

***Upāsaka* Precepts: Recipe to Build a Compassionate Society**

by

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the independent study research paper entitled *Upāsaka* Precepts: Recipe to Build a Compassionate Society and the research work under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Tilak Kariyawasam and thereof represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

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## **Abstract**

The goal of this independent study research project is to illustrate that the *Upāsaka* (lay person) Precepts are the perfect recipe with which to build a compassionate society.

Through an examination of Early Buddhist writings, Buddhist cosmology, current events, and specific examples, this study will show how the application of these five fundamental precepts can solve or prevent the negative aspects found in most cultures around the world today. Readers of this study will come away with a clear understanding of how following a basic set of guidelines within a society can increase the level of compassion throughout that society and afford its citizens more freedom and happiness.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Table of Contents .....	iii
Introduction .....	1
Tipitaka .....	3
Buddhist Cosmology .....	4
<i>Upāsaka</i> Precepts .....	5
Challenges Faced by Modern Society and Governments .....	10
Application of <i>Upāsaka</i> Precepts .....	13
Conclusion .....	18
List of References .....	xxii
Primary Sources .....	xxii
Secondary Sources .....	xxiii

## **Introduction**

The noun 'recipe' is often thought of in the context of cooking or baking, where one works with a predefined list of ingredients and a given process to create a dish or baked good such as chocolate chip cookies. Recipe also has an alternate definition that indicates a way of achieving a particular outcome, such as the recipe for a winning team. It is this latter definition that represents the framework prescribed in this paper.

The word compassion, also a noun, has one basic accepted definition, and that is the sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others. This definition highlights the focus of this independent research paper.

Compassion is one of those easily defined practices or behaviors that is often very challenging to implement. Most any person on the street when asked about what compassion is, could probably correctly list any number of elements or examples of what they felt compassion was. However, when further asked how they themselves practice acts of compassion, the answers might not come so readily. In today's global society, success and happiness are often measured through an individual's own status, financial gains, and physical rewards or possessions. It seems the time has past when a community all looked out for one another ensuring communal happiness and wellbeing. What might be the solution to reversing this trend? How might citizens in society be inspired to interact with thoughtfulness and respect towards each other? The answers, it turns out, were written more than two thousand five hundred years ago by a prince turned monk known throughout the world as the Buddha.

One of the main tenets of Buddhism is compassion. Compassion for all living beings. The Buddha authored thousands of discourses on all manner of topics, but the main underlying thread is that we should act with compassion towards one another and beings of all types. During his lifetime, the Buddha was at the head of an ever growing group of monks and followers and was often presented with situations on which to comment or give advice. All of these lessons and commentaries were first committed to memory by his closest followers and later preserved in written form by the saṅgha, or monastic community. From these lessons, two initial volumes were created called the *Sutta Piṭaka* and *Vinaya Piṭaka*. The *Sutta Piṭaka* contains the discourses and advice given by the Buddha and recorded by his trusted advisors and disciples. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* contains all of the rules and regulations that both monks and nuns are to follow while living as an ordained individual. These rules are referred to as precepts and for lay followers, a subset of these precepts were identified as a precursor to leaving the householder lifestyle. These basic rules or guidelines are at the very foundation of living a Buddhist life, but as will be shown here, can easily be expanded to all cultures and religions to help build a more compassionate society.

As stated above, the *Vinaya Piṭaka* contains all of the precepts that apply to monks and nuns who are living the life of a monastic. The website Access To Insight summarizes the *Vinaya Piṭaka* as:

The collection of texts concerning the rules of conduct governing the daily affairs within the Sangha — the community of bhikkhus (ordained monks) and bhikkhunis (ordained nuns). Far more than merely a list of rules, the Vinaya Pitaka also includes the stories behind the origin of each rule, providing a detailed account of the Buddha's solution to the question of how to maintain communal harmony within a large and diverse spiritual community.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Tipitaka: The Pali Canon - Access to Insight." 2006. 12 Oct. 2013  
<<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/index.html>>

The goal of this independent study is to examine a few of these precepts or rules from the *Vinaya Piṭaka* and illustrate how they can be applied to nearly every facet of today's societal interactions, thus producing a more caring, compassionate, and peaceful society.

