

**Part Two:**

**THE PERFECTION OF MORAL VIRTUE**

**(Chapters 21–23)**



## Chapter 23: Aspects of *Śīla Pāramitā*

### Part One: Additional Precept Specifics<sup>30</sup>

#### b) HOW CAN PRECEPTS BE FOREMOST IN THE EIGHTFOLD PATH?

**Question:** According to the sequence in the eightfold right path, right speech and right livelihood are in the middle whereas right views and right action are at the beginning. Why then do you now state that the precepts serve as the initial entryway into the eightfold right path?

**Response:** When we speak of numerical priorities, those of greatest significance are listed first. Right views is the one which is of greatest significance. Therefore it is placed at the beginning. Moreover, because one is coursing along a path, one takes seeing clearly as the foremost priority. Because all dharmas involve a particular sequence, it is the moral precepts which come first. This is analogous to the construction of a building wherein, although the beams and rafters may be huge, one nonetheless must take the ground itself as the first priority.

#### 5) THE SUPERIOR-SUPERIOR GRADE OF LAY PRECEPT OBSERVANCE

In the case of a person who is the most superior among the superior in the upholding of precepts, it is done out of pity for beings and for the sake of the Buddha Path. It is in order to understand all dharmas and fathom their true character in accordance with reality. It is not done on account of fear of the wretched destinies and it is not done because one seeks to gain pleasures.

All sorts of motives such as these characterize the practice of one who is the most superior among the superior in the upholding of the precepts. These four categories generally constitute an *upāsaka's* practice of the precepts.

#### 2. THE MONASTIC PRECEPTS

The precepts of those who have left the home life involve four categories: The first consists of the precepts of a *śrāmaṇera* and *śrāmaṇerikā*. The second consists of the precepts of a *śikṣamāṇā*. The third consists of the precepts of a bhikshuni. The fourth consists of the precepts of the Bhikshu Sangha.

**Question:** If by relying on the householder's precepts, one succeeds in being reborn in the heavens, succeeds in gaining the Bodhisattva Path, and also succeeds in reaching nirvāṇa, of what further use are the monastic precepts?

## a. THE VALUE OF THE MONASTIC PRECEPTS

## 1) INHERENT PATH-DEFEATING DIFFICULTIES IN LAY LIFE

**Response:** Although one may gain liberation through both approaches, still, there are ways which are difficult and ways which are easier.

The actions involved in the life of a householder involve all manner of endeavors and responsibilities. If one desires to focus one's mind especially on the dharmas of the Path, then the business of the family deteriorates. If one desires to focus one's mind especially on cultivating the business of the family, then the matters associated with the Path deteriorate.

## 2) COMPARISON OF LAY AND MONASTIC SITUATIONS

Neither seizing on nor forsaking anything—it is in this manner that one should cultivate the Dharma. This is renowned for its difficulty. However, if one leaves the home life, separates from the circumstances of the laity, cuts off all complexity and chaos, and maintains a focused mind, then cultivating the Path becomes easy.

Moreover, the befuddlement and boisterousness of the householder's life involves many endeavors and much responsibility. It is the root of the fetters and the repository of the manifold ills. This is an extremely difficult situation.

When one leaves the home life, it is analogous to a person being able to go forth into the unpopulated and empty wilderness to unify his mind. He is then able under those circumstances to become free of immersion in ideation and mental discursion. Once the inward thoughts have been gotten rid of, the outward matters depart as well. This is as described in a verse:

When sitting undisturbed within the forest,  
In a state of stillness, one extinguishes the manifold ills.  
Calmly and contentedly, one gains unity of mind.  
This sort of bliss is unequaled even by the bliss of the heavens.

People seek after the benefit of wealth and noble status,  
For famous fashions and for fine furnishings.  
This sort of pleasure affords no peace or security.  
One thus pursues one's own benefit, but finds no satiation.

The one with the patchwork robes practices reliance on alms,  
And, whether moving or still, his mind is thus always unified.  
He spontaneously employs the eye of wisdom,  
And so contemplates and knows the reality of all dharmas.

Among all the different entryways into the Dharma,  
 All are entered through equanimous contemplation.  
 When the understanding and wise mind abides in stillness,  
 Nothing anywhere in the three realms is able to equal this.

For these reasons, one should realize that it is easiest to practice the Path through leaving behind the home life and cultivating the precepts under those circumstances.

Additionally, if one leaves the home life and cultivates the monastic precepts, one becomes able to achieve the complete perfection of an incalculable number of aspects of good moral conduct. It is for these reasons that members of the lay community should leave the home life and take on the complete precepts.

### 3) DIFFICULTIES SPECIFIC TO THE MONASTIC LIFE

Then again, it is also the case that, within the Dharma of the Buddha, the particular dharma of leaving the home life is the one which is the most difficult to cultivate. This is as alluded to in the questions of the *brahmacārin* Jambukhādaka to Śāriputra, wherein he asked, "What is most difficult within the Buddha's Dharma?"

Śāriputra replied, "Leaving behind the home life is difficult."

He also asked, "What are the difficulties involved in leaving the home life?"

He replied, "Having left the home life, it is finding bliss in the Dharma which is difficult."

"If one succeeds in finding bliss in the Dharma, then what beyond this is difficult?"

"To cultivate all good dharmas is difficult."

For the above reasons, one should leave behind the home life. Moreover, when one leaves behind the home life, the king of the demons becomes frightened and worried, saying, "The fetters of this man are about to become scant. He will certainly gain nirvāṇa and thus fall in among the members of the Sangha Jewel."

