. *Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇi-sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the precept of refraining from sexual misconduct.

4. *Musāvādā veramaṇi-sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the precept of refraining from false speech.

5. *Surā-meraya-majja-ppamāda-ṭṭhānā veramaṇi-sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the precept of refraining from distilled and fermented intoxicants that are the causes of carelessness.

Imāni pañca sikkhāpadāni samādiyāmi.

I undertake these five precepts.

Imāni pañca sikkhāpadāni samādiyāmi.

I undertake these five precepts.

Imāni pañca sikkhāpadāni samādiyāmi.

I undertake these five precepts.³

3 If these final lines are recited, the five precepts are undertaken as a whole. In other words, one would have to observe all the five again even if only one was broken.

The First Precept: Refraining from destroying living beings

The precept is broken whether one does the killing or instructs another to do it. However, the following conditions must be present for the act of killing to result in the possibility that the killer will be reborn in the Woeful States after death:

1. A living being (excluding bacteria and other micro-organisms).
2. Knowledge that it is a living being.
3. The intention to kill.
4. The effort made to kill (including asking another to do it).
5. The being dies through the effort.

(a) Marketing

As far as possible, living beings should not be brought home to be slaughtered before or during the process of cooking. This includes most live sea animals, e.g. *siput*,⁴ cockles, *lalla*,⁵

4 [Malay] A kind of shellfish that is cooked alive.

5 Ditto.

crabs, *balitong*,⁶ etc. Fish, prawns and cuttlefish which are fresh but already dead are fine. Catfish, *layhoo*,⁷ etc. which are still alive and kicking should not be bought home to be cooked. This means that buying chicken and ducks that have already been slaughtered (but not through one's personal instruction) is alright but live poultry should *not* be brought home or ordered to be slaughtered. Fresh eggs too should not be used for cooking, since according to Buddhist belief, life could already have been conceived in the egg. This refers particularly to eggs that have been fertilised, e.g. eggs from the *kampung*.⁸ Nowadays it seems that most eggs sold in the market are produced in factories and are therefore not fertilised. They are considered not to possess life. If that is really so, then it is

6 Ditto.

7 [Hokkien] A type of fish (*ikan haruan* in Malay) usually bought in its live state and killed just before cooking.

8 [Malay] Village.

alright to cook or use them in any other way. Salted and other forms of seasoned, or already fried, boiled or half-boiled eggs can be bought and freely used.

Pork, mutton, beef and other meats, and the entrails of pigs, cows, goats and poultry which have already been cut up and offered for sale are fine, but one should not make an order for roast pigs if doing so necessitates slaughtering—otherwise it is alright. Frogs (*chooi kay*⁹) offered for sale are usually exhibited live and then skinned alive according to the buyer's order—these should definitely not be bought or ordered.

(b) Cooking and meals

As mentioned in the above section, cooking should be done such that no living beings are intentionally killed in the process, e.g. live cockles should not be immersed into boiling

9 [Hokkien] Lit. 'water chicken', considered a delicacy because of the fine texture of its flesh.

water and fresh fertilised eggs should not be cooked in any way.

If the family is eating out, one should refrain from making orders which would cause living beings to be specifically killed for one's sake, e.g. ordering fresh (live) crabs, cockles or fish to be prepared into dishes.

(c) Around the house

Pests are, undoubtedly, major problems to the household. But before spraying toxic pesticides all over the place, we should stop to think first. For example, we ought to ask: *Why do pests come? Where do they abound?*

Firstly, pests are animals—they are also living beings like us who need food to survive, and who fear death as much as we do. They come to scavenge for food, the necessity for life. Secondly, they abound in filthy, untidy places where it is safe to move around without being easily noticed and

harmed by others (e.g. human beings and predators).

Knowing this, it is obvious that if we remove the conditions that are conducive for them to thrive in, we can keep them at bay without having to resort to killing. This is what the observer of the five precepts is encouraged to do.

Food should be properly stored in functional larders and meat safes that can effectively keep away rodents, house lizards, cockroaches, flies and ants. The kitchen should always be kept clean and tidy. Bread crumbs, bits and pieces of food left over after meals, vegetable scraps, fruit peels, remnants from food preparation, etc. should be scrupulously collected and discarded in proper waste disposal bins which are pest-proof. These in turn should be regularly emptied and cleaned.

These same principles of elementary hygiene—cleanliness, neatness and tidiness—

apply just as well to other storage areas in the house. Generally, if all the nooks and corners of the house are regularly cleaned, pests would not dare to come. After all, the real problem may not be the pests, but the state of the house!

For more practical tips on how to get rid of insects without killing them, see Appendix B.

(d) Hobbies

The thing about hobbies is to choose them to suit the precepts, not the other way round. If this simple principle is followed, there wouldn't be much of a problem. The trouble of course, is that our desires and preferences do not come under our control so easily. But there's no other way. We must try with patience and perseverance until we succeed.

If gardening involves the destruction of masses of snails, worms, ants and other insects, we should think again about continuing the hobby and seriously consider

giving it up gradually. Instead take up something less harmful. Otherwise, activities like planting useful fruit trees should be fine. But then again, a reminder here: preventive rather than destructive measures should be taken to control garden pests. For example, the neem tree is a natural insect repellent. If planted near fruit trees, it can help to ward off harmful insects. It seems that even spraying a solution of boiled *neem*¹⁰ leaves onto a tree trunk can help to keep off termites.