## **Tipiṭaka**

The complete collection of teachings and sets of rules of Buddhism are documented in the Pāli Canon or Tipiṭaka. Tipiṭaka is translated to "three baskets" describing the three different volumes of discourses given by the Buddha and recorded by his dedicated followers.

The first volume is the *Vinaya Piṭaka* and contains the various rules and guidelines for living the monastic life as a monk or nun. Here, the Buddha addressed different situations that arose within the sangha (monastic community) and were brought to his attention for counsel. The discourses within the *Vinaya Piṭaka* contain both the back story as well as the Buddha's guidance and ultimate decision on how monastics should conduct themselves in the future in similar situations. This volume of the Tipiṭaka was very much a living document during the Buddha's lifetime and additions were made over time as circumstances required.

The second volume is perhaps the more well known *Sutta Piṭaka* and contains within the foundational teachings of Buddhism. Akin to the *Bible* for Christians or the *Koran* for Islamic followers, the *Sutta Piṭaka* contains all of the insights, teachings, and observations of the Buddha and his closest disciples. According to some sources the total number of suttas number in excess of 10,000 and within the *Sutta Piṭaka* are arranged into five categories or collections depending on length.

The third and final volume is the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, which is the newest of the three Buddhist piṭakas. Here, the Buddha's trusted disciples rearranged some of the suttas into a structured framework with which they conducted an in-depth investigation into the mind and its reactions to matter. Very much a psycho-analytical manual of mental processes, the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* is a unique and important text for those seeking to gain insight into the mind and human condition.

Each of these volumes holds important and comprehensive information for any novice, intermediate, or advanced Buddhist practitioner. A wealth of knowledge is readily at hand, making the Tipiṭaka accessible to all.

### **Buddhist Cosmology**

The subject of Buddhist Cosmology and the supporting texts about this rather complex subject exist to help one understand the grand cycle of time and the existence of all beings within that cycle of time. While all parts of this subject are important to one's understanding of life from a Buddhist perspective, the topic that is most relevant to this paper are the events that trigger the decline of a civilization. Here, the term civilization is used to notate a full cycle of existence, from non-being, to rising, to sustaining, to decline.

Dr. Guang Xing of the International Buddhist College, quoting from the *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta*, highlights that the decline of a civilization is initiated when the first occurrence of killing takes place. The circumstance which lead to this first act of killing is detailed to be poverty, specifically related to food. When people no longer have enough to eat, they feel they are forced to steal, and thus in defense of their property and family, the owners take to killing. The historical solution was to add government (or kingship) oversight and empower the new ruler(s) to deliver punishments for the crimes being committed.

Rāhula Walpola shows that the Buddha addressed this very situation in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*:

It says this method can never be successful. Instead the Buddha suggests that, in order to eradicate crime, the economic condition of the people should be improved: grain and other facilities for agriculture should be provided for farmers and cultivators; capital should be provided for traders and those engaged in business; adequate wages should be paid to those who are employed. When people are thus provided for with opportunities for earning a sufficient income, they will be contented, will have no fear or anxiety, and consequently the country will be peaceful and free from crime.<sup>2</sup>

If we as a society want to reverse the decline of civilization, then a plan of action is needed. While such an undertaking on a global scale is unfathomable to all but the most enlightened and wise spiritual leaders, there are small steps we can take as individuals. Those steps were authored by the Buddha and are known as the *Upāsaka* Precepts and also as the Five Precepts.

### ***Upāsaka* Precepts**

The *Upāsaka* Precepts are a small (five or eight) subset of the larger set of precepts outlined in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*. The etymology of the term *upāsaka* (*upāsikā* when feminine) shows its roots as *upa* and *ās*.<sup>3</sup> *Upa* is a "prefix denoting nearness or close touch, usually with the idea of approach from below or rest on top, on, upon, up, by."<sup>4</sup> *Ās* is defined as "the shoulder."<sup>5</sup> The comparative term *upāsati* (same roots) means "literally "to sit close by", to go after, attend, follow, serve, honour, worship."<sup>6</sup> which brings us to the final

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<sup>2</sup> Rāhula Walpola, and Paul Demiéville. *What the Buddha Taught*. New York: Grove, 1974. 82.