### 4) UTPALAVARṆĀ PROMOTES MONASTICISM (STORY)

Also, although among those who have left the home life in the Dharma of the Buddha there are those who break the precepts and fall into offenses, when the corresponding karmic retribution has come to an end, they then succeed in gaining liberation. This is as described in the *Bhikshuni Utpalavarṇā Jātaka Sutra*.

When the Buddha was still abiding in the world, this bhikshuni gained the six superknowledges and arhatship. She made a practice

of going into the households of the nobility where she constantly praised the tradition of leaving the home life. In doing so, she spoke to the wives and daughters of the nobility, saying, "Sisters, you could leave behind the home life."

The wives and daughters among the nobility replied, "But we are young and strong. Our countenances and physical forms are full and beautiful. It would be difficult to uphold the precepts. It might happen that we would break the precepts."

The Bhikshuni then replied, "Just go ahead and leave the home life, anyway. If it does happen that you end up breaking the precepts, then so it is: You break them."

They responded, "If we break the precepts, we'll fall into the hells. How could it be conceivable that they might be broken?"

She replied, "If it happens that you end up falling into the hells, then you fall."

The wives and daughters of the nobility all laughed at this, saying, "When one falls into the hells, one is compelled to undergo punishments. How then could one even contemplate a situation where one might fall?"

The Bhikshuni replied, "I recall that in a previous life I was an actress who put on all sorts of costumes in which I would play traditional parts. There were times when I would put on the robes of a bhikshuni and then act in that guise as a comedienne. It was due to this causal circumstance that, at the time of Kāśyapa Buddha, I was actually able to become a bhikshuni. However, on account of my noble birth and beauty, I was overcome with arrogance and then broke the restrictive prohibitions. On account of the karmic offenses associated with breaking the precepts, I fell into the hells where I underwent all manner of punishment as retribution.

"When I had finished undergoing retribution for those offenses, I was able to encounter Shakyamuni Buddha and leave the home life again, whereupon I then succeeded in gaining the six super-knowledges and the path of arhatship. Based on this, one should realize that, if one leaves the home life and takes those precepts, even though one may happen to break the precepts, one is nonetheless bound to succeed in gaining the path of arhatship as a result of the causal circumstances associated with having taken those precepts in the first place.

"However, if one merely commits evil deeds, but yet does so in the absence of that causal circumstance of having taken the precepts,

then one will not succeed in gaining the Path. And so it was that I fell into the hells in many previous lifetimes, only to emerge from the hells and become an evil person again, whereupon I would fall right back down into the hells. As a consequence, I failed in those instances to gain anything worthwhile as a result.”

Now, based on this, we can verify that, if one simply leaves behind the home life and takes the precepts, even though one might eventually break the precepts, one will nonetheless finally succeed in gaining the fruition of the Path through the force of those causal circumstances.”

#### 5) AN INEBRIATED BRAHMAN BECOMES A MONK (STORY)

Then again, this point is also illustrated by that time when the Buddha dwelt in the Jeta Grove and a drunken brahman came before the Buddha requesting to become a bhikshu. The Buddha ordered Ānanda to administer tonsure and outfit the man in the Dharma robes. When that brahman awoke from his inebriation, he was startled and amazed that he had suddenly become a bhikshu, whereupon he immediately ran off.

The other bhikshus then inquired of the Buddha, “Why did the Buddha permit this drunken brahman to become a bhikshu?”

The Buddha replied, “Even in innumerable eons, this brahman has never thought to leave the home life. Now, due to his inebriation, he briefly generated a feeble intention to do so. On account of this causal circumstance, he will later become able to leave the home life and gain the Path.”

#### 6) CONCLUDING STATEMENT ON LAY LIFE VERSUS MONASTICISM

Based on all sorts of causal circumstances such as these, one can see that the benefits and merit of leaving the home life are incalculable. Hence, although the members of the lay community do possess the five precepts, they cannot be compared to those associated with leaving the home life.

#### b. THE FOUR CATEGORIES OF MONASTIC PRECEPTS

The moral regulations of those who have left the home life consist of four categories: those of the *śrāmaṇera* and *śrāmaṇerikā* (male and female novices); those of the *śikṣamāṇā* (a female postulant nun); those of the bhikshuni (fully-ordained nun); and those of the bhikshu (a fully ordained monk).

What are the means by which a *śrāmaṇera* and *śrāmaṇerikā* leave the home life and take on those precepts? The lay follower who

comes seeking to leave the home life should request two masters: one *upādhyāya* and one *ācārya*. The *upādhyāya* is comparable to one's father whereas the *ācārya* is comparable to one's mother. Having set aside one's original parents, one should thus seek out among the monastics those capable of serving in those roles.

One next dons the *kāṣāya* robe while also cutting off the hair and beard. [In bowing down in respect], one should then grasp the feet of the *upādhyāya* with his two hands. Why does one grasp his feet? It is the custom of India that to grasp the feet demonstrates the most superior form of reverential offering. The *ācārya* should then provide instruction in the ten precepts. This is done in accordance with the protocols for receiving those precepts. For the *śrāmaṇerikā* it is just the same, the difference being that she takes a bhikshuni to serve as her *upādhyāya*. As for the *śikṣamāṇā*, she takes on six dharmas for a [pre-novitiate probationary] period of two years.