Fishing appears to be quite a harmless sport and is even supposed to be therapeutic in relieving stress. From the perspective of moral virtue however, it is rather dangerous. Here, not only do we kill fishes, but we do so intentionally, out of desire and with pleasure. Though not always sadistic, this hobby often leads to craving for the thrill and excitement

10 *Azadirachta indica*, an evergreen tree, indigenous to India and related to the mahogany tree, of which all parts have been used for centuries for medicinal and other purposes. Also known as *margosa*.

of the 'fight'. This includes both angling as well as spear-fishing and all other methods of fishing which are primarily motivated by pleasure and desire for entertainment.

Finally, it goes without saying that any form of hunting as a sport should not be indulged in.

(e) General

We should gradually train ourselves to give up our bad habit of 'instinctively' reaching out to kill insects, lizards, cockroaches, mice, etc. A preventive method of controlling such household pests has already been suggested and briefly described above. However, it is going to be quite difficult for us especially when we are bitten by insects like mosquitoes and ants. But look at it this way: when we feel the bite, there's no point in getting angry and revengeful, thinking, *For that I'm going to squash you, you bloody mosquito!* The insect has already bitten—killing it won't lessen the

pain. On the contrary, by being angry and revengeful we are actually making ourselves suffer more in addition to the pain of the bite that we already feel. It's never a pleasant feeling to be angry or revengeful. So instead of doing that, why not forgive the poor mosquito—better still donate some blood—and blow or flick it away. In this way, we only suffer the pain of the bite and by doing charity we may even produce a pleasant feeling.

We should constantly remind ourselves that just as all of us fear death and desire to continue living, so too do other beings. Then we develop compassion for them and can better restrain ourselves from killing in this habitual way.

The Second Precept: Refraining from taking what is not given

The precept is broken whether taking what is not given is done personally or through another person acting on one's instructions. However, the following five conditions must be present for the act to give rise to the possibility that the offender will be reborn in the Woeful States after death:

1. The object has an owner.
2. Knowledge that the object has an owner.
3. Intention to steal.
4. Effort made to steal.
5. The object is obtained through the effort.

Being largely conditioned by the materialistic society which we live in, it is not surprising that many of us are obsessed with the mentality of "any time we can get things free, better get 'em fast." It is perfectly alright if the things are really free, but frankly speaking,

some people are prone to *sapu*¹¹ or *gasak*¹² things which they know belong to others and which are not actually free. While gross acts of robbery, looting, plundering, etc. are obvious breaches of this precept, there are other more subtle misdeeds that we need to look out for.

(a) The office

To illustrate this, ask ourselves: How many times have we intentionally flicked home from the office things like erasers, ballpoint pens, stationery, clips, files and other stuff, without even the slightest tinge of guilt, when we are fully aware that these things belong to the office or company and are *not* for the taking? Keeping this precept means that we must try our best to check such seemingly trivial, but surely very bad habits by refraining from taking things which have not

11 [Malay] Sweep away.

12 [Malay] Take according to one's whim.

been given, or which are not meant for us. After all, these little things are not too expensive for us to buy, surely. So, in whatever place that we are working, we should exercise restraint and overcome the temptation and greed of taking things which do not rightfully belong to us.

(b) Occupation and business deals

We should also be wary that our occupations do not lead us to breach this precept, or at the very least, to behave unethically. For example, deviously causing a superior or colleague to be removed in order to take up the vacant post out of greed for power or higher wages is unethical, although it is not an outright breach of this precept. So too is taking off office time for no good reason, e.g. to chit chat, to deliberately do things slowly to avoid being given additional work, to make excuses in order to shirk work which is rightfully ours.

Cheating is also another form of stealing. Examples are numerous but let us consider a few. Shopkeepers who use faulty measuring instruments, or who deliberately mix products (e.g. rice) to result in selling inferior quality goods at standard quality price are breaking the precept. For big time businessmen, the misappropriation of houses, farms, estates, etc. of others by means of crafty lawsuits and allied methods is also considered an act of stealing.

(c) Be a good borrower

Some people have the bad habit of borrowing things for long stretches of time. Eventually, the original owner is forgotten and the borrower assumes possession of the property. In such cases, whether or not this precept is breached depends solely on the intention of the borrower. If one forgets, the precept is not broken but one's conduct is certainly censurable and one will earn a bad reputation. The

outright case of refusing to return borrowed things to the rightful owner is also a form of stealing although not normally considered to be so. Therefore, we should try our very best to be mindful on such occasions and to make it a point to remember the rightful owner and return the property to him as soon as we have finished using it.

(d) Evading tax

The attitude of “any time we can get things free, get ‘em fast!” seems to pervade every aspect of our lives. Even when we are on vacation and do a lot of shopping, especially in other countries where goods are cheaper, it becomes sort of ‘instinctive’ for us to start thinking of ways and means to evade customs duty on all the items that we want to buy. We must guard against such ‘instincts’ which are the causes of our failure to mindfully keep the precept—for the smuggling of dutiable goods is an act of stealing. So too is the evasion of

any form of tax, e.g. income tax, assessment, quit rent, etc.

The Third Precept: Refraining from sexual misconduct

A paraphrase translation of the Buddha's explanation of this precept from the Pāli suttas says:

“I undertake the precept of refraining from an illicit act of sexual intercourse.”

Normally sex does not occur spontaneously, just out of the blue, but is the mutual participation of a man and woman who are already involved in a relationship. Having this in mind, this section will deal not only with the particular conditions concerning the sexual act itself, but also with the relevant aspects of the man-woman relationship which usually comes before and leads to it.