<sup>3</sup> T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede. *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*. Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2004. 150.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p 138.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p 150.

meaning of *upāsaka* as "a devout or faithful layman, a lay devotee"<sup>7</sup> based on the notion of being near or resting near the shoulder of the Buddha.

From the time of the Buddha's life through to present day, dedicated followers of Buddhism devote themselves to a peaceful and compassionate life by vowing to uphold the five *Upāsaka* Precepts. The five *Upāsaka* Precepts are presented below in both the original Pāli language and English translations.

*Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhā-padaṃ samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the training rule to refrain from taking life.

*Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhā-padaṃ samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the training rule to refrain from stealing.

*Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī sikkhā-padaṃ samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the training rule to refrain from sexual misconduct.

*Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhā-padaṃ samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the training rule to refrain from telling lies [using false speech].

*Surā-meraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhā-padaṃ samādiyāmi.*

I undertake the training rule to refrain from intoxicating liquors and drugs that lead to carelessness [heedlessness].<sup>8 9</sup>

Committing to being a lay follower of the Buddha involves more than just the five training rules listed above. There is an overall commitment that drives the type of life one should strive to live as an *upāsaka*. The *Mahanama Sutta* and *Vanijja Sutta* both give us insight into what this life should include and avoid. The *Mahanama Sutta* describes how a lay follower should act with virtue and look out for his/her own welfare and look out for others'

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<sup>7</sup> T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede. *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*. Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2004. 150.

<sup>8</sup> "Taking the Five Precepts." 2012. 12 Oct. 2013 <<http://refuge.sirimangalo.org/>>

<sup>9</sup> "A Basic Buddhism Guide: Buddhist Ethics - BuddhaNet." 2002. 12 Oct. 2013 <<http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/budethics.htm>>

welfare. The *Vaniija Sutta* describes very plainly the types of industry a lay follower should avoid in order to uphold the *upāsaka* lifestyle: "Monks, a lay follower should not engage in five types of business. Which five? Business in weapons, business in human beings, business in meat, business in intoxicants, and business in poison."<sup>10</sup> To consecrate this commitment, one goes before a monastic in an official ceremony and takes refuge in the three gems, and officially declares the undertaking of the five *Upāsaka* Precepts. While this level of commitment is not for everyone, the five precepts can certainly be applied by any person of any faith. Essentially, anyone looking to conduct themselves and live their lives with more compassion.

The first of the five precepts (refrain from taking life) when taken at its meaning, is very straightforward. Don't take the life of any being. There is a Christian version of this same rule in the biblical Ten Commandments of you shall not kill.<sup>11</sup> However, at some point in history the Christian version came to be understood as only applying to other human beings. But what about animals and insects? In Buddhism, the rule applies to all living beings as it probably did originally in the Ten Commandments. Regardless, the first precept of not taking life is steadfast in its meaning, and for practicing Buddhists even promotes vegetarianism.

When given over to deep insight this precept is at the core of compassion. What gives anyone the right or authority to take the life of another living being? And think of what anguish the other living being must feel and experience in the last moments of life during the fateful act. There have been countless scientific studies regarding what emotions or feelings

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<sup>10</sup> "*Vaniija Sutta*: Business (Wrong Livelihood) - Access to Insight." 2006. 22 Dec. 2013  
<<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an05/an05.177.than.html>>

<sup>11</sup> "You shall not kill - Catechism of the Catholic Church - IntraText." 2005. 12 Oct. 2013  
<[http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P7Y.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P7Y.HTM)>

animals, insects, and even plants can experience and most conclude little to none, at least not with the same awareness of a human. But how does one know the scientists are measuring or can measure the correct signals? It is food for thought to be sure, but why not play it safe and assume all beings can at least sense the doom of having their life taken, and proceed with the practice of the first precept and refrain from taking life?