1) THE ORIGIN OF THE ŚIKṢAMĀṆĀ POSTULANT NUN CATEGORY

**Question:** The *śrāmaṇera* first takes the ten precepts and then takes the complete precepts. Why, within the dharma of the bhikshuni, does there exist the *śikṣamāṇā* stage, and only afterwards, the receiving of the complete precepts?

**Response:** When the Buddha was in the world, there once was the wife of an elder who, unaware that she had already become pregnant, nonetheless left the home life and received the complete precepts. Afterwards, her body swelled and her pregnancy began to show. On account of this, the elders ridiculed and criticized the bhikshus. It was on account of this that it was laid down that there would be a two-year period of studying the precepts and accepting six dharmas after which one would progress towards taking the complete precepts.

a) WHY WOULDN'T A PREGNANT ŚIKṢAMĀṆĀ BE AS MUCH A LIABILITY?

**Question:** If the community had been ridiculed and criticized in the former circumstance, how is it that a *śikṣamāṇā* would not bring about ridicule in a similar situation?

**Response:** The *śikṣamāṇā* has not yet taken the complete precepts. That status is analogous to that of a small child or a servant whom people still do not ridicule or criticize even though they may incur the defilement of an offense. This refers to the *śikṣamāṇā*'s taking on the discipline of six dharmas.

## b) TWO SUBCATEGORIES OF ŚIKṢAMĀṄĀ

This *śikṣamāṅṅā* category is of two types: The first is the eighteen-year-old virgin girl who has taken on six dharmas. The second is a woman who has been with the husband's family for a period of ten years but who is then able to take on the discipline of six dharmas.

## 2) THE BHIKSHUNI ORDINATION

When she wishes to take the complete precepts, she should do so in the midst of the two divisions of the Sangha, wearing the five-stripe robe and carrying the bowl. Bhikshunis serve as the *upādhyāya* and as the teacher providing instruction. A bhikshu serves as the precept master.

The rest corresponds to the standard protocol for receiving the precepts. Generally speaking, this involves five hundred precepts. Extensively speaking, there are eighty thousand precepts. At the conclusion of the third *karmavācanā*, one then accesses an incalculable number of moral regulations in becoming a bhikshuni.

## 3) THE BHIKSHU ORDINATION

In the case of the bhikshu, there are three robes and a bowl. There are three masters along with an additional ten members of the Sangha, this in accordance with the standard protocol for receiving the precepts. [For the bhikshu], generally speaking, there are two hundred and fifty precepts. To speak of it in extensive terms, there are eighty thousand. At the conclusion of the third *karmavācanā*, one then accesses an incalculable number of moral regulation dharmas.

## B. CONCLUSION OF PRECEPT DETAILS DISCUSSION

This has been a general presentation of what constitutes the moral precepts. These comprise [the bases] of what is intended by "*śīla*" (moral virtue).



## Chapter 23, Part 2: The Perfection of Moral Virtue<sup>31</sup>

### III. AN EXTENDED DISCUSSION OF THE PERFECTION OF MORAL VIRTUE

#### A. DEFINITION OF THE PERFECTION OF MORAL VIRTUE

**Question:** Now that we have already become aware of the specific aspects involved in “*śīla*” itself, what is it then that constitutes “*śīla pāramitā*” (the perfection of moral virtue)?

##### 1. INDIFFERENCE TO SACRIFICING ONE’S LIFE IN UPHOLDING PRECEPTS

**Response:** There are those who say that when the bodhisattva upholds the precepts and would rather lose his physical life than damage minor precepts, it is this which constitutes *śīla pāramitā*. As described in the previously-cited *Sutra of King Sutasoma*, one does not spare even one’s own physical life in order to preserve the integrity of the restrictive precepts.

##### 2. BUDDHA’S PAST LIFE AS A DRAGON (ILLUSTRATIVE STORY)

For example, in a former life, the Bodhisattva was a greatly powerful poisonous dragon. Whenever any being came to stand before him, in the case of those who were physically weak, if he so much as gazed upon them, they would die on the spot. As for those who were physically strong, if he breathed on them, they would die.

This dragon had taken the one-day precepts. He left his dwelling seeking quietude and had gone into the forest. He had been sitting in contemplation for a long time, became tired and lax, and then had fallen asleep. It is the way of dragons that when they fall asleep their bodies become in appearance like a snake. His body had patterns on it which were composed of the various colors of the seven precious things.

It so happened that some hunters noticed him and, both startled and delighted, said, “Wouldn’t it be appropriate to take this skin, so rare and difficult to come by, and offer it up to the King as an adornment for his robes?” They then held its head down with a staff and used a knife to strip away its skin.

The dragon thought to himself, “My strength is such that, were I only to wish it, turning this entire country upside down would be as easy as turning over one’s hand. These people are but little creatures. How could they be able to put me in difficult straits? Because I am now upholding the precepts, I shall relinquish all regard for this body. I should just follow along with the instructions of the Buddha.”

And so he remained patient while this was going on, kept his eyes closed, and refrained from gazing upon them. He held his breath and, out of pity for these men, kept himself from breathing on them. For the sake of upholding the precepts, he single-mindedly endured the peeling away of his skin, and did not develop any thoughts of regret.

Then, having lost his skin, his bare flesh rested directly on the ground. It was in a season where the sun was very hot. He slithered along through the dirt desiring to make his way to a large body of water. He then observed all of the little insects which came to eat his body. At that point, for the sake of upholding the precepts, he did not dare to move any more.

He thought to himself, "Now I'll just donate my body to the insects. For the sake of the Buddha Path, I will now make a gift of this flesh so that their bodies may become full. Later, when I have achieved buddhahood, I will resort to the giving of Dharma to benefit their minds."