This precept can be broken by oneself only—no one can break it for another. It is broken when the following four conditions are all present:

1. The forbidden person.
2. Intention to have sexual intercourse with the person.

3. Effort made in committing the sexual act.
4. Consent to the sexual act.

The **forbidden person** can only refer to the opposite sex and not to the same sex. For males this person may be:

1. A female who is under protection, such one who is unmarried, engaged or protected by [law with threat of] penalty.
2. A female who is married to or is cohabiting with another male, including a prostitute whose services are currently contracted to another client.

In the case of females, three categories of males are forbidden:

1. For a married or cohabiting female, any male other than her husband or cohabitant respectively.
2. For an engaged female, any male other than the one she is engaged to.

3. For a female protected by [law with threat of] penalty, any male prohibited by the law.

In our modern context, “a female protected by [law with threat of] penalty” would refer to any female decreed by law to be a forbidden sexual partner, e.g. a female convict, a close female relative, someone under the age of consent.

Details from the Pāli scriptures are shown in Appendix C. Lists A and B are the categories of females forbidden to males. The list for females is a bit more complicated: it shows the categories of males forbidden to specific categories of females.

(a) Sex and morality

For the lay disciple, Buddhism does not consider sex in itself as immoral, shameful or dirty; but as something quite natural for most human beings since it is of primary importance for the procreation of the species. What

causes it to be immoral are the circumstances under which sex is carried out. We can draw a few conclusions based on the conditions mentioned above. In the following discussion, I use the term 'attached' to mean either engaged to be married or cohabiting.

1. The personal status of a male (his marital status, age, dependency, etc.) does not bar him from having sex with a female who is not in his forbidden list.
2. For a female, there are no males forbidden to her if she is unmarried, unattached or not "protected by [law with threat of] penalty". In other words, such a female who has reached the legal age—regardless of whether she is still protected by her guardians—does not break the precept when she has sex with any male.

3. In the case of a man having sex with a prostitute, the precept is not broken by the man as long as she does not belong to either group forbidden to him. Neither does she break the precept.
4. For males and females who are unmarried and unattached but not under protection, having sex by mutual consent does not constitute a breach of this precept.

Whether or not this ancient standard of sexual morality is still applicable in our society today is debatable. So hold on to your horses! Before males and single females jump for joy while female partners and parents start to protest, let me share my personal views on this.

(b) Adultery

In the old days, a man who took a second wife was not considered to have broken the

precept. Perhaps this can be regarded as reasonable in a society where both men and women accepted the norm and practice of polygamy, and where the first wife, instead of feeling hurt and jealous, might in fact welcome an extra pair of hands to help with the household chores.

But these days, with monogamy being the rule rather than the exception, society values have changed, thus reconditioning the expectations and outlook of its members. So, when two people get married, they expect and are expected to be faithful to each other. Any form of adultery then, whether or not with a person forbidden to one, so long as it causes suffering to others involved, should be considered as grievously unwholesome. However it may not be technically breaking the precept.

(c) Marriage blues

When a man or a woman commits, or thinks of committing adultery, it is usually an indication that something has gone wrong somewhere in the matrimonial relationship. The thought of committing adultery is actually a form of escapism. Why? Because in such a situation, one conveniently leaves a set of problems which desperately needs to be worked out, unsolved and imagines that it will be solved by entering into a new (and probably highly idealised) relationship with another person. Furthermore, because one is so disgusted and frustrated with the present seemingly insoluble set of matrimonial problems, one becomes blinded and does not realise that committing adultery will in fact *add* much more to those problems rather than solve them in any way. So, one who entertains such thoughts of committing adultery can be said to be indulging in a form of escapism.

Instead of deluding oneself by such futile imaginings, one should take realistic and practical courses of action to tackle the problem. For example, one could have an empathic heart-to-heart talk with one's partner, or suggest some compromise or other.

But whatever it is, one should always bear in mind that any kind of *real*, significant change starts and comes from *within* oneself. We must be prepared—no, we must *want*—to change ourselves for the better *first* irrespective of whether others change or not, before we can ask, or even suggest to another to do so. And to be able to do that we should not let our emotions blind us, so that we can see clearly and objectively with understanding and tolerance. For to understand, it is said, is to forgive.

And one of the more important things to understand is that for a successful marriage, apart from financial considerations, only

responsibility, obligation and a sense of duty are the necessary strands that will bind a family together. If love is present, all the better: one is lucky. If not, let there be understanding, lots of it, and more important, tolerance. For no one is perfect (as far as we have personally come to know), and each and everyone of us has faults as well as virtues. What right then have we, impure as we are, to condemn another's faults while overlooking her virtues which may well be more than ours? This applies to everyone, *especially* our close ones whom we have taken, so much so often, for granted. Most times we tend to be too harsh on them, thus causing unnecessary hurt and suffering to them as well as to ourselves. If only we can be mindful of this as often as possible with regard to everyone and every situation, much of our sufferings can be greatly reduced.

Another important thing to do—or rather, *not* to do—for a person who is caught in

marriage blues, is not to start, encourage, or be involved in any intimate relationship with another member of the opposite sex, especially a sympathetic soul from the same office. This is a particularly dangerous and crucial period of emotional and psychological instability. So one should try one's level best to restrain from sowing the seed of adultery, which is very likely to sprout within a short time in such fertile soil!

On our part, if we know that our colleagues of the opposite sex are caught in such situations, we should try our best to help or assist them—*by keeping clear!* Remember that we may be worsening the situation rather than helping to solve the problem if we, in this crucial period, start to form an intimate—initially platonic of course—relationship with the colleague concerned.

