

*Foundation Series on Buddhist Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM)*  
*As taught by*  
*Sister Khema and overseen by Most Venerable “Bhante” Vimalaramsi Maha Thera*  
*the Gift of Dhamma is Priceless!*

**Training → FS- 03- WHAT IS SILA?**

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**Q: What is Sila?**

A: The pali word Sila means Morality. Wholesome moral living is an important ingredient for the practice of purifying mind. Without this ingredient, positive personality changes cannot happen. Generosity training is the introductory note for the Morality concerto!

When you talk about Morality, people sometimes shut down at the door. They think, ‘this isn’t anyone’s business’. They may not want to listen. But don’t shut the door just yet, please. What if morality offered a valuable angle that helps the meditation succeed? What if you can prove this yourself? This might be interesting to check out. That’s why I am encouraging you to look at morality from an operational perspective exploring it in terms of basic universal law.

**Two parts to Sila.**

There are two parts to morality training. The first part has to do with Precepts and the second part has to do with hindrances. It’s important to receive interconnected information about these two groups before committing to long-term meditation practice. Otherwise we can’t realize their interconnected nature. Buddhist meditation is a training method for purifying mind. A purified mind leads to clear thinking in the present moment and opens mind’s greater potential.

The 5 basic precepts are guidelines for smoother meditation and a balanced life. Breaking these precepts will lead to difficult meditation and suffering .

**Q: What are the precepts?**

**A: 5 basic “pieces of advice” the Buddha gave.**

1. Do not kill or harm living beings on purpose;
2. Do not take what is not freely given;
3. Do not commit wrong sexual activity;
4. Do not lie, use harsh language, gossip or slander;
5. Do not use recreational alcohol or drugs.

**Q: Can you expand a bit?**

**A: Sure.**

**I- Do not kill or harm living beings on purpose.**

We should consider that all living beings have a strong desire to live full lives. Therefore we should make a conscious effort to handle even common pests by peaceful solutions rather than just killing them. This is learning how to co-exist in this earthbound environment.

**Q: What does it mean to kill something?****A: According to the Buddha, “to kill another being” specifically means 5 things:**

1. A living being must be present.
2. You must have the ‘intention’ to kill it.
3. You must have a weapon.
4. You must use the weapon.
5. The being must die.

This is intentionally killing a living being

**II- Do not take what is not freely given.**

A painful feeling arises if something is stolen from you. Do not cause mental or physical harm by stealing.

**III- Do not commit wrong sexual activity.****Q: What exactly is wrong sexual activity?**

**A: Yes.** This means don’t participate in anything that is physically or mentally harmful to yourself or others. Don’t have sex with a person who is too young and who is still living in the care of their parents or guardians. Don’t have sex with someone else’s mate. Don’t do anything that causes mental or physical suffering for yourself, your partner, or anyone related to the situation.

**IV- Do not lie, use harsh language, gossip or slander.**

Today, this precept is very watered down. It is not uncommon to hear lies or harsh speech in our media today and be expected to accept this. People who pretend this doesn’t matter suffer greatly later on. We hear around us a battered language reflecting an angry suffering modern society.

**Q: What exactly is gossip and slander?****A: This is defined for us in the Mahavagga.**

**Gossip** is saying something behind a person’s back that is untrue without them being asked the truth of it.

**Slander** is where someone makes up lies for the purpose of discrediting someone to cause a division between two groups of people. It’s good practice to take a look at what we know and HOW we know it before taking any mental, verbal or physical action! This can be a revealing exercise.

**V- Do not use recreational drugs or alcohol.**

If you use alcohol or take drugs, this clouds mind. A clouded mind opens the door to breaking precepts.

**What are the Hindrances?**

While learning meditation we hear about hindrances, barriers or impediments. Before pursuing meditation seriously, we should understand how these hindrances can affect our meditation. They are directly triggered by broken precepts! The past can mean this life or before. The consequences get locked up inside of us. When we begin meditation we agree to open our inner gate so we can see the consequences of past actions clearly and let them go. Releasing them clears the way for the deeper work of purifying mind. The 5 Hindrances are:

1. Lust, Greed, “I” want it mind leading to attachment.
2. Hatred, “I” don’t want it mind, leading to aversion AND more attachment.

3. Sleepy and dull mind, "I'm" tired.
4. Restlessness, "this is my fault", guilt, remorse.
5. Doubt. Am "I" doing this the right way?

**Q: Can you please expand a little bit more on these hindrances?**

**A:** Yes. The personal perspective of "I" appears in this equation often, doesn't it?

**1. Lust, Greed, 'I' want it mind, leading on to attachment;**

When you look at the 'I' want it mind, notice there is arising tension and a pre-occupation with ME and desire. This is where the idea of a personal self arises. "I" want it! This leads out of the present moment into thinking, analyzing, conceptualizing state and imagination about how to make something happen. How do I 'get it', whatever "it" is? This becomes an exhausting obsession, a driving force. There is a pulling sensation as your attention is pulled away from whatever you are doing.

**2. Hatred, 'I' don't want it mind leads to aversion and more attachment;**

This hindrance also arises with a tension and tightness in mind/body as a similar thinking process pulls attention from the present moment. There is a desire to push it away and then there also arises a pulling sensation which is attachment in our mind as we demand a solution! Both happen in similar ways because of the personal perspective involved. Hatred and aversion do not lead to satisfaction and calm. Instead, they lead to an emotionally active mind full of suffering. "I" struggle and "I" suffer to make things the way "I" want them to be! That's a lot of pushing and pulling going on.

