

The development and use of the Eight Precepts for lay practitioners, Upāsakas and Upāsikās in Theravāda Buddhism in the West

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The Five Precepts (*Pañca Sīla*)

In Theravāda Buddhism, the Five Precepts (*Pañca Sīla*) are the minimum requirements for the lay practitioner. These precepts cover wholesome physical and vocal actions, which constitute the core of Buddhist morality. The Buddha has taught that morality (*Sīla*) is the foundation on which his teaching stands. Before any religious activity everyone present chants the ancient Pāli formula by which the practitioner voluntarily undertakes the rule of training: (1) to refrain from killing living beings; (2) to refrain from taking what is not given; (3) to refrain from sexual misconduct; (4) to refrain from false speech; and (5) to refrain from drugs and drinks that tend to cloud the mind.

*Upāsakas and Upāsikās*¹

What is meant by *Upāsaka/Upāsikā*? Venerable Ñyānatiloka Mahā Thera (1980) in his *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms* quotes from the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (The Book of the Fives, *Sutta* 177 Trades; and The Book of the Eights, *Sutta* 25 Mahānāma the Sākyan), where the word *Upāsaka* is defined (p. 23) as:

literally ‘sitting close by’, i.e. a ‘lay adherent’ is any lay follower who is filled with faith and has taken refuge in the Buddha, his doctrine and his community of noble disciples. His virtue is regarded as pure if he observes the Five Precepts (*Pañca Sīla*). He should avoid the following wrong ways of livelihood: trading in arms, in living beings, meat, alcohol and poison.

The five trades mentioned come under *Micchā Ājīva* (Wrong Livelihood). This definition indicates that Right Livelihood (*Sammā Ājīva*) has to be taken into account when using the term *Upāsaka/Upāsikā*. Morality (*Sīla*), as understood in the Five Precepts, does not include Right Livelihood. This point must be kept in mind when reflecting on the form of the Eight Precepts now evolving in the West.

Eight Precepts

Two different versions of the Eight Precepts have traditionally been used in Theravāda Buddhism: (1) *Aṭṭhaṅgika Uposatha Sīla* (Eight *Uposatha* Precepts) and (2) *Ājivaṭṭhamaka Sīla* (Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth).

Aṭṭhaṅgika Uposatha Sīla (Eight Uposatha Precepts)

The first version is the *Aṭṭhaṅgika Uposatha Sīla* (the Eight *Uposatha* Precepts), observed on *Uposatha* Days (Full Moon, New Moon and Half Moon days). On these days lay people often attend Vihāras and wear white clothes to observe these Precepts. The Eight *Uposatha* Precepts are:

1. *Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
2. *Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
3. *Abrahmacariyā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
4. *Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
5. *Surā-meraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
6. *Vikāla bhojanā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
7. *Nacca-gītā-vādita-visūka-dassana-mālā-gandha vilepana-dhārana maṇḍana vibhūsanatṭhānā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
8. *Ucchāsayana-mahāsayanā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*

- [1. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from killing living beings
2. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from taking what is not given
3. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from non-celibate conduct
4. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from false speech
5. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from drugs and drinks which tend to cloud the mind
6. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from taking food at an unreasonable time
7. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from dancing, singing, music, and unseemly shows; from the use of garlands, perfumes, and unguents; and from things that tend to beautify and adorn [the person]
8. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from using high and luxurious seats and beds]

Venerable Hammalawa Saddhātissa Mahā Thera (1997) writes in his book, *Buddhist Ethics* (Chapter 4, The Underlying Ideals of the Moralities, p. 80):

Regarding the length of time during which the eight Precepts should be observed ... the keeping may be periodical and therefore constitute ‘periodical virtue’ (*kālapariyanta sīla*) ... Lifelong *Sīla* (*apāṇakoṭṭika sīla*) is that practised in the same way but undertaken for as long as life lasts. *Aṭṭha sīla* [*Aṭṭhaṅgika Uposatha Sīla*] is therefore of two kinds, periodical and life-long.

The *Uposatha* Precepts continue to be regularly used at Vihāras in the West on *Uposatha* days. However, it is not easy for most lay people living a household life to observe the *Uposatha* Precepts on a permanent basis. Consequently, it is the second set of Eight Precepts, the *Ājivaṭṭhamaka Sīla* (Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth), that have been found to be ideally suited for committed lay people in the West.