Having made this vow, his body dried up and his life was cut off. He was then born in the second level of the Trāyastriṃśa heavens. That poisonous dragon was a former incarnation of Shakyamuni Buddha. In the present era, those hunters manifest as Devadatta and the six [non-buddhist] masters. The little insects were the eighty-thousand gods who gained the Path when Shakyamuni Buddha first turned the wheel of Dharma.

#### B. MORE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF ŚĪLA PĀRAMITĀ

The bodhisattva guards the precepts not sparing even his own physical life in doing so. He is decisive in this and has no regrets. When his endeavors are of this sort, this constitutes *śīla* pāramitā.

Then again, as he observes the precepts, the bodhisattva makes a great vow for the sake of the Buddha Path: "I will certainly bring beings across to liberation, will not seek the pleasures of this or later lives, will not do it for the sake of fame or the dharmas of an empty reputation, and will not do it for the sake of seeking an early nirvāṇa for myself. I will do it solely for the sake of beings who are submerged in the long-continuing flow [of the river of cyclic existence], who are cheated by their affections, and who are deceived by their own delusion. I will bring them across to liberation, causing them to reach the other shore."

He is single-mindedly in observance of the moral precepts and is consequently reborn in a good place. Through rebirth in a good place,

he meets good people. Through meeting good people, he develops wisdom. By developing wisdom, he succeeds in practicing the six pāramitās. Because he succeeds in practicing the six pāramitās, he gains realization of the Buddha Path. When one upholds the moral precepts in this manner, it is this which constitutes *śīla* pāramitā.

Moreover, in the bodhisattva's observance of the moral precepts, it is done with a mind which finds happiness in goodness and purity. It is not motivated by fear of the wretched destinies nor is it motivated by a desire to be reborn in the heavens. He seeks only to embody goodness and purity. It is through the mind's being imbued with the moral precepts that it is caused to take pleasure in goodness. It is this which constitutes *śīla* pāramitā.

Moreover, in the bodhisattva's observance of the moral precepts, he employs the mind of great compassion and thus succeeds in arriving at the Buddha Path. It is this which constitutes *śīla* pāramitā.

#### 1. HOW ŚĪLA GENERATES ALL SIX PERFECTIONS

Furthermore, in his upholding of the precepts, the bodhisattva is able to generate all six of the pāramitās. It is this then which qualifies as "*śīla* pāramitā."

#### 2. ŚĪLA'S GENERATION OF ŚĪLA PĀRAMITĀ

How is it that observing the moral precepts is itself able to generate [perfection in] the practice of the moral precepts? It is on account of the five precepts that one gets the *śrāmaṇera* (novice) precepts. It is on account of the *śrāmaṇera* precepts that one accesses the [complete] moral regulation precepts. It is on account of those moral regulation precepts that one gains the moral precept observance associated with dhyāna absorption. It is on account of the moral precept observance associated with dhyāna absorption that one brings about that level of moral precept observance which is entirely free of outflow-impurities. This is the process by which the moral precepts themselves generate [perfection in] the practice of the moral precepts.

#### 3. ŚĪLA'S GENERATION OF DĀNA PĀRAMITĀ

##### a. THE THREE TYPES OF GIVING

How does upholding the precepts engender *dāna*? There are three kinds of *dāna*: The first kind involves the giving of material wealth. The second kind is the giving of Dharma. The third kind is the giving of fearlessness.

##### 1) THE GIVING OF WEALTH

When one observes the moral precepts, one is frugal oneself while

also refraining from encroaching on the material wealth of any other being. This itself amounts to the giving of wealth.

2) THE GIVING OF DHARMA

When beings witness this [practice of observing the moral precepts], they respond with an admiring emulation of his actions. He then additionally speaks Dharma for them, thus causing them to awaken. He then reflects: "I should be firm in adhering to the precepts of moral purity, thereby providing for all beings a field of karmic blessings for the offerings they make." He consequently causes beings to gain countless karmic blessings. All sorts of instances such as these qualify as the giving of Dharma.

3) THE GIVING OF FEARLESSNESS

All beings fear death. When one upholds the precepts, one refrains from bringing any harm to them. This in itself amounts to the giving of fearlessness.

b. THE ALTRUISTIC VOW OF THE BODHISATTVA

Moreover, the bodhisattva thinks to himself, "I shall uphold the precepts and, for the sake of all beings, shall employ the karmic reward from these precepts to become a wheel-turning sage king or perhaps a king of Jambudvīpa. In the event that I become a king among the the gods, then I will cause all beings to be amply supplied with wealth and to have nothing in which they are wanting.

"Later on, I will sit beneath the bodhi tree, vanquish the demon king, destroy the demon armies, perfect the unsurpassed Path, and speak the pure Dharma for the sake of all beings, thus causing an incalculable number of beings to cross beyond the sea of aging, sickness, and death."

These instances demonstrate how the causal factors associated with upholding the precepts bring forth *dāna* pāramitā.

4. ŚĪLA'S GENERATION OF KṢĀNTI PĀRAMITĀ

a. THE PRECEPTS' DEPENDENCE ON ESTABLISHING PATIENCE

How is it that observing the moral precepts engenders patience? A person who upholds the precepts reflects to himself: "I now uphold the precepts for the sake of maintaining my own mind. If I fail to maintain patience in my observance of the precepts, then I am bound to fall into the hells. Although I may not have actually broken any of the moral precepts, due to failing to maintain patience, I will still have failed to avoid the wretched destinies.