The second of the *Upāsaka* Precepts is to refrain from stealing. This rule also contributes with great impact to practicing compassion. At its very core, this precept is about being compassionate toward others. Again, think of the impact and emotional toll taking an object from someone else without permission must have on that person. Victims of robbery often report feeling violated and having a feeling of no longer being safe in their own car, home, neighborhood, etc. This sense of dread must be extremely difficult to live with and get through.

The third rule is again rooted in compassion toward others, but also is equally directed toward the individual and that is to refrain from sexual misconduct. It should be clear how this rule protects other beings through compassion and respect, but how does it help the individual? The answer relates to craving. When a person finds or engages in something pleasurable, the natural reaction is to continue to seek the source of that pleasure leading to a cycle of repetition. However, what the Buddhist teachings and common sense and introspection show, is that this is a never-ending, never-fulfilling cycle. As this cycle relates to sexual misconduct, there is a twofold benefit of protecting the individual from falling into such a cycle while protecting the outside partner from being the subject of unwilling or unwanted actions.

To refrain from lying and false speech is the fourth *Upāsaka* Precept. False speech includes gossip, abusive speech, and idle chatter, but generally the focus is on lying. While this rule may seem superficial and of low impact, consider that by not telling the truth to a person, you are in effect distorting that person's reality. Perhaps a person has come to you for some piece of information and instead of admitting that you do not have the information, you simply lie. You have provided a falsehood to someone seeking you out as an authority on whatever subject they approached you about. This is such a serious offense, that in the United States if you are called upon to testify in a court of law, part of the oath you are given and must abide by includes the statement "to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."<sup>12</sup> With regards to the other forms of false speech, we only need to look to our mothers who raised us and remember that small bit of advice she undoubtedly gave: "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all."

The fifth and final *Upāsaka* Precept is to refrain from intoxicating liquors and drugs that lead to carelessness or heedlessness. This rule could be placed at the foundation layer under the other four precepts, as it deals with conditioning that could influence the breaking or adherence to all of the other precepts. To refrain from intoxicating liquors and drugs is key to maintaining an alert and aware mind. In Buddhism, psychology, and other fields, the mind is held in regard as the key to all emotions, actions, and mental states. When one becomes intoxicated, the effect is directly on the mind and it becomes difficult or impossible to maintain awareness and alertness, but more importantly it becomes difficult to follow all five of the *Upāsaka* Precepts.

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<sup>12</sup> "Rule 6.10 Courtroom Oaths - North Dakota Supreme Court." 2006. 12 Oct. 2013  
<<http://www.ndcourts.gov/court/rules/ndroc/rule6.10.htm>>

Here are the five *Upāsaka* Precepts in the Buddha's own words as translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu from the *Aṅguttara Nikaya* book in the *Sutta Piṭaka* volume of the Pāli Canon (also found in Bhikkhu Bodhi's *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon*):

Now, there are these five gifts, five great gifts — original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated, unadulterated from the beginning — that are not open to suspicion, will never be open to suspicion, and are unfaulted by knowledgeable contemplatives & brahmans. Which five?

There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, abandoning the taking of life, abstains from taking life...

Furthermore, abandoning taking what is not given (stealing), the disciple of the noble ones abstains from taking what is not given...

Furthermore, abandoning illicit sex, the disciple of the noble ones abstains from illicit sex...

Furthermore, abandoning lying, the disciple of the noble ones abstains from lying...

Furthermore, abandoning the use of intoxicants, the disciple of the noble ones abstains from taking intoxicants...<sup>13 14</sup>

### **Challenges Faced by Modern Society and Governments**

Throughout history as villages grew into towns and towns grew into cities, there became more and more governmental interaction with the citizen population. It seems anytime a larger and larger number of people began to reside or congregate in the same geographic location, one can witness more government oversight into their activities. Why is

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<sup>13</sup> "Abhisanda Sutta: Rewards - Access to Insight." 2006. 14 Oct. 2013  
<<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an08/an08.039.than.html>>

<sup>14</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi. *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon*. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005. 172-174.

this? The proposition of this paper is that the community at large began to act with less compassion towards their fellow citizens. Let's review a couple of hypothetical, yet true to life, examples.