Ājivaṭṭhamaka Sīla (Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth)

1. *Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
2. *Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
3. *Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
4. *Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
5. *Pisuṇā vācā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
6. *Pharusā vācā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
7. *Samphappalāpā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
8. *Micchājivā veramaṇī sikkāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*

- [1. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from killing living beings
2. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from taking what is not given
3. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from sexual misconduct
4. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from false speech
5. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from backbiting
6. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from using harsh or abusive speech
7. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from useless or meaningless conversation
8. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from wrong means of livelihood]

There has been some debate about the origin of these Precepts. Interest has been expressed as to where the *Ājivaṭṭhamaka Sīla* appears in the Theravāda Pāli Buddhist Canon, and how these training rules correspond to fundamental Theravāda Buddhist teachings. This publication endeavours to throw some light on how the *Ājivaṭṭhamaka Sīla* corresponds to the Pāli Canon teachings.

The Noble Eightfold Path and the Ten wholesome Courses of Action

The *Ājivaṭṭhamaka Sīla* Precepts are compatible with: (1) the Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya Aṭṭhaṅgika Magga*), which lies at the heart of Theravāda Buddhism; and (2) the Ten Wholesome Courses of Action (*Dasa Kusala Kamma-patha*). The latter excludes Right Livelihood. [The Ten Unwholesome Courses of Action (*Dasa Akusala Kamma-patha*) are also given later.]

The Noble Eightfold Path (Ariya Aṭṭhaṅgika Magga)

| | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| WISDOM GROUP | PAÑÑĀ |
| 1. Right View | <i>Sammā ditṭhi</i> |
| 2. Right Thought/Intention | <i>Sammā saṃkappa</i> |
| MORALITY GROUP | SĪLA |
| 3. Right Speech | <i>Sammā vācā</i> |
| 4. Right Action | <i>Sammā kammanta</i> |
| 5. Right Livelihood | <i>Sammā ājīva</i> |
| MEDITATION GROUP | SAMĀDHI |
| 6. Right Effort | <i>Sammā vāyāma</i> |
| 7. Right Mindfulness | <i>Sammā sati</i> |
| 8. Right Concentration | <i>Sammā samādhi</i> |

Venerable Ñyānatiloka Mahā Thera states in the *Sīla* section of the *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms*: ‘Morality of the eightfold path, namely Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, is called “Genuine or Natural Morality” (*pakaṭi-sīla*), as distinguished from the external rules for monks or laymen, the so-called “Prescribed Morality” (*paññatti-sīla*) ...’

The Morality Group of the Noble Eightfold Path encompasses the *Ājīvavṛttamaka Sīla* Precepts: Right Speech covers the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh precepts; Right Action covers the first, second and third precepts; Right Livelihood is the eighth precept.

Venerable Ledi Sayadaw (1971) in *The Requisites of Enlightenment; Bodhipakkhiya Dīpani, Wheel Publication 171-4* (p. 10) states: ‘The three constituents of the Morality Group of the Eightfold Path when considered in detail become *Ājīvavṛttamaka Sīla*’.

The Ten Unwholesome Courses of Action (Dasa Akusala Kamma-patha)

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| THE COURSES OF ACTION/KAMMA | KAMMA-PATHA |
| BODILY ACTIONS | |
| 1. Killing | <i>Pāṇātipātā</i> |
| 2. Stealing | <i>Adinnādānā</i> |
| 3. Sexual misconduct and abuse of the senses | <i>Kāmesu micchācārā</i> |
| VERBAL ACTIONS | |
| 4. Lying | <i>Musāvādā</i> |
| 5. Slandering | <i>Pisuṇā vācā</i> |
| 6. Harsh speech | <i>Pharusā vācā</i> |
| 7. Frivolous talk and gossip | <i>Samphappalāpā</i> |

MENTAL ACTIONS

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| 8. Covetousness | <i>Abhijjhā</i> |
| 9. Ill-will | <i>Vyāpāda</i> |
| 10. False View | <i>Micchā diṭṭhi</i> |

The Ten Wholesome Courses of Action (Dasa Kusala Kamma-patha)

BODILY ACTIONS

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Avoidance of killing | <i>Pāṇātipatā veramaṇī</i> |
| 2. Avoidance of stealing | <i>Adinnādānā veramaṇī</i> |
| 3. Avoidance of sexual misconduct and abuse of the senses | <i>Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī</i> |

VERBAL ACTIONS

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 4. Avoidance of lying | <i>Musāvādā veramaṇī</i> |
| 5. Avoidance of slandering | <i>Pisuṇā vācā veramaṇī</i> |
| 6. Avoidance of harsh speech | <i>Pharusā vācā veramaṇī</i> |
| 7. Avoidance of frivolous talk and gossip | <i>Samphappalāpā veramaṇī</i> |

MENTAL ACTIONS

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 8. Unselfishness/non-covetousness | <i>Anabhijjhā</i> |
| 9. Good-will/non-illwill | <i>Avyāpāda</i> |
| 10. Right Views/Right Understanding | <i>Sammā diṭṭhi</i> |

Ājivaṭṭhamaka Sīla in the Sutta Pitaka, Abhidhamma Pitaka and the commentaries

References to the *Ājivaṭṭhamaka Sīla* occur in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, and the commentaries.