**3. Dull and sleepy mind; sloth and torpor; "I'm" Tired;**

This one is a favorite hiding place everybody uses at one time or another. Remember a time when you were down about something or you felt like things were not working as smoothly or as fast as you wanted them to? Can you remember feeling a dull mind set in and then drooping over and wanting to sleep? In meditation, most times this is caused by a slip in interest and can be corrected by bringing up mindfulness and remembering to use the 6Rs.

"I" don't like this, the personal perspective, is at the heart of it once again! Without "me" there is no desire for escape. If we understand the true nature of what is going on here, how perspective matters, precisely how this all works, then there is a way out of this predicament.

**4. Restlessness, this is my fault, guilt, remorse.**

During meditation, you can't sit still; you just can't stop moving. In life, perhaps it's hard to sleep or you can't stay on a task. This can become irritating, but, there is a solution.

**5. Doubt is the last hindrance.**

This is a specific kind of doubt; its doubt about how you practice meditation. It is a lack of confidence. This is where, without comparing anything else, you need to keep the meditation going long enough to see if it really works or not. Also it's where a little faith in the Buddha's instructions helps out. After all, the Buddha taught meditation for 45 years! He must have refined the way to teach it in that time. I'm not saying accept a practice on the word of a teacher. Let's be very clear about this. I just mean it's time to get closer to the source for how to do things, to "back up to the

suttas and regroup, follow the instructions precisely while you test-run the results properly for yourself.”

Recognizing doubt is like seeing a signpost that says *stop!* Review if you are practicing correctly? Are you smiling and keeping mind light enough? Re-evaluate the instructions. Start again. Be precise. Keep going. Persevere. Ask questions. Discuss your concerns with the teacher. Don't sit on them in silence.

**Q: How do hindrances affect meditation?**

**A: Understanding how hindrances work, affects how easy or difficult your practice will become.**

If you break a precept, at that time you have lust and hatred in your heart. The after effect shows up later as an arising hindrance like restlessness or dull sleepy mind. Guilt, remorse, anxiety can change sleep patterns and you can get really tired. Hindrances do not necessarily come up one at a time. They can gang up on you.

**Q; What can be done about them?**

**A: Through Harmonious Practice using Right Effort properly, the Buddha taught how to systematically replace the hindrances until they naturally fade away.**

The way to deal with hindrances is to RECOGNIZE as early as possible arising tension that comes up with them. RELEASE any attention on the hindrance and RELAX all remaining tension and tightness that was caused by it. Then just let it be there. Lightly SMILE and RETURN to your meditation object or whatever task you were doing. All hindrances naturally pass away if they are not fed mind's attention. A hindrance cannot increase if "I" do not personally give it nutriment! When a hindrance arises, it lets us know how the idea of a self, or the personal perspective causes suffering. Think about this. Once we understand this angle, it becomes clear what has to change and the 6Rs offer us the way to do this.

It's interesting to consider how end results will change if we use an impersonal perspective.

**Q: Do these arising hindrances have to do with Karma?**

**A: Yes.** This is what I call karmic kickback! It can happen within this lifetime or over longer periods of time! How bad the after effects are depends entirely on the level of "intention" at the time of the action. Intention is not the karma. Intention is a component of karma. Karma is "action." The quality and degree of karmic kickback depends on the level of intention involved during an action.

**Q: What can we do about this?**

**A: Don't break the precepts!** Retrain mind in a wholesome direction. Experience universal laws for yourself in order to fully understand how this works. When you figure out the true nature of everything, you develop more effective ways to respond to life situations.

**Q: What kind of universal laws?**

**A: Buddhist practice is all about CHANGE.** You must be willing to change in order to succeed. Universal law opens the way for new hope, development, and future change. For instance:

**"What you do in the present moment, dictates what happens in the future!" This is Karma**

**Q: So, concerning the suffering caused by hindrances, you are saying there is a choice?**

**A: Of course. There is a beautiful choice in foundation Buddhism leading to the Cessation of Suffering.** This choice is now missing in much of the teaching of Buddhism today. Foundation Buddhist Meditation offers you the choice “to stay in the present moment or not to.” It helps you see the difference between being fully alive in the present moment without craving and clinging or not. It trains you through a system of “knowledge and vision”, which means, personally “knowing by seeing” how things really work. It encourages you to test everything. The meditation trains you how to observe suffering and notice what happens when you let it go.

**IN SUMMARY:** Broken precepts produce hindrances. By following the precepts closely, hindrances are reduced and eventually they stop all together once we understand exactly what they are, what causes them, how they can be released and how to be mindful and practice this release naturally all the time. Buddhist Meditation offers us the way to a cessation of suffering by using Right Effort all the time.

Understanding the inter-relationship between precepts and hindrances from the beginning of training helps clear the way for smooth successful meditation.

SUGGESTED SUPPORT READING:

At the website at [www.dhammasukha.org](http://www.dhammasukha.org) , Please read **“Simple Easy to Understand Mindfulness”** found in the articles section.

Also in the Dhamma talks section, please listen to MN-46

Much Metta .

Rev. Sister Khema

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