#### Example 1

In a small country, protesters gather outside of the government's main building citing corruption in the recent elections and demanding a new set of fair and open elections. Emotions are high and the verbal jousting is heated. The citizens feel that the newly elected officials will not represent the needs of the country at large and that the voting process was tainted by bribes and corruption because the new officials were only looking for a quick way to make money. As the day wears on, several physical altercations occur, and ultimately a member of the crowd is killed. It is unclear if the killing was intentional or accidental, however the entire group takes on an unruly mob-like mentality and when authorities finally intervene, nearly a hundred people have been killed. News outlets around the world pick up on the story and condemn not only the actions of the protesters, but the entire region and country, labeling them barbarians.

#### Example 2

State-level legislators receive an increasing number of reports by local police agencies that people are driving while intoxicated. The state government passes a law against driving while under the influence (DWI) of any intoxicant which carries a stiff penalty of time in jail and loss of one's driving license. Again, the power of choice has been shifted from the citizen to the government with a farther reaching implication of loss of personal transportation which could in turn affect one's ability to earn their wages.

### Example 3

A newly created online social networking website experiences rare success and growth, and within a few months of launching have several hundred thousand active members. However, the administrators of the site notice a trend occurring called "flaming"<sup>15</sup> where one member or group outwardly attack another member or group through their online interactions. After fielding thousands of complaints, the site is forced to implement an addendum to their Terms Of Service (TOS) agreement outlining and explaining acceptable and forbidden conduct. Upon activation of the new agreement all users must read and agree to abide by the rules during their next login, before being allowed continued use of the website.

### Example 4

At a corporate headquarters office, employees are now required to complete daily time cards accounting for their activities throughout each workday in fifteen minute increments. Based on an increasing number of assignments turned in late, customer complaints, and reports from the IT department showing greater than usual computer activity on non-business related websites, the executive management team decided a time tracking tool would help keep their employees accountable. The employees, however, feel annoyed and mistrusted, and feel that keeping the new time cards is a waste of their time.

### Example 5

In a small village restaurant, a new waitress is called into the manager's office at the

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<sup>15</sup> "The Original Hacker's Dictionary." 2002. 12 Oct. 2013 <<http://www.dourish.com/goodies/jargon.html>>

end of her shift. He offers to give her a raise, even after she has only been working for three weeks. She is delighted at the chance to earn more than the minimum wage. However, when her next paycheck and then the second one following do not reflect a pay increase she is puzzled. At the next opportunity, she inquires to the manager about the missing funds and he politely closes the office door and then corners her, citing the raise comes with certain new "responsibilities." Feeling nervous, the waitress asks for clarification and the manager grabs her hand and puts it on his crotch. Horrified, the waitress is able to twist away and leaves the restaurant immediately.

What has been outlined thus far are fairly common examples of situations where, when people fail to act with compassion a governing body is forced to step in to try and correct the negative activities. These situations highlight both a lack of compassion by the citizenship and an increase of government oversight which might result in fewer community freedoms. Is there a way for the members of these respective communities to self-regulate and maintain their freedoms while increasing their compassion for their fellow citizens? Let's find out.

### **Application of *Upāsaka* Precepts**

So how can a set of rules written over two thousand five hundred years ago help to fix some of today's modern societal problems? The answer lies in the very foundation of those rules and the teachings surrounding them: compassion. In each of the examples previously presented, the resulting corrective action could have been prevented if the individuals involved had turned their attention outward instead of maintaining their egocentric inward views. Let's examine each example in more depth.