Sutta Piṭaka

It can be seen that the definition of ‘*Upāsaka*’ as given by the Buddha in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, as quoted by Venerable Ñyānatiloka Mahā Thera earlier, can legitimately be applied to anyone undertaking a lifetime commitment to the *Ājivaṭṭhamaka Sīla*. Furthermore, such a practitioner will be following morality for lay people in its entirety as taught by the Buddha.

The practical application of the Buddha’s teachings consists of the threefold training of Morality, Concentration, and Wisdom (*Sīla, Samādhi, Paññā*). The threefold training includes the entire Noble Eightfold Path. This point is explained in the *Cūḷavedalla Sutta*, translated as The Shorter Series of Questions and Answers (*Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta 44*). The lay follower Visākha questions *bhikkhunī* Dhammadinnā.² One question was: Is the threefold training

included by the Noble Eightfold Path, or is the Noble Eightfold Path included by the threefold training? The *bhikkhunī* answers the question by telling Visākha that the threefold training is not included by the Noble Eightfold Path, but the Noble Eightfold Path is included by the threefold training. She elucidates her answer thus:

Right speech, right action, and right livelihood—these states are included in the aggregate of virtue. Right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration—these states are included in the aggregate of concentration. Right view and right intention—these states are included in the aggregate of wisdom. (*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* 1995, p. 398)

Visākha reports the entire conversation to the Buddha, who endorses the *bhikkhunī*'s answers by saying:

The *bhikkunī* Dhammadinnā is wise, Visākha, the *bhikkhunī* Dhammadinnā has great wisdom. If you had asked me the meaning of this, I would have explained it to you in the same way that the *bhikkhunī* Dhammadinnā has explained it. Such is its meaning, and so you should remember it. (*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* 1995, pp. 403–4).

In the *Samañamañḍikā Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta 78*), the Buddha describes morality in the same form as in the *Ājivaṭṭhamaka Sīla*:

What now is karmically wholesome morality (*kusala sīla*)? It is wholesome bodily action (*kāya kamma*), wholesome verbal action (*vacī kamma*), and also the purity with regard to livelihood which I shall call morality. (Translation by Venerable Ñyānatiloka Mahā Thera 1980, p. 210)

The translation of the same passage by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi is:

What are unwholesome habits? They are unwholesome bodily actions, unwholesome verbal actions, and evil livelihood. They are called unwholesome habits ... What are wholesome habits? They are wholesome bodily actions, wholesome verbal actions, and purification of livelihood. These are called wholesome habits. (*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* 1995, pp. 650–1)

The wholesome physical and vocal actions in the *Ājivaṭṭhamaka Sīla* represent Morality as taught in the threefold training referred to earlier, and in factors three, four and five of the Noble Eightfold Path: Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. The *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta*, translated as The Great Forty (*Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta 117*), gives an in-depth treatment of the Noble Eightfold Path at a higher level.

The three doorways of action. Buddhism expands *kamma* (action) into three types: bodily action (*kāya kamma*), vocal action (*vacī kamma*), and mental

action (*mano kamma*). These are called the three doorways of action. In the *suttanta* teachings, the three doorways of action appear under the Ten Courses of Wholesome Action (*Dasa Kusala Kamma-patha*). The first seven Precepts of the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* correspond to the first seven aspects of the *Dasa Kusala Kamma-patha*: the bodily action group corresponds to the first three precepts; the verbal action group corresponds to the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh precepts.

The Discourse on Right View (*Sammā Ditṭhi Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, *Sutta* 9), gives a comprehensive exposition of Right View (*Sammā Ditṭhi*), the first factor of the Noble Eightfold Path. This *Sutta* also gives a description of the Ten Courses of Wholesome Action as well as its counterpart, the Ten Courses of Unwholesome Action (*Dasa Akusala Kamma-patha*). This erudite discourse was given to the *bhikkhus* not by the Buddha, but by his chief disciple, Venerable Sāriputta, whose great wisdom has been extolled by the Buddha on many an occasion.

Majjhima Nikāya, *Sutta* 114 (the *Sevitabbāsevitabba Sutta*, translated as To Be Cultivated and Not To Be Cultivated) explains the Courses of Action (*Kamma-patha*) in some depth.