"This being the case, how could I give free rein to anger and thus fail to control my own mind? It is solely on account of the mind

that one enters into the three wretched destinies. I should therefore be skillful in strictly restraining myself while diligently cultivating patience.”

Moreover, the practitioner who desires the virtue of his precept practice to be solid and strong should cultivate patience. Why? Patience constitutes a great power which is able to strengthen the precepts and cause one to remain unmoved and unshaken.

One additionally reflects to himself: “Now that I have left the home life, I have taken on a different mode from that of the common person. How then could I give free rein to the mind after the manner typical of worldly people?”

It is appropriate that one encourage oneself to employ patience to train the mind. It is through patience of body and mouth that the mind also succeeds in becoming patient. Again, if the mind itself fails to maintain patience, the body and mouth become just the same. Therefore, the practitioner should influence his body, mouth, and mind to maintain patience, thus severing all instances of anger and enmity.

Furthermore, briefly described, these moral precepts number eighty thousand. If one discusses them extensively, then they are found to be incalculably numerous. One might think: “How could I possibly succeed in perfectly observing these innumerable precept dharmas?” One need only exercise patience. As a consequence, all of the many precepts are naturally brought to realization.

#### b. THE EXECUTION WAGON ANALOGY

This is analogous to a circumstance where a man has committed an offense in his relations with the King and the King has consequently ordered that miscreant placed in a wagon of knives where in he is surrounded on all six sides by sharp blades with no intervening space between himself and the blades. The wagon is then turned loose at a fast gallop, racing along aimlessly through the streets. If he is able to control his body and thus avoid being harmed by the knives, this would be a case of being slain yet still not dying. A person who upholds the precepts is just like this. The precepts are like the sharp knives. Patience is analogous to the controlling of the body. If one’s mind of patience fails in its solidity, then the precepts themselves may injure a person.

#### c. THE WALKING STICK ANALOGY

This is also analogous to an elderly person who might be prone to fall down if he walks along at night without the aid of a walking

stick. Patience serves as a “walking stick” for in one’s practice of observing the moral precepts. It supports a person in successfully arriving at realization of the Path. It insures that circumstances produced by merit-generated bliss remain unable to shake him [from his observance of the precepts].

All sorts of instances such as these demonstrate how upholding the moral precepts generates *kṣānti* pāramitā.

5. ŚĪLA’S GENERATION OF VĪRYA PĀRAMITĀ

a. ŚĪLA’S EXPULSION OF NEGLIGENCE

How is it that one may engender vigor through observing the moral precepts? The person who upholds the precepts gets rid of negligence (*pramāda*). Through one’s own power, one earnestly cultivates the unsurpassed Dharma. One relinquishes the pleasures of the world and enters into the path of goodness. One resolves to seek nirvāṇa for the sake of all. One possesses a great mind, refrains from laziness, and takes striving for buddhahood as one’s fundamental priority. This is how observing the moral precepts is able to bring forth vigor.

b. ŚĪLA’S ENGENDERING OF RENUNCIATION

Moreover, the person who observes the moral precepts becomes weary and abhorrent of the sufferings of the world and the calamities of aging, sickness, and death. His mind generates vigor and the resolve that he will certainly seek his own liberation while also bringing about the deliverance of others.

c. A COYOTE MAKES HIS ESCAPE (ILLUSTRATIVE STORY)

This is analogous to the case of the coyote who lived in the forest depending for his survival on following along after lions, tigers and leopards, scavenging the leftover carcasses of their prey. There happened to be a period of time when there was a shortage of available food for him. This led him to slip into the city in the middle of the night, making his way deep into a man’s household. He was seeking for some meat but failed to find any.

He happened to fall asleep in a screened-off spot and, unaware that the night had already ended, awoke, startled, frightened, and at a loss for what to do. If he tried to run out, he figured he would be unable to save himself, but if he remained, he feared he would fall victim to the pain of being killed. Consequently, he then just fixed his mind on just laying there on the ground, pretending that he was dead.

Many people came to see this. There was one man who said, "I have need of the ears of a coyote." He then cut them off and took them away.

The coyote thought to himself, "Although it hurts to have one's ears cut off, still, the body is allowed to survive."

Next, there was a man who said, "I have need of the tail of a coyote." He then cut that off as well and departed.

The coyote next thought, "Although it hurts to have one's tail cut off, still, it's a relatively minor matter."

Next, there was a man who said, "I need a coyote's teeth."

The coyote thought, "The scavengers are becoming more numerous. Suppose they were to take my head. Were they to do that, I would have no way to survive." He then sprang up from the ground and, arousing the strength of his own intelligence, suddenly bolted for a narrow exit, thus immediately saving himself.

#### d. THE MIND'S SELF-EXHORTATION TO ACTION

In seeking liberation from the trials of suffering, the mind of the practitioner is just like this. When old age arrives, he may still find reason to forgive himself and may still be unable to be diligent, earnest, and decisive in the application of vigor. It may be just the same when encountering sickness. Because there is still hope for a cure, he may still be unable to be resolute in carrying out his strategy.

But when death is about to arrive, he realizes that there is no further hope. He is able to dare to be decisive and diligent in devoting himself mightily to the cultivation of vigor. Then, escaping from the spot where death is upon him, he finally succeeds in reaching nirvāṇa.