The first example shows how a group of protesters in a small country break the first *Upāsaka* Precept and during a gathering outside of a government building to protest against a corrupt electoral process, almost one hundred people are killed. As a result of this horrific scene, the world's media now view the region and country as a wholly barbaric society. There have even been rumors reported that surrounding countries and local non-governmental aid agencies are no longer willing to offer assistance in conducting new elections. Whenever differing opinions are put to the test through confrontation, it can be easy to lose control and resort to violence. However, the Buddha clearly advocated against this with the first precept of never taking a life. In a protest situation, nonviolence is always the best choice as it allows for the sharing of ideas, discussion, and compromise. When activists resort to violence, all of those options are removed and the authorities are left with no choice but to intervene. In this case of election fraud, had the demonstrators remained peaceful they would not have been labeled criminals and barbarians and their concerns could have been investigated by impartial third parties, hopefully resulting in new elections and the curtailment of fraud within the country's government.

The second example is a clear illustration of violating the fifth precept of refraining to take intoxicants which can lead to carelessness and heedlessness. If people are out on the roads driving cars while intoxicated, there are endless chances for collisions resulting in injury and death. Driving an automobile is a treacherous undertaking requiring intense focus and concentration while maintaining awareness of many moving obstacles all at once. Needing to keep alert of other vehicles, signage on the road, published traffic laws, while at the same time being able to react to unforeseen situations that can occur in a fraction of

second, is intensely taxing on the mind. As more and more of the world's population take to the roads, the number of traffic related accidents, injuries, and deaths will continue to increase. The World Health Organization (WHO) is estimating that "road traffic crashes are predicted to result in the deaths of around 1.9 million people annually by 2020."<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, in the United States alone, during the year 2011 there were over 1.2 million arrests made for driving while under the influence.<sup>17</sup> Just imagine how these numbers would drop if all drivers acted with compassion and opted never to drive while under the influence of intoxicants. The purpose of the fifth precept is to motivate individuals to maintain a clear and alert mind at all times, and this is especially important when driving.

The third example takes place in the virtual world. As stated, a new online social networking website is forced to update their Terms Of Service agreement to include a section on rules of conduct while using their site. Because members on the site were engaged in a behavior called "flaming", the site administrators were forced to take action in order to equally protect their members from attack. Flaming could be classified as a form of "cyberbullying"<sup>18</sup> and definitely falls under the purview of the fourth precept. False speech generally includes a variety of negative types of speech including lying, divisive or abusive language, gossip and idle chatter, and slander. Even though the topic is verbal communication, the root of the precept is again compassion. Being compassionate with one's speech might be the hardest behavior to be aware of and correct if needed. For all but maybe two or three years at the beginning of one's life, the ability for speech has been

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<sup>16</sup> "WHO | Road traffic injuries." 2011. 12 Oct. 2013  
<<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs358/en/>>

<sup>17</sup> "FBI — Table 29." 2012. 12 Oct. 2013  
<<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the-u.s.-2011/tables/table-29>>

<sup>18</sup> "What is Cyberbullying | StopBullying.gov." 2012. 12 Oct. 2013  
<<http://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/what-is-it/>>

developed. It quickly becomes second nature and requires no thought or active mental process to engage. Additionally, consider all of the outside influences (media, print, radio) and influencers (family, friends, coworkers) that one might verbally interact with over time. Having the mental acuity to both monitor and correct one's speech is certainly a daunting task. But with practice it can be done and in doing so the benefits are realized by all whom you might communicate with.

Take the recent real world case of 12-year-old Rebecca Sedwick, who after months of enduring cyberbullying from approximately fifteen kids in a geographically and physically different location, opted to take her own life through suicide.<sup>19</sup> This tragedy and all others like it can be prevented by the application of the fourth precept. A parent advocate points exactly to this point with her comments on Rebecca's case: ""Wonder if they decided ... 'Hey listen, we can do something to be kind to this girl. Let's say ... your hair looks nice today. You look pretty today. Don't listen to these girls. You have a reason to live. You don't have to do this. ... Don't think you have to end your life,' " Scheff said."<sup>20</sup>

False speech is clearly an important activity to work towards correcting and is of such importance as to be included in the five precepts prescribed by the Buddha for all followers. With fairly little effort it should be plain to see what hugely negative impacts all types of false speech can have on society.