The extracts quoted illustrate the factors of the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* appearing in some of the discourses in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, and bears out the validity of the ‘Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth’ now gaining popularity as a lifetime commitment among Western Theravāda Buddhists. (Further information is given later.)

Abhidhamma Piṭaka

The *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* is described by the Pali Text Society (2002), in its *List of Issues*, as ‘the first volume of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* [which] is a compilation from various sources analysing and classifying the phenomena (*dhamma*) that comprise all mental and material conditions’. *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* has been translated by C.A.F. Rhys Davids for the Pali Text Society as *Buddhist Psychological Ethics*. Buddhaghosa’s commentary on this is the *Aṭṭhasālinī* translated by the Pali Text Society (1999) as *The Expositor*.

The Expositor, Book II Material Qualities (*Rūpa*), Part II Discourse on the Chapter of the Summary, Chapter II Couplets and Other Groups (p. 505) explains:

‘that which is absence of excess in deed’ is the threefold bodily good conduct; ‘that which is absence of excess in word’ is the fourfold good conduct in speech. By the expression ‘in deed and word,’ virtue, produced (in these seven ways) at the body-door and the speech-door and, with livelihood as the eighth, is comprised.

In *Abhidhamma Studies: Researches in Buddhist Psychology*, Chapter 3 The Scheme of Classification in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* (pp. 31–3), Ñānaponika Thera explains and expands the description given in *The Expositor*. In explaining wholesome consciousness as described in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, he

comments that supplementary factors are given in the *Aṭṭhasālinī* (*The Expositor*).

Three of these correspond to the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla*:

63. Abstinence from wrong Bodily Action (*kāya duccarita-virati*)
64. Abstinence from wrong Speech (*vacī duccarita-virati*)
65. Abstinence from wrong Livelihood (*ājīva duccarita-virati*)

The Expositor, Book I, Risings of Consciousness, Part III Discourse on Doors (or Gates), Chapter IV Discourse on *Kamma* (Voluntary Action) (p. 119) states:

... the transcendental Path may be included in, and classified under three forms of *kamma* (bodily, vocal, mental). To expand: restraint of the wickedness of transgression by body should be understood as bodily; restraint of the wickedness of transgression in speech, as vocal. Thus Right Action is bodily *kamma* and Right Speech is vocal *kamma*. When this pair is taken, Right Living, because it consists of each, is included. Restraint of the wickedness of transgression of thought is mental.

The commentaries

The *Nettipakaraṇa* is described by the Pali Text Society (2002), in its *List of Issues*, as a ‘Treatise setting out methods for interpreting and explaining canonical texts, similar in content to the *Peṭakopadesa* and used by Buddhaghosa and other commentators. (Possibly first century B.C.E.)’. The translation by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli for the Pali Text Society is *The Guide*. Part III Counter-Demonstrative Subsection, Chapter i 16 Modes of Conveying: Separate Treatment (*The Guide* 1977, p. 68), describes the seven courses of action as follows:

240. Herein, killing breathing things, malicious speech and harsh speech are moulded by hate; taking what is not given, misconduct in sensual-desires, and false speech are moulded by greed; and gossip is moulded by delusion. These seven kinds of acting are acting as choice. The analysis of action here is more easily grasped if the following distinctions are kept in mind. A ‘course of action’ (*kamma-patha*) is a completed ‘historical act’ regarded as continuing from the first planning of it down to the carrying of it out, which ‘course’ involves body and/or speech. The ‘choice’ (*cetanā*) here is the momentary mental willing (or ‘affirmation’) at each and every stage of the ‘course’.

The *Visuddhimagga* is a treatise on the whole of the Pāli Canon written by Bhadantācāriya Buddhaghosa in Sri Lanka in the fifth century. The Pali Text Society (2002), in its *List of Issues*, describes it in the following terms:

...one of the most influential Pali texts, this compendium of Buddhist doctrine and metaphysics is the most important book written by Bud-

dhaghosa. It provides a systematic exposition of Buddhist teaching and is also a detailed manual for meditation.

Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli's translation of the *Visuddhimagga* is published by the Buddhist Publication Society (1979) as *The Path of Purification*. Pe Maung Tin's translation is published by the Pali Text Society as *The Path of Purity* (1975). In the *Visuddhimagga* Bhadantācāriya Buddhaghosa clarifies the *Ājīvattḥamaka Sīla* by drawing a distinction between 'good behaviour', consisting only of the three kinds of wholesome bodily and four kinds of verbal action, and good behaviour, 'which has right livelihood as the eighth'.