(d) Teenage sex

Children nowadays are easily exposed to sexually arousing inputs from the mass media and environment. Moral standards with regard to sexuality have dropped. It is therefore not surprising that the sexual behaviour of teenagers today differs so starkly from that of ancient times, making teen sex a matter of concern for many parents. Teenagers who are spiritually inclined would naturally want to know more about sexual morality.

According to the ancient commentaries, a boy who has sex with a girl who is single breaks the precept if she is

1. engaged;
2. underage; or
3. not underage, but still under protection.

In the first two cases, the girl also breaks the precept but not in the third case. However, both do not break the precept if the girl is not

engaged to somebody else, not underage or not protected.

Coming to terms with one's sexuality is certainly more than just undertaking or breaking precepts. Granted, teens are at a crucial period of their development. They are neither cute children nor matured adults, and are constantly grappling with psychological conflicts and physiological changes. They are neither totally dependent on their parents nor totally independent of them. So, how much right do they have in deciding how to deal with their hormonal urges? I guess that will have to depend on how understanding, open-minded and permissive their parents are.

Whatever that may be, teens who are thinking of having sex should be well aware of the circumstances leading to it and its consequences. It would be ideal if they are exposed to proper sex education that deals with both the physiology *and* psychology of sex, including information on contraceptives

and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections. Teens need to understand that a sexual relationship is not just a casual affair. It involves many emotional, psychological, physiological, social and financial issues that may be overwhelming and distressing. Videos on such themes can be shown to teenagers as part of sex education. Prevention is better than cure—for making a wrong decision could ruin the carefree life of youth, impose premature responsibilities of family life on a teenager, and produce long-lasting psychological wounds of guilt and disgrace.

The sexual urge is actually a form of creative energy that can be transmuted for other useful purposes. Instead of fanning the urge with sexual fantasies or pornography, it can be transmuted by diverting one's attention to other creative activities, e.g. art, music, writing, designing, public speaking, dance, sport, meditation, Dhamma-propagation, social welfare service, etc. So, there are

healthy options for dealing with hormonal urges that steer clear of impulsive teenage sex, which may have regrettable repercussions, such as unwanted pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted disease, etc.

(e) Special importance of the third precept

Many a saying has been composed, proclaiming women to be the cause of a man's downfall. If we cast aside the chauvinistic reactions to these sayings and look carefully into the wisdom of the message, we may find that it is not so much women—or men, for that matter—who are the cause of anyone's downfall. It is in fact sexual lust, or craving for members of the opposite sex, which is the very potent force behind many a person's ruin and dishonour.

How often for example, have we heard of how intense romantic love has led people to do all sorts of things (*love is blind*) including

murder; thieving and destroying other's property; seduction and adultery; lying, slandering, abusive behaviour and taking to the bottle or to drugs? Thus we see that a person who breaks the third precept is more than likely to break all the remaining four.

So the third precept helps us to guard our very potent and powerful sexual urges, drives or desires so that they do not lead us to consequences which are harmful to us and others.

The Fourth Precept: Refraining from false speech

This precept is broken when an untruth is spoken, or when one instigates or instructs another to do it. However, the following five conditions must be present for the act to give rise to the possibility that the offender will be led to the Woeful States after death:

1. The untruth.
2. The intention to express the untruth.
3. The effort made through body or speech to communicate the untruth.
4. The deception occurs.
5. The other party suffers a loss.

Bluffing for fun or pulling another's leg is generally a harmless manifestation of our sense of humour, and sometimes an acceptable ingredient of a sociable and friendly character. Strictly speaking, it is still considered as breaking the precept although one may not be led to the Woeful States if the other party does not suffer a loss. However, we should remind ourselves that we shouldn't be too much of a perfectionist at

this stage. So a minor misdeed like this may be overlooked in the beginning. Instead we should concentrate on the grosser cases of deliberate lying, e.g. lying out of envy, jealousy, or spite, or out of desire for gains, fame, or other selfish motives. These are serious cases which can bring rather grave consequences in the future and so we should try to restrain ourselves from committing them. The important point to consider is whether the other party will be hurt or harmed in any way: emotionally, physically, by way of loss of property, status, etc. This is because

- ◆ we ought to be considerate towards the welfare of others, and
- ◆ the kammic results that we shall have to reap in the future are largely dependent on the gravity of the ill effects actually inflicted on the affected party.

(a) Children

It may be especially difficult to keep this precept with children. Often we find ourselves bluffing children in order to bring them under our control, e.g. saying things such as, “If you go out in the dark without telling Mother, the *pontianak*¹³ will catch you.” If we look deeper into the situation, the reason why we resort so often to falsehood when we are dealing with children is not difficult to see: most normal children are, by nature, inquisitive, energetic and expressive. If they are not asking endless questions, they are making helluva noise, bawling, screaming and running all over or they sulk and throw tantrums. Of course there are numerous positive qualities of children, but we are not concerned with them here. When we decide to spend a nice quiet Sunday morning in the easy chair reading our favourite novel, here they come! And the easiest way to get rid of

13 [Malay] Vampire.

them, without losing our cool is by making use of such playful threats. But the easiest way, unfortunately, is not the best way. When we tell children such deliberate lies for our own convenience, not only are we breaking the fourth precept at our own expense, but we may be performing other unwholesome deeds as well. For example, when we threaten children with a deliberate lie,

1. they may be unnecessarily accumulating unfounded fears that may be difficult to remove later on in life,
2. we as adults are showing a very bad example that will significantly have an adverse effect on the children's moral upbringing, and
3. we may be conditioning them to do the same thing towards their own children in future.