The fourth example in this paper highlights a lesser known form of stealing known as time stealing or time theft.<sup>21</sup> In the example, an executive management team decided to

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<sup>19</sup> "Parents, beware of bullying on sites you've never seen." 12 Oct. 2013  
<<http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/10/living/parents-new-apps-bullying/>>

<sup>20</sup> "Parents, beware of bullying on sites you've never seen." 12 Oct. 2013  
<<http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/10/living/parents-new-apps-bullying/>>

<sup>21</sup> "Is Time Theft Robbing You Blind? - Peninsula Time Clock." 2002. 12 Oct. 2013  
<[http://peninsulatime.com/time\\_theft.htm](http://peninsulatime.com/time_theft.htm)>

implement a time tracking system after various sources pointed to employees wasting time while at work. Time theft, as well as all forms of theft and stealing, comes under the second precept. Similar in nature to the first precept of refraining to take life, the second precept covers situations where an individual is taking something not given to them.

In Buddhism, giving is considered one of the Ten Perfections (pāramīs) that one should seek to attain and perfect while on the path to enlightenment. Dāna (or giving) has a twofold benefit to those who practice it. First, the object being given is likely to be beneficial to the intended recipient, such as clothing or food. Second, the act of giving produces positive karma, but also and more importantly, starts the process of training the mind to let go. Consider the first time you give something away. It may be traumatic or you may feel regret, but over time and with continued practice the same act of giving something away gets easier and you may start to experience a sense of wellbeing. These are the benefits associated with giving. Bhikkhu Bodhi translates for us the Buddha's own words:

"O monks, if people knew, as I know, the result of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would they allow the stain of niggardliness [selfishness] to obsess them and take root in their minds. Even if it were their last morsel, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared it, if there were someone to share it with. But, monks, as people do not know, as I know, the result of giving and sharing, they eat without having given, and the stain of niggardliness [selfishness] obsesses them and takes root in their minds."<sup>22</sup>

Stealing, however, is at the opposite end of the scale and carries with it multiple layers of harm. First, you've deprived the owner of something they have chosen to possess and retain. Second, if you're a practicing Buddhist, you run the risk of accumulating negative karma. And third, you've reinforced in your mind the act of clinging or craving. As

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<sup>22</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi. *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon*. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005. 169.

mentioned earlier, when an individual experiences something pleasurable they continue a cycle of seeking out that feeling or experience, thus creating a habit of clinging or craving. With regard to stealing, that clinging or craving could be towards the act of committing a crime, or the money gained when selling stolen goods, or the satisfaction felt after stealing food following a period of hunger. Regardless of the interpreted benefit, the act of stealing can have far greater negative effects.

Returning to the example of time theft in the corporate office, had the employees acted in a compassionate manner towards the company and maintained a level of output in line with expectations, there would have been no need for the new time tracking system implemented by the executives. The employees would have avoided the feelings of annoyance and mistrust as a result of the new system, and the company would have successfully continued to conduct business at a sustainable level.

In the fifth and final example, we read about a violation of the third precept, to refrain from sexual misconduct. This example highlights a workplace behavior known as quid-pro-quo which involves preferential treatment in exchange for sexual favors. Clearly the manager was in violation of this precept (and in some countries the law) when he tried to demand sexual acts from the new waitress in exchange for more pay. He should have either not made any kind of offer to increase her wages, or made the offer contingent upon something relative to the job, such as increased performance, or fewer mistakes on customers' bills. Sadly, one only needs to look at current news reports from around the world to see countless examples of sexual misconduct within our society. From quid-pro-quo, as shown in this example, to rape, pornography, human trafficking, and prostitution, there are just too many examples of this precept being broken. The corrective

action here, is to go back to the main tenet of Buddhism and treat all beings with compassion and respect. Society as a whole needs to re-embrace the idea of a social contract among its citizens and once again treat each other with respect. Sexual misconduct does nothing but erode away our common well being and instills fear and hatred into those who are victims.