The Pali Text Society translation of *Visuddhimagga* (1975, p. 14) uses the following wording:

'The fundamental precept' is the foundation of the exalted practice of the Path; and is a synonym for the set of eight Precepts of which pure livelihood is the eighth. This set of eight is the foundation of the Path, because it ought to be in purified practice previous to the Path. Hence [the Buddha] has said 'Previously his bodily action, his vocal action, his livelihood have been well purified.'

The Buddhist Publication Society translation of *Visuddhimagga* (1979, pp. 11–2) uses the following wording:

Good behaviour itself is *that of good behaviour*; or what is announced for the sake of good behaviour is *that of good behaviour*. This is a term for virtue other than that which has livelihood as the eighth. [The three kinds of profitable, bodily *kamma* or action (not killing or stealing or indulging in sexual misconduct), the four kinds of profitable verbal *kamma* or action (refraining from lying, malicious speech, harsh speech, and gossip), and Right Livelihood as the eighth).] It is the initial stage of the life of purity consisting in the path, thus it is *that of the beginning of the life of purity*. This is a term for the virtue that has livelihood as the eighth. It is the initial stage of the path because it has actually to be purified in the prior stage too. Hence it is said 'But his bodily action, his verbal action, and his livelihood, have already been purified earlier'.

Bhikkhu Bodhi, in his footnote 1341 to the *Mahāsaḷāyatanika Sutta*, translated as The Great Sixfold Base (*Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta 149*), clarifies this by stating:

The eight factors of the path mentioned here seem to pertain to the preliminary or mundane portion of the path. MṬ [*Majjhima Nikāya Ṭika*] identifies them with the factors possessed by a person at the highest level of insight development, immediately prior to the emergence of the supramundane path. In this stage only the former five path factors are actively operative, the three factors of the morality group having been purified prior to the undertaking of insight meditation. But when the supramundane path arises, all eight factors occur simultaneously, the three factors of the morality group exercising the function of eradicating the

defilements responsible for moral transgression in speech, action, and livelihood. (*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* 1995, p. 1356)

Introduction of *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* to the West

Venerable Balangoda Ānanda Maitreya Mahānāyaka Thera Agga Mahā Paṇḍita (1896–1998) is regarded as being chiefly responsible for the introduction of the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* to the West. He came to prominence after he featured in the BBC series *The Long Search*, and thereafter travelled widely in Europe and the United States. His commitment to the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* can be seen in his book *Nine Special Qualities of a Buddha & Other Essays*, where he states:

The perfect moral conduct or character can be categorised under the eight Precepts called *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla*. These are refraining from eight unwholesome ways, namely, killing; taking what is not given; a life devoted to sensuality; falsehood, slandering backbiting, harsh speech, gossip; and wrong livelihood. All the good conduct and keeping Precepts or *Pāṭimokkha* rules of Buddhist monks are included in these eight Precepts. (Balangoda Ānanda Maitreya 1995, p. 16)

The Development of *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* in England

The Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravāda), a lay Buddhist Group set up in the English Lake District in 1992, has taken a lead in introducing Naming Ceremonies for *Upāsakas/Upāsikās*; and the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* as a lifetime commitment, for Westerners. On 27 September 1997, two Western lay men became *Upāsakas* by taking the Five Precepts at a Naming Ceremony held at Fellside Centre, Kendal, receiving the *Upāsaka* names of Sumedha and Mahinda.³ Subsequently, following discussions between the Buddhist Group of Kendal and Ketumati Buddhist Vihāra, (a Vihāra set up in Oldham by Sri Lankan *bhikkhus*), the following policy decision was agreed upon regarding the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla*: ‘*Upāsakas* and *Upāsikās* of three years standing are eligible to request the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* as a lifetime commitment from a senior monk as Preceptor’. On this basis, *Upāsaka* Sumedha and *Upāsaka* Mahinda undertook these ‘Precepts for Life’ at a ceremony conducted on 1 October 2000.⁴ The *Upāsakas* were presented with a ‘Certificate of Observing *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* for Life’ in the presence of a large gathering at the Kaṭhina Ceremony held at Ketumati Buddhist Vihāra on 22 October 2000.⁵ This event was reported in the Sri Lankan press, along with photographs of the ceremony.⁶ *Upāsaka* Puñña also undertook these Precepts for Life at a ceremony conducted on 29 September 2002.⁷ He received his ‘Certificate of Observing *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* for Life’ at the Kaṭhina Ceremony held at Ketumati Buddhist Vihāra on 27 October 2002.⁸

Upāsaka Sumedha was presented with a ‘Certificate of Competence to teach Theravāda Buddhism’ at the Kaṭhina Ceremony, Ketumati Buddhist Vihāra, on

4 November 2001. The certificate includes a reference to him undertaking the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* for life.⁹ *Upāsaka* Mahinda was presented with a similar certificate at the Kaṭhina Ceremony on 27 October 2002.¹⁰ Those receiving Certificates of Competence to Teach must have studied and practised the *Dhamma* for a minimum of five years under an authorised teacher.