Therefore, we ought to try our best to refrain from bluffing children for our own convenience, and to utilise other means of

diverting the inquisitive, expressive energy of the young. All of us are full of creative potential, so we should make full use of it, as the situation demands, in ways which are beneficial to one and all.

(b) Business deals

Honest people in the sales line are often caught in a dilemma: to deliberately lie in order to clinch a sale or to evade the client's inquiry and risk a sale down the drain. The attitude to adopt here should not be that of a salesman desperately trying to get as much sales as he can through any and every unscrupulous means. On the other hand, if one regards oneself as a person who is only trying his best to create convenient opportunities for the company, the client and himself to arrive at mutually beneficial deals, and if the benefits are considered in a balanced way (and *not* lopsided, e.g. *How much cut will I get? Can I*

get a higher cut out if I cheat the company and the client?) there shouldn't be much of a dilemma.

The problem is there only when there is craving to make as much money as one can. By trying our best to observe this precept, we are actually restraining greed from arising and suppressing greed that has already arisen. By doing this constantly and patiently, we may gradually adopt the good habit of restraining our greedy tendency and so live a more contented, less dissatisfied life.

(c) Special circumstances: to lie or not to lie?

Sometimes circumstances are such that if we tell the truth, it will hurt the other party. Also it is not possible to keep quiet or to evade the issue. But if we tell a lie in order not to hurt the other party, won't it be breaking the precept? Well, the answer to the question is "Yes." Then what should we do?

Here there are at least two ways of looking at the problem but the final decision of course, lies with us. This is a special case where we can exercise a choice between two wholesome deeds: one rooted in compassion, and the other in virtue (or morality). Firstly, if we are compassionate enough and we do not wish the person to feel hurt by the truth, then we can consciously sacrifice our observance of the precepts and break the fourth one. When we do this we should be fully conscious that we are breaking the precept through compassion, and that we are fully prepared to bear the consequences (of breaking the precept) whatever they may be, in the future. Now, because any volitional action of ours which is rooted in compassion is a wholesome deed, it is probable that the goodness generated from such a deed may overshadow the unwholesomeness generated from consciously breaking the precepts. Therefore when this happens, the fruits (of this particular deed of

ours) which we shall have to reap in the future may turn out to be not bad, but good.

The second way of tackling the problem is more suited to the person who is more bent on perfecting or developing his virtue of morality rather than compassion. Here the person holds tightly to his precepts and tells the truth fearlessly and with equanimity. He does so with the understanding that he is telling the truth not with the intention of purposely trying to hurt the other party, but because he does not see any point in telling a lie. He does so also with the realisation that it is neither the speaker of the truth nor the truth itself that causes hurt in the other person, but in reality it is the person himself who allows the truth to hurt him.

So either way, depending on our temperament and choice, we are still performing wholesome deeds which will bring us wholesome consequences in the future.

(d) Holding the fourth precept more firmly

Those who are keen on perfecting their virtue of morality should exercise greater discipline by refraining also from divisive speech (which causes others to be disunited), abusive language and frivolous talk (e.g. trivial gossiping which is neither wholesome nor beneficial).

The important things to remember about keeping this fourth precept are the feelings and welfare of the other party whom we are dealing with. If we are always mindful, cautious and considerate we can, without doubt, be more successful in refraining from causing hurt or any kind of harm to everyone around us. In this way we become much more likeable persons and we taste the fruits of the virtue of keeping the precepts even here and now, in this life. What more in our next?

The Fifth Precept: Refraining from intoxicants

Intoxicants here refer to all types of alcoholic beverages, liquors, spirits and drugs including (1) any alcoholic beverage made from powdered grain, cakes, cooked rice, yeasts and fruits, e.g. grapes; (2) spirits made from flowers, fruits, honey, sugar and mixed ingredients; and (3) drugs like opium, ganja, heroin, LSD, etc. Modern examples of (1) would include whisky, beer, vodka and gin; and (2) would include wine, mead and rum. Together, the two terms are meant to cover all kinds of alcoholic beverages.

This precept is broken when all the following four conditions are present:

1. Substance which is either liquor, spirit or drug.
2. The wish to take it.
3. The effort made to take it.
4. Ingestion of it.

Breaking this precept severely and frequently leads to the Woeful States after

death; if only lightly, may lead to madness (see Introduction).

(a) The social drinker

If we examine the conditions of breaking the precept carefully, we will notice that mere ingestion is enough to break this precept. This clearly shows that the precept is not to be taken lightly. Thus the social drinker who drinks only on social occasions and who is not addicted nor particularly drawn to liquors and spirits, breaks the precept whether or not he gets himself tipsy or intoxicated.

It is always wise to keep away from intoxicants as far as we can—for who knows if we can or will not get addicted to or develop a liking for them? One should especially be wary of the company that one keeps. On social occasions, more often than not, it is the company that exercises the greatest influence on one's attitude towards drinks and unless one is strong-willed, one is likely to succumb

to the challenges, teasing and mocking which follow one's refusal to drink.

(b) The boozer

Every occasion that the boozer takes to drinks and gets himself tipsy or drunk, he is breaking the precept. If he is only slightly tipsy, the precept is lightly broken; if he is violently drunk, or is intoxicated to such an extent that he verbally abuses or causes inconvenience and much trouble to others, the precept has been severely broken. If the addicted boozer does not put a stop to his alcoholic craving he is heading for the woeful states even in this very life, not to mention the next.