It should be noted that the *Upāsaka* Precepts are not just a corrective tool, but can also be a source of inspiration. Take a survey of the people around you and find those that are already living a life based on compassion. Perhaps it is the co-worker who always works late to make up any time he or she might have missed. Or maybe it's a stranger on the street who returns a dropped twenty dollar bill to the person walking by. There are examples everywhere if you want to find them. Consider this brief story from the website Random Acts of Kindness illustrating the practice of the first precept:

My children laugh at me as I always pick up worms or other small creatures that are stranded on the footpath when we are out walking. I maintain that if we are kindest to the smallest of living things we will also view all life as precious. Well as I returned home from walking my dog outside my front door I saw a small sparrow lying on its back by the side of the road, with its legs twitching in the air. Seeing it was in danger of being crushed, I carefully picked it up and took it inside with me and seeing it had no obvious injury I put it in the garden where I leave the bird seed for our feathered friends, happily within an hour it had recovered and flown away. I know this is a small thing but it made me feel happy all day.<sup>23</sup>

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>23</sup> "Little Bird | Random Acts of Kindness." 2012. 24 Dec. 2013  
<<http://www.randomactsofkindness.org/kindness-stories/224-little-bird>>

As has been shown here, compassion is a powerful tool that is available to every person in society. Through the study of Buddhism, it is clear that compassion and the need to act with compassion has been a concern for over twenty five hundred years. As the world's population continues to grow and more and more people are driven to achieve personal success, there is a sense or undercurrent that society's members are becoming more focused on themselves rather than on others. By utilizing the teachings of the Buddha, particularly the *Upāsaka* Precepts, as a recipe for change the trend that we sense can be changed. Admittedly this is probably easier said than done, but it just takes a small group of people making a small effort to affect change.

Take the example of false speech as represented by the fourth precept. Start small and slowly build the habit of never lying. Be conscious or mindful of every fact you state and every answer you give. Be sure you are always telling the truth and specifically the whole truth. Don't bend the truth or stretch the facts, keep them whole. Admit when you don't know, but offer to find out the facts if the opportunity affords it. Through this small exercise you can start to have a positive impact on the subset of society that you interact with. Next, try expanding this behavior to include all types of false speech by avoiding gossip, idle chatter, and divisive or abusive speech. Don't be discouraged when old habits reappear, just recommit and try again. It will take time. Perhaps months or even years, but every effort is a positive step in the direction towards being compassionate towards others through your verbal exchanges. Just like following a new cooking recipe for the first time where the dish may not turn out perfectly, with repetition and practice it gets better with each attempt.

Likewise, the same approach can be used with each of the other precepts. Start small and become masterful at a single situation, and then slowly broaden your scope. Again, just as in cooking, you don't try to prepare an entire five course meal all at the same

time without practice. You might start with the dessert or appetizer recipes, then try a few side dishes before moving on to the main course. It may take several attempts before you master each recipe on its own before attempting to prepare the meal in its entirety. This is exactly the approach to take with the *Upāsaka* Precepts as well. Start slow, start small with just one and then slowly expand.

Rāhula Walpola offers these closing thoughts:

Buddhism aims at creating a society where the ruinous struggle for power is renounced; where calm and peace prevail away from conquest and defeat; where the persecution of the innocent is vehemently denounced; where one who conquers oneself is more respected than those who conquer millions by military and economic warfare; where hatred is conquered by kindness, and evil by goodness; where enmity, jealousy, ill-will and greed do not infect men's minds; where compassion is the driving force of action; where all, including the least of living things, are treated with fairness, consideration and love; where life in peace and harmony, in a world of material contentment, is directed towards the highest and noblest aim, the realization of the Ultimate Truth, Nirvana.<sup>24</sup>

The fate of society is in the hands of the individual, which means each and every one of us, not just a select few. It's time to make an investment in the future and in ourselves to reverse the trend of selfishness and uncaring, and reinstate the idea for the good of the many. Each of us in society have the skills to enact this type of change, and now we have the recipe.

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<sup>24</sup> Rāhula Walpola, and Paul Demiéville. *What the Buddha Taught*. New York: Grove, 1974. 88-89.

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