Another policy decision was agreed with Ketumati Buddhist Vihāra whereby a ‘Certificate of Becoming an *Upāsaka/Upāsikā*’ will be given to future *Upāsakas/Upāsikās*. The first such ceremony was conducted by Venerable Pidiville Piyatissa as Preceptor on 14 October 2001 at a Naming Ceremony for *Upāsaka* Dhammika, and a certificate was subsequently presented at the 2001 Kaṭhina Ceremony.¹¹ The agreed wording on the certificate was: ‘Certificate of Becoming an *Upāsaka/Upāsikā*: This is to certify that ... having taken refuge in the Triple Gem and having undertaken to observe the Five Precepts was given the Buddhist name *Upāsaka/Upāsikā* ... on ... at...’

At all of the Precept Taking Ceremonies at the Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravāda), the formulation of requesting the Precepts as given in *A Buddhist’s Manual* by Venerable Hammalawa Sadhātissa and Venerable Pesala was used. The agreed formula for requesting the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* is:

Upāsaka/Upāsikā: Okāsa, okāsa, okāsa; ahaṃ bhante tisaraṇeṇa sahā ājīvaṭṭhamaka-sīlaṃ dhammaṃ yacāmi. Anukampam katvā, sīlaṃ detha me bhante.

Dutiyam pi ahaṃ bhante...

Tatīyam pi ahaṃ bhante...

The Preceptor then administers the eight *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* Precepts one by one, with the *Upāsaka/Upāsikā* repeating them after him.

Preceptor: Tisaraṇeṇa sahā ājīvaṭṭhamaka-sīlaṃ dhammaṃ sādhuṃ surakkhitaṃ katvā appamādena sampādetha

Upāsaka/Upāsikā: Āma Bhante

This formula is also mentioned in Venerable Rewata Dhamma Mahā Thera’s book *Mahā Paritta: The Discourses of the Great Protection* (1996, pp. 10–2).

The development of the Eight Precepts in the United States

Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra, Los Angeles

The Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra in Los Angeles, under the direction of the late Venerable Havanpola Ratnasāra Mahā Thera and Venerable Walpola Piyānanda Mahā Thera, has also developed the taking of Precepts by lay practitioners in the United States. A description of this is given in an interesting book by Paul David Numrich, (1996), *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravāda Buddhist Temples*. Numrich was present at the 1991 Vesak ceremony and describes how three *Upāsakas* took Five Precepts, two *Dhammacāris* took Nine Precepts and the first two *Bod-*

hicāris took Twelve Precepts. The nine *Dhammacāri* Precepts are an amalgamation of the Five Precepts and the *Ājīvattḥamaka Sīla*. Numrich explains that:

The twelve *Bodhicāri* Precepts include the nine *Dhammacāri* Precepts, plus two borrowed Pali phrases and one Precept composed by Venerable Piyānanda himself. The borrowed Pali, with translation and sources according to Venerable Piyānanda, are (1) *Sabba sattesu metta sahāgatena cetasa vihārana sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi* ‘I undertake the Precept to live every moment with loving-kindness to all living beings’ (from *Nava Uposatha Sīla* [the Nine *Uposatha Sīlas*, with loving kindness as the ninth]); and (2) *Karunopaya kosalla pariggahitanam dasapāraminam pāripūrana sikkhāpadam samādiyami*, ‘I undertake the Precept to practise the Ten Perfections with compassion and skill’ (from Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the *Jātaka*). Venerable Piyānanda’s original Precept was: *Yāvajīvam aham ratanattayam na niggahissāmi tatheva tam samādarena garukaram karissamiti sikkhāpadam samādiyami*, ‘I undertake the Precept not to revile the Three Treasures [the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha] but to cherish and uphold them’. (1996, p. 130)