(c) The sick

Sometimes alcohol, spirit and liquor may have to be used in mixtures as medicines for certain kinds of ailments. In such cases, ingesting the medicine constitutes a breach of this precept whether or not the sick person

becomes intoxicated. But there is an allowance made by the Buddha for monks that can also be applied to the laity: as long as the taste, colour, and smell of the alcohol are not perceptible in the medicine, it is alright to ingest it. Based on this principle, one can argue that morphine and other narcotics used as pain killers are allowable as well.

(d) The gourmet

There is a similar allowance made by the Buddha for monks that the gourmet would be happy to know. Monks are allowed to take alcohol “cooked in broth, meat, or oil”. This is probably because the alcohol would have evaporated in the process of cooking and so would have lost its intoxicating properties. However, foods containing unevaporated alcohol would not be included under this allowance.

(e) The drug taker

Even though ganja is not addictive, the taking of it may eventually lead the drug-taker to try other addictive drugs which have more kick. Drug-pushers are ever more than willing to encourage this. So *all* types of drugs, including ganja, stimulants and sedatives should not be misused, i.e. taken not out of necessity, but for kicks. As far as possible, even when confronted with such problems like insomnia, or depression and other emotional or psychological problems, one should try one's best to refrain from resorting to any kind of drugs. If we are strong enough we should be able to endure. Otherwise, accept the problems for what they are: mental fabrications which have arisen and which, eventually, *must* fall away. In this case, more often than not a sympathetic pair of ears can give a great deal of help. So seek out a good friend who is also a good and sympathetic listener and let him help us lessen the load on our shoulders.

The misuse of drugs leading to addiction can be very much more dangerous than mere addiction to alcohol. With the increasing cases of drug smuggling, pushing and addiction these days, I'm sure the dangers and evils of drug misuse for the individual and to society are very familiar to all of us. Needless to say, the misuse of drugs in any way (e.g. smuggling, pushing or taking them for the kicks, or to get high) constitutes a very heavy breaking of the precepts, and every effort should be made to avoid getting involved in it.

(f) Special importance of the fifth precept

When a person breaks the fifth precept and becomes intoxicated, there is no telling what he can do. His inhibitions have all been shed. He is no longer in control of his senses and, not being able to discriminate between what is beneficial and what is harmful, he is liable to be given to violence. He can even kill, steal,

or destroy others' property, become sexually aggressive and dangerous. He can lie, slander, and be given to abusive behaviour—thus tremendously increasing the likelihood of breaking the rest of the other four precepts.

It is therefore important to appreciate the special significance of the precept, which has been so aptly phrased: “to refrain from distilled and fermented intoxicants *that are the causes for carelessness*”.

Conclusion: To each her own (destiny)

As a concluding remark it may be well for us to remind ourselves of the major underlying principles of practical Buddhism which is found in this simple but profound verse from the **Dhammapada** (#165):

*Only by oneself has evil been done
by oneself is [one] defiled;
By oneself has evil not been done
only by oneself is [one] purified.
Purity and impurity are personal
no other can purify another.*

This is the spirit with which the five precepts (*pañcasīla*) should be regarded. It is not a set of commandments passed on by a Supreme Being. If we break any of them, we do not commit any sin nor do we displease this Supreme Being. But we should be well aware of and be fully prepared to accept the consequences of our actions—just as we should be prepared to face the music when we get back to office the day after taking French leave.

The precepts are meant as guidelines for us to follow on the path to our future security, happiness and welfare. The degree to which we would like to abide by these guidelines is completely left to us. The Dhamma¹⁴ respects the fact that each of us, ultimately, is responsible for our own destiny.

Ideally, our observance should not only be motivated by fear of the dire consequences of breaking the precepts, but also by compassionate loving-kindness as well. Let us not be satisfied with the mere observance of the five precepts, i.e. just abstaining from killing, stealing, etc., but let us also complement the passive aspect of abstention by being proactive as well:

1. Instead of just refraining from killing, let us try to heal the hurt and save life, e.g. not flushing the toilet bowl because a cockroach is swimming in

14 [Pāli] Nature; the Law of Nature.

it should be accompanied with the intention to save the cockroach.

2. Instead of just refraining from taking what is not given, let us try to practise generosity, e.g. by giving our own possessions to the needy.
3. Instead of just refraining from sexual misconduct, let us try to be sincere and faithful, e.g. by being understanding, forgiving and considerate towards our partner.
4. Instead of just refraining from telling lies, let us try to be truthful about what is beneficial and say it kindly at the right time, e.g. by skilfully telling a patient that she has been diagnosed with fourth stage cancer and has only three more weeks to live.
5. Instead of just refraining from divisive speech, let us try to promote peace and harmony, e.g. by trying to

reconcile those who have become disunited.

6. Instead of just refraining from harsh speech, let us try to be considerate of others' feelings, e.g. by speaking politely at the right time.
7. Instead of just refraining from frivolous talk, let us try to be circumspect about what we want to say, e.g. by speaking only what is beneficial.
8. Instead of just refraining from ingesting intoxicants, let us try to be always sober, e.g. by being mindful and clearly aware of our mental, verbal and physical activities.

As we stumble along the Path, may all of us then have the enduring patience to pick ourselves up every now and again, and to move on, ever more determined than before! May all beings be happy!