#### e. THE ARCHERY ANALOGY

Moreover, the dharma of observing the moral precepts is analogous to archery wherein a person first finds a level spot of ground. Having found level ground, one then stabilizes the mind. After the mind has become stable, one draws back the bow completely. When one has drawn it back completely, the arrow then plunges deeply into the target. The precepts are analogous to level ground. The decisive mind is comparable to the bow. Drawing it back completely corresponds to vigor. The arrow is comparable to wisdom and the insurgent adversaries are analogous to ignorance.

If one is able to bring forth one's strength and be vigorous in this fashion, he will certainly arrive at realization of the great Path and will thereby bring beings across to liberation.

## f. ŚĪLA'S NATURAL PROMOTION OF DILIGENT SELF-CONTROL

Then again, the person who upholds the precepts is able to employ vigor to self-regulate his own five sense faculties. He does not indulge in pursuit of the five types of desire. If his mind has already gone off course, he is able to draw it back and cause it to return. This is a case of observing the moral precepts being able to bring about a guarding of the sense faculties. If one guards the sense faculties, then one develops dhyāna absorption. If one develops dhyāna absorption, then one develops wisdom. If one develops wisdom, then one succeeds in arriving at realization of the Buddha Path.

These are circumstances wherein upholding the moral precepts brings forth *vīrya* pāramitā.

## 6. ŚĪLA'S GENERATION OF DHYĀNA PĀRAMITĀ

## a. RECTIFICATION OF MIND THROUGH PHYSICAL AND VERBAL GOODNESS

How is it that upholding the precepts brings forth dhyāna? People possess the three karmic actions whereby they may do what is good. If the actions of the body and mouth are good, then the actions of the mind naturally enter into goodness.

## b. THE GRASS-IN-SESAME ANALOGY

This is analogous to normally crooked grasses which are caused to grow vertically when in the midst of sesame plants. Thus, even without being propped up, they naturally grow straight in such circumstances.

## c. THE FETTER-DIMINISHING EFFECT OF THE PRECEPTS

The power of observing the moral precepts is able to cause the fetters to waste away. How is this able to cause such wasting away? If one fails to observe the moral precepts, when a matter comes along which provokes rage, the intention to kill may immediately arise. If a situation arrives which conduces to lust, sensual thoughts are immediately conceived.

However, in the case of one who observes the moral precepts, although there may be slight anger, one refrains from bringing forth the intention to kill. Although there may be sensual thoughts, lustful activity is not indulged. This is how observing the moral precepts is able to cause the fetters to waste away. As the fetters waste away, dhyāna absorption is easily achieved.

## d. THE INVALID'S-FRAGILITY ANALOGY

This is analogous to when someone has become aged and sick to the point where he has lost his typical vitality. In such a case,

complete demise comes easily. Similarly, in a case where the fetters have wasted away, dhyāna absorption is easily established.

e. THE CLARITY-PROMOTING EFFECTS OF MORAL RESTRAINT

Moreover, when a person's thoughts have not yet been put to rest, he tends to constantly seek unrestrained indulgence in pleasures. However, when the practitioner observes the moral precepts, he renounces worldly karmic blessings. His mind refrains from falling into negligence. As a consequence, it becomes easy for him to succeed in developing dhyāna absorption.

f. ŚĪLA'S PRODUCTION OF HIGHER REBIRTH AND PATH ACQUISITION

Also, the person who observes the moral precepts succeeds thereby in being reborn among humans. Next, he is reborn in the six desire heavens. Thereafter, he reaches the form realm. If he is then able to break through the characteristic aspects of form, he is able to be reborn in the formless realm. If he remains pure in his observance of the moral precepts, he cuts off the fetters and gains the path of arhatship. If he upholds the precepts with the great mind while maintaining sympathetic regard for beings, this is a bodhisattva.

g. THE COOPERATIVE LINK BETWEEN PRECEPTS AND DHYĀNA

Additionally, the precepts involve restraint with regard to what is coarse. Dhyāna involves focusing on the subtle. Also, the moral precepts restrain the body and the mouth. Dhyāna brings stillness to the scattered mind.

1) THE PRECEPTS-AS-STAIRS ANALOGY

This process is analogous to moving higher in a building. If there were no stairs, one would be unable to ascend. If one fails to gain the stairs of the precepts, dhyāna absorption cannot be established either.

2) THE FETTER-INDUCED MENTAL WIND ANALOGY

Then again, in a person who breaks the precepts, the wind of the fetters is strong and so it scatters and confuses his mind. If his mind is scattered and confused, then dhyāna cannot be realized. In the case of a person who upholds the moral precepts, the wind of the fetters is weak and so his mind is not much scattered by it. Thus, for him, dhyāna absorption is easily gained.

All sorts of causal circumstances such as these illustrate how observing the moral precepts generates dhyāna pāramitā.

7. ŚĪLA'S GENERATION OF PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ

a. A WISDOM GENERATING CONTEMPLATION OF PRECEPTS

How is it that upholding the moral precepts is able to bring forth wisdom? The person who observes the precepts contemplates the

origins of the specific aspects of the moral precepts. He realizes that they originate with the numerous sorts of karmic offenses which have been committed. If none of those numerous karmic offenses been committed in the first place, then there would not be any moral precepts, either. Since the specific aspects of the moral precepts exist in this manner—on the basis of causes and conditions—how could one generate any attachment them?

b. THE LOTUS-FROM-MUD ANALOGY

In this sense, the moral precepts are comparable to lotus blossoms growing forth from grime-ridden mud. Although their form is fresh and fine, the place from which they arise is impure. If one awakens one's mind in this fashion, then one does not allow it to develop attachments. This is an instance of the upholding of precepts bringing forth *prajñāpāramitā*.