Numrich (1996, p. 114) reports that Venerable Ānanda Maitreya gave an American laywoman the Five Precepts at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra in 1986. She later received the Buddhist name Vajirā at a ceremony held in 1991 at the same Vihāra. The *Newsletter on International Buddhist Womens Affairs* (Number 34) reported that Venerable Ānanda Maitreya was in Sri Lanka in 1991, when Vajirā was one of the first two people to take the *Bodhicāri* Precepts, and conveyed his approval from there. (As far as I am aware, the only time the *Bodhicāri* Precepts have been administered in England was by Venerable Balangoda Ānanda Maitreya in 1994, as reported in *The Middle Way* of November 1994. This *Bodhicāri* had earlier become an *Upāsikā* on 30 July 1975, at a naming ceremony by being given the Five Precepts and the Buddhist name Jayasīlī, by the late Venerable Nārada Mahā Thera at Vajirārāma Vihāra in Colombo, Sri Lanka. With Venerable Ānanda Maitreya’s death in 1998, interest in taking the *Bodhicāri* Precepts seems to have ceased in England.)

Bhāvanā Society, West Virginia

At the Bhāvanā Society in High View, West Virginia, a well-known Sri Lankan bhikkhu, Bhante Henepola Gunaratana Mahā Thera, has introduced ‘The Eight Lifetime Precepts’. The first seven precepts are identical to the first seven precepts of the *Ājīvattḥamaka Sīla*, but the eighth precept is the same as the fifth precept of the Five Precepts (*Pañca Sīla*) and the *Aṭṭhaṅgika Uposatha Sīla*. The translation of Bhante Gunaratana’s Eight Lifetime Precepts is very clear and helpful:

Eight Lifetime Precepts

I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking life

I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking what is not given

I undertake the training rule to abstain from sexual misconduct

I undertake the training rule to abstain from malicious speech

I undertake the training rule to abstain from harsh speech

I undertake the training rule to abstain from useless speech

I undertake the training rule to abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana's (2001) book *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Path of the Buddha*, Step 4: Skillful Action, Section Higher Precepts for Lay People, discusses both the *Aṭṭhaṅgika Uposatha Sīla* (which he calls the 'Eight Traditional Training Precepts') and the development of the Eight Lifetime Precepts. He states:

Lay people can ... make a commitment to a set of training rules called the Eight Lifetime Precepts. This set of principles is made up of the five basic Precepts plus three additional rules regarding Skillful Speech: not engaging in malicious speech, not speaking harshly, and not speaking frivolously. In 1998, for the ten-year anniversary of the opening of the Bhāvanā Society, members were invited to participate in a ceremony to take these Eight Lifetime Precepts. The suggestion came from one of our board members who wished to take these Precepts herself. Candidates were asked to attend a two-day retreat just prior to the ceremony to focus on the meaning of the vows. The response to this invitation was heartening. Thirty-six people attended the retreat, took lifetime refuge in the Buddha, and received the Eight Lifetime Precepts. We have offered this opportunity each year since then ... The vow ceremony itself was very simple. The candidates recited the verses together as a group. They each received a new name in the ancient language of Pali. (2001, pp. 125–6)

The Eight Lifetime Precepts have proved to be helpful and popular in the United States. However, unlike the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla*, The Eight Lifetime Precepts do not totally encompass all the aspects of morality (*Sīla*) as defined by the Buddha in the threefold training, in that they do not include Right Livelihood (*Sammā Ājīva*).

Anguttara Nikāya, translated by the Pali Text Society as *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Book of the Eights, *Sutta* 40 (translated as Very Trifling), discusses the consequences of breaking the Eight Lifetime Precepts.

Eight Precepts and the teaching of the *Dhamma* in the West

The development of *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* in the West has influenced the teaching of the *Dhamma* in the West by lay practitioners. Numrich (1996, p. 128) explains that *Dhammacāri* Precepts are taken by 'the temple's *Dhamma* teachers'. *Upāsaka* Sumedha and *Upāsaka* Mahinda, who both received a

Certificate of Competence to Teach from Venerable Pidiville Piyatissa at the Buddhist Group of Kendal, have both undertaken the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* for life. Venerable Ānanda Maitreya and Venerable Hammalawa Saddhātissa Mahā Thera, the Buddhist Primate for the United Kingdom, gave *Upāsikā Jayasīlī* a Certificate to Teach Buddhism and Meditation on 20 November 1985, at the London Buddhist Vihāra. The development of teaching the *Dhamma* by lay practitioners in the West has also been developed with *Upāsakas* and *Upāsikās* who have taken the *Pañca Sīla* (Five Precepts) at the monasteries following the Forest Sangha tradition through their Amarāvati *Upāsikā* Association. *Forest Sangha Newsletter* (Number 57, July 2001) explains that Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery in California has developed and expanded the *Upāsikā* programme into a further training programme, called Community of Abhayagiri Lay Ministers, for invited people. Bhante Henepola Gunaratana has started Introduction to Teacher Training and Advanced Teacher Training Retreats at The Bhāvanā Society. The Forest Way Insight Meditation Centre in Virginia has introduced Teacher Training and Teachers Retreats. The Spirit Rock Meditation Center in California has started a Community Dharma Leader program. The American Buddhist Congress is attempting both to establish criteria for accrediting *Dhamma* Teachers and to establish a training programme.