Appendix A:

The blessings of moral virtue

If the precepts are conscientiously and faithfully observed, we will surely reap the fruits of our untiring efforts sooner or later, whether in this very existence or in future lives to come. The lists below give some of these benefits that the precepts, when properly observed, can bring to us. The first set is from the suttas and the second, from the Commentary to **Putta Sutta** (Iti 74), in the fourth book of the **Khuddaka Nikāya**.

From the suttas

According to **Duccaritavipāka Sutta** (AN 8:40), any of the following unwholesome actions, when indulged in, developed and pursued, can lead to the Woeful States; but when one becomes a human being, each can lead to the slightest of results as tabulated below:

Unwholesome action	Slightest of results when one becomes a human being
taking life	a short life
taking what is not given	loss of wealth
sexual misconduct	hostility and enmity
false speech	being falsely accused
divisive speech	breakup of one's friendship
abusive speech	unappealing sounds
frivolous talk	words not worth taking to heart
taking intoxicant	mental derangement

In **Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta** (MN 135), the Buddha described the results of wholesome and unwholesome actions, including the following:

Passive wholesome action	Active wholesome action	Result
not killing living beings, laying aside the rod and the knife	being considerate and merciful, compassionate for the welfare of all living beings	leads to long life
not harming beings		leads to good health

In **Mahāparinibbāna Sutta** (DN 16), the Buddha listed five benefits accruing to one who is morally virtuous:

1. great increase of wealth due to heedfulness
2. a favourable reputation
3. confidence in the company of others (belonging to any stratum of society)
4. an unconfused death
5. rebirth in a happy state, in a heavenly world.

In **Abhisanda Sutta** (AN 8:39), the Buddha declared that one who observes the five precepts gives freedom from danger, animosity and oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In doing so, she gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, animosity and oppression; and her virtuous conduct will lead to welfare and happiness, to heaven, to what is desirable, pleasurable and appealing.

In **Dānūpapatti Sutta** (AN 8:35), the Buddha said that the aspiration of one who gives gifts to a monk or priest, if firmly resolved, can be fulfilled provided his moral virtue is pure, but not if he is immoral.

In **Dussīla Sutta** (AN 5:24) the Buddha said that one who is morally virtuous has the cause and condition for the development of mental collectedness (*samādhi*), which is the basis for the sequential unfolding of gnosis¹⁵ and vision according to what has occurred

15 Intuitive knowledge of spiritual truths.

(*yathābhūtañāṇadassana*), disenchantment and dispassion (*nibbidāvirāga*) and gnosis and vision of liberation (*vimuttiñāṇadassana*).

From the Commentary to the Itivuttaka

One who observes the relevant precept creates kamma that can produce the following benefits when conditions are ripe.

1. Benefits of not killing living creatures

Complete limbs • Well-proportioned body • Agility • Beautiful legs • Charming disposition • Soft and gentle disposition • Cleanliness • Courage • Strength • Sweet, pleasant speech • Popularity • Freedom from blame • Possession of a retinue that cannot be broken up • Fearlessness • Protection from assault • Invincible (cannot be killed) • Possession of an infinite retinue • Good looks • Shapely body • Seldom sick • Freedom from sorrow • Non-separation from what one cherishes • Longevity

2. Benefits of not taking what is not given

Great wealth • Abundant rice (grains) • Infinite prosperity • Acquisition of new wealth • Acquired wealth is durable • Speedy acquisition of the property one wishes for • One's property will not be affected (depleted) by the ruler, robbers, thieves, flood, fire, or unloved heirs • Exclusive wealth • Foremost in the world • No experience of deprivation • Live in comfort or happiness

3. Benefits of not committing sexual misconduct

Free of enemies • Loved by all • Not lacking in rice, clothes, bed, lodging, etc. • Sleeps happily • Wakes happily • Freedom from the danger of the Woeful States • Impossible to be born as a woman • Impossible to be born as a hermaphrodite • Absence of angry temperament • Ability to give clear explana-

tions • Absence of posture with lowered shoulders (indicating disgrace) • Absence of posture with face looking downwards (indicating shame) • Mutual love between partners • Complete sexual faculties • Complete gender characteristics • Freedom from suspicion • Live at ease, free from anxiety • Live in comfort or happiness • Freedom from fear or danger • Non-separation from what one cherishes

4. Benefits of not telling lies

Clear faculties • Pleasant and sweet speech • Good set of teeth • Not too fat • Not too skinny • Not too tall • Not too short • Contact with pleasurable sensations • Mouth with lotus fragrance • Obedient retinue • Trustworthy words • Pink slender tongue • Not restless • Steadiness

5. Benefits of not taking intoxicants

Quick understanding of one's tasks and duties of the past, present and future • Always mindful • Sane • Clever • Not lazy • Not stupid/dull • Not dumb • Not intoxicated (with conceit, desire, joy, etc.) • Not careless • Not deluded • Not fearful • Not impetuous • Not anxious (or not the object of distrust) • Speaker of truth • Does not engage in divisive speech, abusive language and frivolous talk • Not idle by day and night • Grateful • Expressive of one's gratitude to others • Not stingy • Generous • Virtuous in observing precepts • Straightforward (honest) • Absence of angry temperament • Possession of conscience • Fearful of consequences of doing unwholesome deeds • Possession of upright view • Great knowledge • Intelligence • Wisdom • Discretion

Appendix B: How to get rid of insects without killing them

(Compiled from various sources in the Internet)

Ants don't like sour things

- ◆ To keep them away, squeeze fresh lemon juice on where they'll be passing, and also wipe the lemon slices on that surface.