c. MAKING PRECEPT PRACTICE REFLECT PRAJÑĀ

Additionally, one who observes the moral precepts should reflect, "Were I to regard upholding precepts as noble and therefore a justification for grasping while regarding breaking precepts as base and therefore as a justification for rejection, such thought would not correspond to *prajñā*. This is because, when one relies on wisdom as the basis of one's analyses, one's mind refrains from seizing on the moral precepts and one remains free of either grasping or rejection." This [reflection] is an instance wherein upholding the precepts serves as the basis for generating *prajñāpāramitā*.

d. THE KEEN MIND, LACKING PRECEPTS, BECOMES DULL

What's more, even though one who fails to uphold the precepts may possess keen intelligence, because all manner of endeavors associated with managing worldly responsibilities involve creating karma through one's striving, the faculty of intelligence gradually grows dull. This is analogous to using a sharp blade to cut mud. As a consequence, it eventually becomes a dull instrument.

e. THE DULL MIND, IMBUED WITH PRECEPTS, BECOMES KEEN

If one leaves behind the home life, upholds the precepts, desists from engaging in worldly endeavors, and constantly contemplates in accordance with reality the true character of dharmas as devoid of any [inherently existent] characteristic, although one may have formerly had dull faculties, they gradually become ever sharper.

All sorts of causal circumstances similar to the above illustrate how upholding moral precepts engenders *prajñāpāramitā*.

Causal circumstances of the sort cited previously illustrate how *śīla* pāramitā brings forth all six pāramitās.

8. CONCLUDING STATEMENT ON THE NATURE OF ŚĪLA PĀRAMITĀ

Additionally, the bodhisattva's upholding of the moral precepts is not done on account of fear, nor is it the case that it is done out of stupidity, or doubt, or delusion, or out of a private quest for his own nirvāṇa. The upholding of the moral precepts is carried out solely for the sake of all beings, for the sake of success in the Buddha Path, and for the sake of gaining all of the dharmas of buddhahood. Characteristic features of this sort demonstrate what is meant by *śīla* pāramitā.

C. UNFINDABILITY OF OFFENSE AND NON-OFFENSE

Then again, if the bodhisattva's practice is based in the unfindability of either offense or non-offense, it is at this time that it qualifies as *śīla* pāramitā.

1. OBJECTION: OFFENSE AND NON-OFFENSE DO EXIST

**Question:** If one is able to relinquish evil and practice goodness, it is this which constitutes the upholding of the precepts. How then can it be said that offense and non-offense cannot be found?

2. THE MEANING OF UNFINDABILITY OF OFFENSE AND NON-OFFENSE

**Response:** This is not referring to the concept of "unfindability" described by those of erroneous views and coarse minds. If one enters deeply into the characteristic aspects of all dharmas and courses in the samādhi of emptiness, because one employs the wisdom eye in one's contemplation, one discovers that offenses are not apprehensible. Because offenses themselves are [ultimately] nonexistent, non-offense cannot be found, either.<sup>32</sup>

a. THE LINK TO UNFINDABILITY OF BEINGS AND UNFINDABILITY OF PRECEPTS

Moreover, because beings themselves cannot be gotten at, the offense of killing cannot be gotten at, either. Because the offense itself cannot be gotten at, the corresponding moral precept cannot be gotten at, either. How is this? It is on account of the existence of the offense of killing that the corresponding moral precept exists. If there were [ultimately] no offense of killing, then there would [finally] be no corresponding moral precept, either.

b. OBJECTION: HOW CAN ONE CLAIM BEINGS DON'T EXIST?

**Question:** It is manifestly the case that "beings" *do* now exist. How can you claim that "beings" cannot be gotten at?

## C. CLARIFICATION OF UNFINDABILITY OF BEINGS

**Response:** As for what is seen by the fleshly eye, this amounts to non-seeing. However, if one contemplates with the wisdom eye, then one does not find any “being.” This is as explained above in the section on *dāna* pāramitā wherein it was stated that there is no donor, no recipient, and no material object offered as a gift.

## 1) REFUTATION: INCOMPATIBILITY OF SINGULARITY AND MULTIPLICITY

Additionally, if, as you claim, a being *does* exist, is it identical with the five aggregates, or does it exist apart from the five aggregates? If it is supposedly identical with the five aggregates, [one must confront the fact that] the five aggregates are fivefold, whereas a “being” is a singular entity. If what you assert were actually the case, then [this would amount to the absurd and untenable assertion that] “five” would somehow equal “one” and “one” would somehow equal “five.”

To use the trading of goods in the market as an analogy, a person is unable to get something worth five currency units in exchange for only a single currency unit. Why? It is because “one” cannot equal “five.” As a consequence, one must realize that the five-fold aggregates cannot constitute a singular being.

## 2) REFUTATION OF BEINGS: IMPOSSIBILITY OF KARMIC RETRIBUTION

Moreover, the five aggregates are characterized by the process of creation, destruction, and impermanence. It is the characteristic dharma of beings that they come forth from a former life and arrive at a later life and undergo karmic punishments and karmic blessings within the three realms. If the five aggregates make up a being, then they would be born naturally and die naturally after the manner of grass or trees. If this were actually the case, then there would be no being bound by offenses nor would there be any liberation to be gained. Based on this, one knows that it is not true that the five aggregates constitute a being.