Impact of the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* on its practitioners

The members of the Buddhist Group of Kendal who have taken these *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* are all still under fifty. It has been observed that whenever there is occasion for any of them to make changes in employment, they take soundings from each other to ensure that any firm decision is in consonance with the eighth precept. They are also mindful of the fourfold *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka* vocal actions at all times. This enhanced *Sīla* seems to have made them more enthusiastic about going further into the study and practice of the *Dhamma*. Indeed, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, two of them have received a ‘Certificate of Competence to Teach’ from Venerable Pidiville Piyatissa, the Head of Ketumati Buddhist Vihāra, Oldham. *Upāsaka* Dhammika has made arrangements with Venerable Pidiville Piyatissa to take the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* at the Buddhist Group of Kendal, three years after becoming an *Upāsaka*, and to receive a certificate at the Kaṭhina Ceremony at Ketumati Buddhist Vihāra in 2004.

Conclusion

Although these are still early days, from experience gleaned within the Buddhist Group of Kendal (as mentioned earlier), it can be assumed that the enhanced lifetime commitment of *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla* should have a significant impact on its practitioners in the West; and perhaps encourage keen students to move into deeper *Dhamma* commitments.

To the best of my knowledge, the presented discussion gives some idea of the promising developments and various adaptations of the Eight precepts in the

West. These are (as explained) in keeping with Theravāda teachings. I would be very grateful if anyone who has any further relevant information could be kind enough to write to me. The exhaustively researched information given in this article should, I hope, be of some use to any group that wishes to consider the introduction of the *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla*.

Other Buddhist traditions

Other Buddhist traditions are also developing various arrangements for their lay followers. For example: Thich Nhat Hanh has developed the ‘Fourteen Precepts of the Order of Interbeing’ (later renamed ‘The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing’). *Dharma* teachers of the ‘Order of Interbeing’ are called *Dharmāchāriyas*. Lama Anagārika Govinda founded the ‘Order Ārya Maitreya Maṇḍala Vajrayāna Sangha’.

Notes

- 1 The Buddha’s ‘fourfold assembly’ consisted of the *saṅgha*—that is, the community of monks and nuns (*bhikkhus* and *bhikkunīs*) and male and female lay followers (*upāsakas* and *upāsikās*). The Theravāda *bhikkhu saṅgha* follows the 227 rules of the *Vinaya* (with a few more additional rules for the *bhikkhunīs*). *Upāsakas* and *upāsikās* follow the Five Precepts (*Pañca Sīla*).
- 2 In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* the Buddha had singled out *bhikkunī* Dhammānīnā as being the foremost (*etad-aggā*) among the *bhikkunīs* in her skill at expounding the *Dhamma* (*Gradual Sayings*, ‘The Book of the Ones, Chapter XIV (e) Women Disciples,’ p. 21).
- 3 Officiated by Venerable Witharandeniye Kāssapa Mahā Thera (Head of the Sri Lankan Birmingham Buddhist Vihāra).
- 4 Officiated by Venerable Pidiville Piyatissa Mahā Thera, the head of Ketumati Buddhist Vihāra, as Preceptor.
- 5 Presentation made by Venerable Medagama Vajiragnāna, Head of London Buddhist Vihāra, Chief Sangha Nāyaka of Great Britain.
- 6 As a matter of interest, *Upāsaka* Mahinda, who had spent a holiday in Sri Lanka shortly afterwards, was recognised by a Sri Lankan girl at Peradeniya Botanical Gardens, Kandy, who had seen his photograph in the Sri Lankan press.
- 7 Preceptor: Venerable Pidiville Piyatissa Mahā Thera.
- 8 Presentation made by Venerable Kirindigalle Dhammaratana, Head of Stockholm Buddhist Vihāra and Chief Sangha Nāyaka Thera in Scandinavia.
- 9 Presentation made by Venerable Botale Gnānissara Thera of Sri Kethārama, Sri Lanka.
- 10 Presentation made by Venerable Kirindigalle Dhammaratana, Head of Stockholm Buddhist Vihāra and Chief Sangha Nāyaka Thera in Scandinavia.
- 11 Presentation made by Venerable Botale Gnānissara Thera of Sri Kethārama, Sri Lanka.

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