Cockroaches don't like fragrance and cucumber

- ◆ Put fragrant things like *pandan*¹⁶ leaves, cakes of soap, etc. in a cupboard to keep out cockroaches. After several days, they will be all gone and your cupboard will even smell good.
- ◆ Put pieces of cucumber in places you want to be cockroach-free.

16 *Pandanus amaryllifolius*, a tropical plant in the screwpine genus which is known commonly as pandan and used widely in Southeast Asian cooking.

Mosquitoes don't like lemon grass, spice, orange light, etc.

- ◆ Plant lemon grass (citronella grass, *serai wangi*, geranium grass) near doors and windows in the garden or in pots to keep them away.
- ◆ Bury garlic under flowerbeds, clear dead leaves, and keep the area clean.
- ◆ Hang up a bunch of spring onions, and use gauze to wrap up the green sections of the onions.
- ◆ Put up orange coloured curtains, or orange plastic wrap around a bulb. Mosquitoes are afraid of orange light.
- ◆ Putting a pot of lilies, milans, roses, or evening primroses in your room will work too.
- ◆ Dissolve Vitamin C and B2 in water, wipe the water on your skin, and the scent will drive the mosquitoes away.

Appendix C: Forbidden persons

20 categories of females forbidden to males according to the Vinaya (Pr 303)

A. Female protected by

(1) mother, (2) father, (3) parents, (4) brother, (5) sister, (6) relative, (7) clan or clansmen, (8) co-religionists, (9) betrothal, (10) [law with threat of] penalty

B. Female

(1) bought by another man, (2) cohabiting willingly with another man, (3) cohabiting with another man for riches, (4) cohabiting with another man for clothing, (5) married to another man by ceremony, (6) married to another man by gesture, (7) who is another man's slave and wife, (8) who is another man's employee and wife, (9) prisoner of war cohabiting with another man, (10) who is a temporary partner (prostitute) of another man

3 categories of males forbidden to 12 categories of females according to the Commentary to the Vinaya (Pr 303)

- (1) For female no. 9 under group A, any male who is not her betrothed
- (2) For female No. 10 under group A, any male prohibited by law
- (3) For all ten females under group B, any male who is not their husband, cohabitant or client

Abbreviation	Pāli Text	Reference according to
AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya	Book no. : Sutta no.
DN	Dīgha Nikāya	Sutta no.
Iti	Itivuttaka	Sutta no.
MN	Majjhima Nikāya	Sutta no.
Pr	Pārājikakaṇḍapāli	Section no.

All references are based on Vipassana Research Institute's Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana CD-ROM (V.3.0).



Āyasmā Aggacitta Bhikkhu is a Malaysian who was ordained as a novice (*sāmaṇera*) in Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre, Penang, Malaysia, on Wesak Day, 1978. He received higher ordination (*upasampadā*) from his preceptor (*upajjhāya*) Bhaddanta Mahasi Sayadaw at Mahasi Meditation Centre, Rangoon, Burma (Myanmar), in 1979. After several periods of intensive meditation there, Āyasmā Aggacitta began to study the Burmese language and later learned basic Pāli grammar and Pāli-Burmese translation from Sayadaw U Paṇḍita.

Since then he has trained under various other teachers, notably Sayadaw U Tissara (Yankin Forest Monastery), Sayadaw U Āciṇṇa (Pa Auk Forest Monastery) and Sayadaw U Tejaniya (Shwe Oo Min Dhammasukha Forest Centre).

Besides practising meditation, he studied advanced Pāli grammar and translation in Thai and Burmese under Sayadaw U Dhammananda at Wat Tamaoh, Lampang, Thailand, from 1983 to 1984. He continued to study the Pāli Tipiṭaka in Myanmar and researched on its interpretation and practice until his return to Malaysia at the end of 1994.

In 2000 he founded Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary, a Theravāda monk training centre nestled among secluded valleys and brooks near Taiping, Perak, Malaysia.

Languages that he is knowledgeable in are English, Bahasa Malaysia, Hokkien, Myanmar, Thai and Pāli.

Publications

Among his major literary contributions are:

- ◆ *Awaken to Truth in Harmony: A Trilogy* (authored, 2010)
- ◆ *Dhamma Therapy Revisited* (retranslated, 2009)
- ◆ *Be Present, Be Prudent* (authored, 2009)
- ◆ *Be Present* (authored, 2007)
- ◆ *Honouring the Departed* (authored, 2004)
- ◆ *Coping with a Handful of Leaves* (authored, 2004)
- ◆ *Discourse on Āṭānāṭiya Protection* (translated, 2003)
- ◆ *Role of the Saṅgha in the New Millennium: The Monastic Perspective* (authored, 2002)
- ◆ *Kathina Then and Now* (authored, 2001)
- ◆ *Dying to Live: The Role of Kamma in Dying and Rebirth* (authored, 1999)
- ◆ *Cessation Experiences and the Notion of Enlightenment* (authored, 1995)
- ◆ *Raindrops in Hot Summer* (edited, 1995)
- ◆ *In This Very Life* (translated, 1993)
- ◆ *Dhamma Therapy* (translated, 1984)
- ◆ *The Importance of Keeping the Five Precepts* (authored, 1978)

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Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jināti.

The gift of the Dhamma surpasses all gifts.

– BUDDHA –

We offer a share of the merits accrued in the writing, editing
and sponsorship of this gift of the Dhamma to all our
deceased relatives from time immemorial

and to all other beings.

May they appreciate and rejoice in this dana
and be happy, well and peaceful.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

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