## 3) REFUTATION OF NON-AGGREGATE BEINGS: ETERNALIST FALLACY

If one asserts the existence of a being distinct from the five aggregates, this is precisely what was already refuted in the prior discussion addressing the fallacy of a supposedly eternally existent and universally pervasive spiritual soul (*ātman*).

Furthermore, if one asserts there exists such a being distinct from the five aggregates, then the thought imputing existence of a self therein would not even arise. If one asserts existence of a being apart from the five aggregates, one falls into an eternalist view.

If one falls into an eternalist view, then this entails the nonexistence of birth and the nonexistence of death. Why? Birth refers to something formerly nonexistent now coming into existence. Death refers to something already born then being extinguished. If it were the case that beings were eternally existent, then it ought to be the case that they exist everywhere filling up the five paths of rebirth.<sup>33</sup> If something already exists eternally, why would it then now come to birth yet again? And if it does not have a birth, then it has no death, either.

4) OBJECTION: AGGREGATE-BASED BEINGS ARE LIKE A FINGER-BASED FIST

**Question:** It is definitely the case that beings exist. How can one claim that they are nonexistent? It is based on the causes and conditions of the five aggregates that the dharma of a being exists. This is analogous to the case of the causes and conditions of the five fingers generating the dharma of a fist.

5) REFUTATION: ABSENCE OF ANY APPREHENSIBLE "BEING" DHARMA

**Response:** This statement is fallacious. If the dharma of a being exists among the causes and conditions associated with the five aggregates, then, aside from the five aggregates themselves, there exists some separate "being" dharma. However, no such thing can be found. The eye itself sees forms. The ear itself hears sounds. The nose smells fragrances. The tongue knows flavors. The body knows tangibles. The intellectual mind faculty knows dharmas as objects-of-mind. They are all empty and devoid of any dharma of a self. Apart from these six [sense-based] phenomena, there is no additional "being."

a) SYNOPSIS OF RELATED NON-BUDDHIST POSITIONS

Based on inverted views, non-Buddhists claim, "When the eye is able to see forms, this involves a being," and so forth until we come to, "When the mind is able to know dharmas, this involves a being." They also claim that, when one remembers and when one is able to undergo suffering and pleasure, these circumstances involve a being. However, they merely create this view. They do not actually possess any direct knowledge of any genuinely-existent entity associated with this "being" they posit.

b) A DECEASED GURU DISGUISED (ILLUSTRATIVE STORY)

This is analogous to the case of an old, senior, and very venerable bhikshu. People were of the opinion that he had become an arhat and so brought forth many offerings. Later on, he became ill and

died. Because the disciples were alarmed that they would lose the offerings, they surreptitiously removed him during the night and in that place where he had been laying down, they arranged blankets and pillows, causing it to appear as if their master was still present, but merely lying down. People came and asked about his illness, inquiring “Where is the Master?”

The disciples replied, “Don’t you see the blankets and pillows on the bed?” The gullible ones did not investigate into it. They believed this master was lying down there stricken with illness, went ahead and presented large offerings, and then left. This happened more than once.

Next, a wise man came along and asked after the Master. The disciples replied in the same way. That wise man then said, “I did not ask about blankets, pillows, beds, or cushions. I’m looking instead for a ‘person.’” He then threw back the covers, looking for that master. In the end, there was no ‘person’ to be found there at all.

Apart from the characteristic features of the six [sense-based] phenomena, there is no additional “self” or “person” at all. As for a “knower” or a “perceiver,” they are identical in this respect.

#### 6) REFUTATION BASED ON CONSEQUENCE OF BEINGS’ IMPERMANENCE

Moreover, if it were the case that a “being” existed somewhere in the causes and conditions of the five aggregates, since the five aggregates are impermanent, beings, too, ought to be impermanent. Why? This is on account of the similitude in the causes and conditions. If beings were impermanent, then it would be impossible for them to extend on to any subsequent lifetime.

#### 7) REFUTATION BASED ON LATER ARISING OF AGGREGATES

Furthermore, if it is as you say, then beings must have existed eternally from the very beginning on forward through time to the present. If that were so, then it should be that beings are what produce the five aggregates. It should not be the case that the five aggregates produce beings. Now, however, it is actually the causes and conditions associated with the five aggregates which give rise to the application of this name: “being.” People who have no wisdom then proceed to chase after these names in search of what is real.

### 3. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION OF UNFINDABILITY AND ITS IMPORT

For all of these reasons, beings are in fact nonexistent. If beings are nonexistent, then the karmic offense of killing is nonexistent as well. Because the karmic offense of killing is nonexistent, then the observance of moral precepts is also nonexistent.

Also, when one enters deeply into the contemplation of these five aggregates, one analyzes them and consequently realizes that they are empty of inherent existence, are like something seen in a dream, and are like images appearing in a mirror. If one kills something only seen in a dream or kills what is only an image in a mirror, then there is no karmic offense of “killing” which is actually committed. One merely engages in killing the empty marks of the five aggregates.<sup>34</sup> Beings, too, are [unfindable] in this same way.

Additionally, if a person is displeased by karmic offenses and thus is covetously attached to being free of karmic offenses, if he observes someone with karmic offenses which have arisen from breaking moral precepts, he will act in a slighting and arrogant manner. If he observes a good, precept-observing person, he will behave towards them in an affectionate and respectful fashion. If one’s upholding of moral precepts is carried out in this manner, then this itself generates causal bases for the commission of karmic offenses. It is for this reason that [the *Sutra*] states, “It is based on the unfindability of offense and non-offense that one should engage in perfecting *śīla* pāramitā.”